

**Matthew 10:24-39**

Jesus said: "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."

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts,  
be acceptable in your sight O Lord, our strength & our redeemer (Psalm 19:14)**

**INTRO**

Well that's not the easiest text to listen to, or preach about, but here it goes.

### 6.21.20\_Pentecost.3A \_Father'sDay

If today's passage were a product to be purchased it might come with a warning label: "*Warning: side discipleship may lead to loss of status or family, rejection, division, and sometimes death.*" Upon a quick glance it sounds about as appealing as a commercial for prescription medication with a laundry list of side effects. Is this really what we signed up for when we come to church? Most of us just wanted a little time to recharge from a busy week.

The harsh realities of Christian discipleship may seem far off to many who live in a comfortable western Christian existence. If we are honest, most of us in the mainline American Christian world have grown stagnantly comfortable. In this passage Jesus warns of the costs of being his disciple.

Being a disciple of a teacher means we follow the same ways of being that they live, we follow their example, and walk in their footsteps. To be a disciple of Jesus is to pattern our life after his life, follow his example, and walk in his footsteps. In Jesus' earthly life, and in the early days of the Church, the context is closely linked to the Roman Empire—an empire whose systems of inequality Jesus resisted.

The vision of the Kingdom of God that Jesus initiated on earth was one that challenged human systems of class, wealth, status, and oppression. Indeed, his resistance to the empire led to his crucifixion at the hands of the state. Thus, if we are to be disciples of Jesus, we can expect to follow this path of resistance to oppression. Once again, a warning would be helpful here: *this work is dangerous!*

#### TEXT

Jesus warns that his mission will cause division. Some might face rejection, even by their own families.

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It's not that we need to renounce family simply for the sake of it, rather Jesus is pointing out that to follow him means elevating his mission of justice above all other areas of one's life. Being a disciple isn't a part time hobby or even a "Christian lifestyle" of being holy and going to church regularly. It's about being all in for the work of the Kingdom of God.

We can look to many in our recent history who have lived fully into this costly discipleship. Those who have fought for racial justice such as Dr. King have lived out the call to bring about God's Kingdom on earth, even though it cost them their lives. Or we might remember Dietrich Bonhoeffer whose resistance to Hitler and the Nazi regime led to his death. But what does this mean for us, in this moment?

To be a disciple of Jesus means committing ourselves to the work of bringing God's Kingdom to be seen and experienced here on earth as in heaven. We must resist oppression and seek to build a more just world. Sometimes it may be a small action. Yes, that does mean you have to speak out and say something when your family members speak racist micro-aggressions at thanksgiving dinner; yes, even if it makes you uncomfortable and is going to disrupt conversation. After all, Jesus says even our families can't hold us back from his work. But there is more than just individual moments. I doubt we need to look far to notice we are in a place where entire systems of oppression are glaringly obvious in our country. We need to speak to those too, because Jesus did.

### **LIFE**

Researchers have found that the human face has eighty so-called "landmarks" - including the bridge and tip of the nose, the size of the mouth and eyes, and the cheekbones.

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These landmarks are used in an increasingly important investigation called "biometrics," the process of identifying people through unique physical characteristics. Now, with powerful computer technology such as the latest iPhones, biometrics can even include identification by retina or iris, using "eye prints."

As Jesus says in today's lesson from Matthew, *"nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing [is] secret that will not become known"* (v. 26).

God has been making positive identifications for years when Jesus warns his disciples that when a sparrow falls, God knows it, even the hairs on our heads are numbered.

One of the greatest needs of human beings is to be known. We want to be noticed, to be remembered, to know that we are essential to someone. We have this insatiable need to feel we belong. I would argue some of the society problems we have today is that people are not being seen and heard...they are not being known.

Here Jesus reminds us that we are noticed. God has this face recognition thing down cold. God will not forget us, promises Jesus, or fail to recognize us and acknowledge our service. And Christ himself promises to be involved in this process, saying, *"Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven"* (v. 32). In other words, if we recognize Jesus in public, then Jesus will remember us in the presence of God.

All these words are spoken in the context of danger, a situation as familiar to 21st-century disciples as to the first followers of Jesus. We feel the threat of watching the senseless murders of black Americans all over our country.

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The riots in major cities, towns, and rural areas in protest face the Roman military of our day, and we face militant terrorists. I'm seeing more similarities between Rome and the U.S than I have seen in my lifetime.

These are dangerous times. Times in which it is more vital than ever for us to know God and to be recognized by God. Fortunately, our Lord sees us infinitely more accurately than even the most top-of-the-line technology we have today.

Three things really jump out to me this week from our texts:

**I. On the Journey, We Will Encounter Opposition.** Jesus begins with an age-old warning: they will be called names, and as we all know, names do hurt us. Even being misunderstood is painful, to be seen as other than we believe ourselves to be. Jesus has been called the devil himself and so asks what his disciples can expect from their detractors. Implicit in his statement that a disciple is not above the teacher is a call for each of his followers, then and now, to experience the fullness of life as he led it. We should not assume that we will not have to suffer since Jesus took care of everything. Jesus is telling us that our lives will not be easier than his, and he urges us to embrace the life of faith with all of its pain and glory.

**II. On the Journey, We Will Encounter God's Love.** Jesus then urges the disciples to have no fear of those who abuse them. In fact, he is insistent regarding fear, repeating three times that they need not be afraid. He encourages them to speak boldly the things they have previously discussed privately, without regard for the local authorities, and to remember that they are answerable only to God, who alone has power over both their bodies and their souls.

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These words still challenge us today. Our cultural indifference to religious values leads many of us, even clergy, to not mention prayers answered, we don't tell of moments of spiritual insight, nor do we talk of the struggle in the life of faith; we simply let the moment pass. We don't do it because the surrounding cultural apathy feels like hostility, and yet Jesus warns of spiritual consequences if we deny our allegiance to him. He urges us to break out of fear.

**III. On the Journey, We Will Encounter Decisions.** Jesus continues his directions by challenging the disciples in their allegiances. He states the strain that their new life in the gospel will place on their strongest loyalties. He pits true discipleship against any bond of affection and familial fidelity that would stand between the disciple and the life of faith.

#### **CONC**

So again, this text should come with a warning...maybe that warning could be *God sees us, knows us, and protects us ... because God adores us.* We are not doomed to be nameless, faceless souls, caught in the crushing grind of historical events or the anonymous oblivion of contemporary corporate culture. God notices us, but how should we see God?

In the church, we notice God in the faces of children in the global marketplace. They are bringing their own gifts to the table, and look to their global companions to be identified by their unique voices. Also, we notice God in those who are marginalized, oppressed, misunderstood, poor, illiterate, struggling with disease, alienated, body-pierced, tattooed youth on the streets, the multitasking minivan mom, the worn out dad trying not to be busy to spend time with his kids.

We have a people-noticing God; it's time now to have a God-noticing people.

