



## SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

### Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

*Grace and peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.*

Let me begin by saying, “Happy Father’s Day,” which is a difficult thing to say in light of today’s passage: “I have come to set a man against his father.” Hmm. Ouch! What’s up with that?

But wait! There's more unsettling words from Jesus! He promises disruption and discomfort in following his path to true peace and wholeness.

Jesus once told his disciples, "In this world there will be trouble." In our typical lives as we know them, this is not a controversial declaration. We can all agree life really sucks sometimes. It is true yet I still haven't seen this passage put on a refrigerator magnet. I do not think we want to be reminded.

Once Jesus told his disciples experiencing the kingdom of heaven would be like the joy of selling everything you own to buy a piece of land you knew had a buried treasure.

Another time, Jesus told a rich young ruler—someone who was kind of a big deal—to sell everything he owned, give it to the poor, and then follow him. I imagine the wealthy young man mumbling under his breath as he walked away, "I didn't say I wanted to follow him. I just wanted to inherit happiness and immortality."

Last week we read that Jesus told those who chose to follow him to take nothing with them on their journey. Interesting since most had very little to start with. I wonder if any of them said, "Jesus, are you serious? We gave up everything to get to this point."

Once Jesus asked a hungry crowd to give him the only food they carried. It would have fed at least the ones carrying the food. He gave thanks and made it more than enough. His followers trusted Jesus with all they had and were willing to be temporarily empty handed.

Over and over, I am reminded how Jesus invited his followers to stare boldly into the face of loss and uncertainty with defiant hope. To speak courageously to the stifling empires of our world and our own minds. To any tyrant who would attempt to clog the flow of living water from the source of life.

And now here in Matthew, we get a clearer picture of the depth beneath Jesus's fatherly advice.

Jesus said, "If you love me, the path I am on comes with it."

In today's church society it appears Jesus is as much a mascot as the Philly fanatic or at best a legend like Michael Jordan. What do Michael Jordan and Jesus have in common? The shoes and crosses the fans wear are still hot selling fashion items. But just like Michael Jordan's followers wearing his shoes, Jesus'

followers often wear the cross as a symbol of prestige rather than identifying with the suffering in the world as Jesus did on the cross. Few are saying yes to following Jesus as he went against the grain of Roman culture of power and greed.

To take up the cross is more than a fashion statement. The cross is a symbol of identifying with the disruptive and authentic life of Jesus.

To take up the cross is to proclaim the real reason Jesus was killed in such a disgraced manner. This form of execution was reserved for those who were perceived as a threat to the Roman Empire, its position of privilege, and its oppressive, centralized power.

As we celebrate 250 years of the United States, we must remember that this country's Independence was about liberation from a British empire. The revolt was a disruption to tyrannical power.

It appears we've forgotten that freedom does not wave arrogantly in the air of superiority. This always leads to defending false securities and a culture driven by fear and self-preservation.

Institutions filled with people claiming to follow Jesus are just as susceptible to yielding to tyranny. It is typically a path of surrendering to fear, but Jesus is reminding us that his path was a path of surrender to an alternate reality of radical and inclusive love. Any other path for a follower is not an option. There is no other way to true wholeness but by living into the paradoxes Jesus taught.

Jesus did not tell the disciples to keep this good news a secret; he told them to shout it from the housetops. In other words, make it real! Jesus says, "It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher." We do not need to be greater than our teacher or more successful than our peers. That is the kingdom of hell, where one never has enough and is never enough.

To be open and authentic in love destroys the egos attempt to hide behind success and self-preservation.

Jesus is not warning his followers; he is speaking the truth with unparalleled authenticity. He is not using fear or motivational techniques to compel them to carry on his mission. Rather, he is inviting them to embrace the inevitable consequences that seekers of true peace and personal wholeness will encounter. Jesus is inviting his followers to share the suffering individually and communally

and to be unafraid. For those who are on this path it will conclude with God making all things right. Outcomes are God's thing, not mine.

These words of Jesus about loving him are central to what it means to follow him. They are difficult words to hear, so Jesus is saying that the decision to walk this path must be grounded in love, with all things filtered through love and anchored in love. Love will be the source of our strength and the nourishment for our roots.

I have to say this is hard! Will I boldly take the path of authenticity that Jesus took? Will I allow my conventional relationships to be disrupted? Will I face societal expectations with defiant hope? Will I let go of worldly attachments?

How can I counter fear in the world if I can't counter the fear within myself?

An allegiance to this radical inclusive love of God will inevitably clash with any of my false values and the values of a dominant culture.

I don't think I'm alone. We all face our human condition when we are invited to let go of our false self and allow our true self to emerge.

This fight for self-preservation is like a shell of ego covering our true self. It has been there for a long time, but it is dying. It is inherently driven by fear, scarcity and defensiveness. It begs to be shed. All animals including humans molt. The human body regularly sheds cells. In different seasons and sometimes daily we as humans must molt spiritually as well. Like the rich young ruler many want to inherit immortal happiness yet refuse to shed the skin of their old patterns, thoughts and beliefs. They would rather die than respond to the itch inviting them to birth their true self.

This invitation to molt is not only for individuals but also for communities of faith that have abandoned their apprenticeship to Jesus. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, they serve two masters in an effort to maintain relevance and ensure survival. In the process, the call of Jesus to let the gospel disrupt empires is ignored.

Perhaps we need to allow oppressive systems to become agitated as a result of following Jesus' occasionally uncomfortable path. While it is not the ambition of those who follow Jesus to create disruption, Jesus says that disruption will likely occur when people pursue true peace and wholeness.

How can there be peace when there will be suffering and disruption along the way? Jesus comes with a sword not as a weapon, a blade of wisdom that cuts

through false peace. It will eventually expose the superficial quiet masks worn in the face of systemic injustice, poverty and racism.

By doing so we enter into direct intimate fellowship with the God who suffers.

Yes, God suffers with us and creates an unbreakable connection to the divine. An intimacy that is its own reward. That intimacy is more than enough and is good news for the followers of the disruptive one.

In every moment of following, may we say with Paul, "I consider my present sufferings nothing in comparison to the joy that awaits me!"

Amen