

MATTHEW 10.24-39 – YEAR A SANDRA KJELLGREN B/FIELD

In the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Gospel message today - we see Jesus teaching his disciples – and all of his followers – that they will not only get to share in his glory - but they are to be aware that their following of Him will also involve sharing in the spiritual warfare that at times will involve a share in his suffering.

Scottish Theologian - William Barclay – writes that no person deserves to share in the fruits of victory if they refuse to share in the struggles of which these fruits are born. Barclay tells us that when Christianity is hard - we should say to ourselves, - that we are treading the path where the feet of Christ have trodden before us.”

And Jesus reminds his disciples – and all of us - that if we ARE willing to be completely faithful in our following of Him - and are willing to share in His life – then we shall also be given a share in the power of His Victory – the victory that he won for us through His cross and resurrection.

Three times in the Gospel today Jesus bids his disciples to not be afraid. He tells them that his messengers are going to possess a courageous fearlessness – a fearlessness that marks them out as different from others.

Jesus teaches them that they are not to be afraid - because there is nothing covered in this world that is covered in secrecy - that will not be revealed – that there is nothing hidden - which will not become fully known. The truth will triumph - and there is no need to fear - for Christ Himself is with us – even till the end of the age.

And Jesus also instructs his followers - that they are to proclaim his gospel with boldness. Yet how are we to do that – to proclaim His gospel with boldness – if we do not know what it says – if we are not prepared to take the

time to listen to Jesus – to what Jesus has to say - when we draw near to him in prayerful meditation with His holy word.

In the days of which the Reformation of the Church was coming to birth - the English scholar - John Colet - invited the Dutch Renaissance humanist - Erasmus - to come to Oxford - to give a series of lectures - on either Moses or Isaiah.

However, Erasmus knew he was not up to the job -so he wrote back with the explanation - saying “ But I who have learned to live with myself - and know how scanty my equipment is - can neither claim the learning required for such a task - nor do I think that I possess the strength of mind - to sustain the jealousy of so many men - who would be eager to maintain their own ground. The campaign is one that demands not a tyro - but a practised general. Neither should you call me immodest in declining a position which it would be most immodest for me to accept. You are not acting wisely Colet, in demanding water from a pumice stone as Plautus said. With what effrontery shall I teach what I have never learned? How am I to warm the coldness of others - when I am shivering with cold myself?”

Secondly, Jesus makes it clear that the preacher must faithfully speak what they have heard from Jesus - even if their proclamation of the gospels convicts people in their hearts of their own sinfulness - and therefore gains the preacher - a degree of animosity for their speaking the truth in Christ.

Diogenes famously said that people do not always like to hear the truth - for the truth is like a very bright light to sore eyes.

Famously, Hugh Latimer was preaching - when King Henry VIII was present in the Cathedral - and Latimer knew he was about to say something that the King would not relish. So in the pulpit he loudly proclaimed “Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! be careful what you say for Henry the King is here.” Then

he paused and again said loudly “Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be very careful what you do say - because the King of Kings is also present.”

Jesus tells His faithful ones that they are never to fear - because if God cares for the little sparrows in the wild - how much more will he care for his faithful followers.

They are to be reassured by Jesus that they are forever in His sight – in His care – that there is never a time that he will leave them nor forsake them.

We are invited to realise that the Church of today - is built on the unbreakable loyalty of those who were faithful to Jesus - Faithful unto death.

Pliny, the Governor of Bithynia, writes to the Roman Emperor, Trajan, about how he treated the Christians within his province. Anonymous informers gave information that certain people were Christians and Pliny tells how he arrested these people and gave them the opportunity to invoke the pagan Gods and to offer frankincense and wine to the image of the Emperor. Then for a final test he demanded they should disrespect the name of Jesus. And Pliny adds “None – not even one of these acts, those who are truly Christian - could be compelled to do – no matter how severe the penalty for their faithfulness to Christ.”

So we see in the written witness of history – how – outside the writings of Christian witnesses -- even the Roman Governor confessed his helplessness in the face of the absolute loyalty to the name of Jesus - of those who are truly Christian.

In our modern times it is still sadly possible for people who would call themselves Christians to still deny the holy name of Jesus as the Christ of God. We may deny him with our words. It is said of J.P. Mahaffy - the famous scholar and man of the world from Trinity College in Dublin, when he was asked if he was a Christian, his answer was “Yes, but not offensively so.” Mahaffy meant that he did not allow his faith in Christ to interfere with the

society that he kept.

Yet, the reality is - that the true follower of Jesus Christ - can never escape the duty of being different from the world. Jesus tells us very clearly – that it is not our duty to be conformed TO the world – rather - it is our duty to be TRANSFORMED FROM IT.

And I think it is also helpful for us to bear in mind that we are quite capable of denying Jesus by our Silence. William Barclay writes that there can be a menace of things that are unsaid in the Christian life. Because again and again life will bring us opportunities to speak up for our Faith in Jesus – to take some stand against evil - and to show where we stand in our faith.

Yet again and again on those occasions – God given occasions for us to speak up for Jesus – we see people choosing to turn their face away from him and take the easier road. To stay silent rather than to speak up for that which is right. But the Bible tells us that such a silence - is a clear denial of Christ.

In 1948 The Lambeth Conference had a special prayer composed to say every day by the Conference Delegates – all of the Bishops throughout the Anglican Communion prayed together each day at Morning Prayer and again at Evening Prayer:

“Almighty God, give us grace to be not only hearers, but doers of thy holy word, not only to admire, but to obey thy doctrine, not only to profess - but to practice thy religion, not only to love - but to live thy gospel. So grant that what we learn of thy glory we may receive into our hearts and show forth in our lives through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Jesus also told his followers “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace - but a sword..... and the one who finds their life

will lose it and the one who loses their life for my sake - shall find it and shall have it for eternity.”

Jesus said “The day of the Lord has arrived - the intervention of God is splitting groups and perhaps even families - asunder.”

Because to be confronted with Jesus is to be confronted with a clear choice.

We choose to honour and accept him or we choose to reject and disrespect him. The world is divided into those who accept Jesus and live in obedience to him - and those who do not.

Jesus offers us a choice - and a person is required to choose - sometimes that choice may be between close ties of an earthly relationship - and their loyalty to Jesus.

But the choice nevertheless remains - that all loyalty must first be to Jesus – above any human being.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus you have taught us that it profits us nothing if we gain the whole world and yet lose our souls. Help us to be willing so to lose ourselves for your sake - that we may find ourselves anew - in your life of grace - and so forget ourselves - that we may be remembered in your eternal kingdom - for your name’s sake. Amen.