

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

Third Sunday after Pentecost - Year A

15th Sunday of Quarantine (Father's Day)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Psalms 69:7-10[11-15]16-18

Romans 6:1b-11

Matthew 10:24-39

06/21/2020

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

[Jesus said to the twelve:] 24“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25it 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! 26“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are

not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 34“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35For 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; 36and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. 37Whoever 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; 38and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

The Gospel of our Lord.

Prayer

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Good News?

Good morning! On Mondays we have been having our “Sunday School.” The focus over the last few weeks has changed to provide a place for me to work through the coming week’s gospel lesson with input and questions from the members. I can’t overstate how helpful this has been for me, it’s very easy to put off sermon preparation, especially during quarantine. It’s also helped me to keep in touch with the questions that the average person would ask after reading a week’s lessons. Much to my surprise, this week’s text left a few with some questions, questions I distinctly remember answering three years ago the last time this text came up... but apparently my sermon wasn’t that interesting! The word “gospel” means “good news,” and nowhere is it more ironic than with today’s reading. The words we just read are tough. So, no more funny stories today, let’s just jump right in!

The first, and most glaring, thing we need to address begins with verse 35: *“35For 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; 36and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. 37Whoever 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...”* Not the kind of message you expect on Father’s Day is it? Angry teenagers

aside, it's not very encouraging. And coming from the Bible, it's not what we expect. But here is my take- the bulk of this section of scripture isn't commanding us to fight one another. Instead, it's an observation from Jesus that when you claim to be a believer, you will face challenges and opposition. This is equally likely in one's own family. It can be a strange thing when one is forced to look at one's kin differently once they begin to take their faith seriously. Just look at Jesus! When he shows up in his hometown to preach they try to throw him off a cliff! The text today is pointing out that when we become believers, we will be forced to face opposition.

The other parts of today's pericope (which is a fancy word for the assigned portion of the lesson) are just more examples of this reality. When we profess Jesus Christ as Lord, it changes the way we look at the world, and more importantly, it changes the way the world looks at us! Douglas R. A. Hare, my favorite commentator on Matthew, puts it succinctly when he writes: *"Matthew uses 'sword,' a powerful metaphor for the way a community can be split by the preaching of the gospel."*

Just look at our reading from Jeremiah in the Old Testament. When prophets of old proclaimed the word of God, it made the status quo unhappy. It led to persecution and hostility towards the prophet.

It's a tough pill to swallow, but Jesus is asking that we put God first, and nowhere is this more challenging than when it comes to our family. Could any of us choose between a child and God? Or our commitment to a brother or sister instead of Jesus?

The other overarching theme of this lesson is that we can't expect the world to like the message of the Gospel. Again Dr. Hare helps us as he writes about the context of the Gospel's original community: *"God will not protect the evangelists from suffering, since even Jesus had to suffer, but the one whom they call Father will bring his children through suffering to eternal life."* And it's this kernel that hits at the heart of the problem for so many of us who claim to be Christians. We often confuse God's eternal blessing with earthly rewards. Being a Christian doesn't mean that life will be safer, or more successful in the traditional sense, but what it does promise is life eternal.

One more quote from Dr. Hare, and boy, is it a challenging one: *"Those who give highest priority to the task of protecting themselves will find there is nothing left to protect. A man who spends his young adulthood in a continuing effort to 'find' himself, indulging his appetites and whims and refusing to be locked into any commitments, may discover only too late what he has lost. Conversely, the person who surrenders*

freedom by acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord will indeed find herself or himself. A healthy self-esteem, for which all emerging adults long, will in such cases be based not on the fickle opinion of transitory friends but on God's call and God's love. Not even the bitterness of suffering can take away the sense of one's eternal worth that is given to those who take up their cross and follow Jesus." Which is why I find the words from our second reading in Romans so powerful and encouraging. Paul writes: *"5For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his..."*

So, maybe there is some good news in this story after all. The whims of life will blow back and forth, and being a Christian will always be something that challenges us to carry the cross, but only Jesus can save us at the end of that journey, and after our work we have the promise of a heavenly feast where we will gather again in joy and celebration. Sounds like good news to me! Amen.