

LIKE FATHER. LIKE SON. ... HOPEFULLY LIKE JESUS

Father's Day sermon on Jeremiah 20:7-13 and Matthew 10:24-39

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight oh Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.*

The working title of this sermon was actually "This is the scripture lesson for Father's Day?!"

If you were expecting a Hallmark type sermon, this isn't it.

And yet, today's scripture lessons do reveal something that resonates

with a more "manly" approach to the faith.

an approach that doesn't shy away from shouldering responsibility,

from the sometimes costly demands of discipleship,

from the call for valiant obedience in the face of real peril,

the discipline of doing the difficult thing.

I love that there's place in Christianity for that sort of thing.



The gospel lesson I just read was in the context of the instructions Jesus gives his disciples

as he sends them out to preach and teach, to heal and cast out demons.

Because it is a difficult passage, this is especially important to remember this fact.

These are words directed at disciples preparing for a demanding mission.

As He sends them on their quest, He stresses that this call is no walk in the park.

The student is not above the teacher - right away there is a call here to humility,

a reminder that the power that will be worked through them is not their own

and there is no room for ego in this project.

And in this same line, Jesus reminds them of their purpose.

It is enough for a disciple to be like their master.

It's there in the word disciple, it is almost more of apprentice than merely student.

Disciples, μαθητής in Greek, lived with their teacher and went everywhere with him,

getting a sort of all-inclusive mentorship.

So discipleship is not just about gaining intellectual knowledge, but growing more like the Master.

And even without really understanding the crucifixion that was come,

these disciples had already seen Christ ridiculed, slandered, and plotted against.

He had been called Beelzebub, literally "Lord of the Flies"

- a derogatory name for a foreign god whom Jews held to be a literal demon.

The disciples know not anticipate honors from the world.

(how could they as students expect to be treated any better than their teacher;

for a student is not above the teacher)

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Instead they should expect to courageously share the struggles of their teacher
that will ultimately transform their spirits to be ever more Christ-like.

Like Father
Like Son



It's a challenging question that's the basis of my revised sermon title:
If someone becomes more like you, will they also be more like Christ?
If the student takes after the teacher and the son takes after the father,
that's a bit of responsibility for those with that kind of influence.

But where that begins is interiorly.

There is a maxim of the Church Fathers

(St. Athanasius, 4th century) that

"You can't put straight in others what is warped in yourself."

And that can give impetus to bothering with the spiritual life,
knowing that affects others.

There's a famous saying of a Russian monk, St. Seraphim of Sarov (19th century),

"Acquire a peaceful spirit and a thousand souls around you will be saved."

For St. Seraphim, this even extended to wildlife,

even bears who were gentle in his presence.



The disciples had already made a beginning, but to get to the next level,
well, teaching sure does show you what you don't yet know.

I know my first semester teaching my own history class was like that.

And learned so much from having to explain things
better than I had previously understood them myself!

The disciples were about to face something scarier than a room full of freshmen.

And so conversation between Jesus and his disciples turns to matters of courage.

Jesus repeats three times, μή φοβείσθε, "do not fear."

Do not fear those who ridicule you.

Do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul.

Do not fear because you are more valuable than many sparrows.

But do fear God, that is, treat him with a reverence,
acknowledging that He has ultimate authority.

Jesus gives the upward call to courage.

To speak in the light what He has told them in the dark,

and to announce from the rooftops what they hear whispered in the ear.

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Now, every early commentator I read made a point of specifying that this didn't mean in a literal sense only those things that Jesus told them after nightfall in hushed tones. But this does fit with how God very often communicates, preferring the still small voice of silence.



But there's more here than just that, especially in Jesus' context and that of the early Christians Matthew is writing this gospel for, a context in which the psalms played a central role in worship and were often memorized,



we hear here an echo of Psalm 78,
in which we hear as though in God's voice:
"I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old" (78:2)
...followed by the voice of the congregation,
specifying that these are the sayings:
"Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.
We will not hide them from their children,
showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,
and his strength, and his wonderful works that he has done." (78:3-4)

It is this same, and as it turns out, very fatherly, mission that Jesus assigns to his disciples. To make known what has been made known to them. Their knowledge and wisdom comes with the responsibility to pass it along.

But as we found out in the reading from the prophet Jeremiah, this isn't always agreeable. Sometimes God demands one to speak out against injustice, hypocrisy, wickedness, when it would be so much easier, not to mention safer, to hold "peace," as though peace were simply a matter of toeing the line.

It is easy, relatively, to do the God loves you and wants to shower His goodness on you, but what about when like Jeremiah the messages you are given are ones of judgement and calls to repentance.

In Ephesians, Paul instructs us to "Speak the Truth in love," [Ephesians 4:15] so we shouldn't be a jerk about it, but it still isn't likely to make you popular with everyone, not even within your own household.

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What do we do with all this stuff about family division?

It's one of those things that you might have the instinctive recoil that says, "Surely Jesus can't have meant *that!*"

But in fact, the very difficulty is the very point in bringing this up.

First, pay attention to the wording:

The unworthy one is one that loves father or mother MORE than God.

If love within the family weren't strong, perhaps the strongest bonds we can conceive of, the comparison wouldn't land.

If I told you I love Jesus more than a mosquito, you're not going to be very impressed.



But there's even more here to dig into.

Remember back in January I mentioned how Matthew loves doing this thing where he weaves references to the Old Testament throughout his rendition of Jesus' life.

If Jesus ever said or did anything Old-Testament-y, Matthew is going to point it out.

Well, he's still at it.

Let me quickly refresh your memory of what the prophet Micah says, in chapter 7, verse 6:

"The son dishonors the father,
the daughter rises up against her mother,
the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
a man's enemies are the members of his own household."

Sound familiar?

Now when Micah wrote these lines,

he was lamenting the degradation of society in his day. (8th century BC).

What he was describing is NOT the ideal, in fact it is the *inverse* of the ideal.

So why would Jesus quote this line now? Why is Matthew sure to record it?

My best guess would be reality.

For both the Apostles and the earliest Christians,

not only was the threat of persecution huge, but the reality unfortunate as it is, was that Christians were most commonly betrayed to the authorities by friends and family.

In other cases, family members, especially parents,

would plead with their Christian children to deny Christ
it was just too dangerous.



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Imagine how these words from Christ hit differently
for an audience who is experiencing the pain of strained relationships.
There's reassurance here in the acknowledgment of that struggle.

Jesus is not abolishing family affection. He is demanding ordered loves.
Some Church Fathers (like Augustine) speak of sin being in its essence is disordered love.
We can actually destroy good things by loving them inordinately.
If a father idolizes career, family, even his children, things can get very dysfunctional quickly.

In *Star Wars*, Anakin Skywalker is a man full of love, but in a possessive, disordered way.
He is afraid of losing his wife so obsessively that that he essentially sells his soul,
becoming Darth Vader, and grips so tightly
that he does indeed lose his beloved Padme
along with everything else he once cared about and fought for.
But of course if you know how the story plays out,
Anakin turned Darth Vader is redeemed at the end,
and through his love for his son,
but now instead of grasping and controlling, his love is expressed in self-sacrifice.



And that is the very next thing Jesus turns to:
the task of taking up one's cross and following Christ.
"He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for Christ's sake will find it." (verse 39)
The word for lose is an interesting - ἀπώλumi, it usually has the meaning of "to destroy."
If you grasp your own life too tightly, you risk actually actively destroying it.

But in the willingness to live self-sacrificially, new life and purpose is discovered.

It all circles back to that idea of becoming more like the Master, more like Christ.

And that question, how much do we take after Christ?

Is there a family resemblance in the way we live?

I hope so. And may Christ guide us ever deeper into his own likeness.



*Now to the One who by the power at work within us
is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or imagine,
to God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*