**July 2, 2023 Matthew 10:24-39**

***Family***

**Scripture:** *Matthew 10:24-39 NRSV*

*(24)“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; (25)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! (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. (27)What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. (28)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. (29)Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (30)And even the hairs of your head are all counted. (31)So 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; (33)but 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. (35)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; (36)and one's foes will be members of one's own household. (37)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; (38)and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39)Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

**Notes:**

1. Jesus followers are ***oppressed*** by the Jewish leadership.
   * 1. “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.”
     2. “Whoever loves father and 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.”
   1. Jesus is talking to those who ***turn*** ***against*** each other because of him.
   2. What happens to ***relationships*** when Jesus comes first?
2. God’s ***family*** are those who believe in and follow him.
   1. Jesus accepts no excuse for lack of ***commitment***.
   2. Jesus' family is those who ***follow*** his heavenly father.
3. Jesus ***re-define*** family.
   1. We are all connected through common ***blood***.
   2. We are bound together through the ***blood*** of Christ.
4. Who is your ***family***?
   1. Make others feel ***accepted***, ***loved***, ***valued***.
   2. Have an attitude of ***acceptance***, ***forgiveness***, and ***thankfulness***.
   3. Begin to treat each person as if they are ***family***.

**Script:**

A few weeks ago, I used this passage for the devotion during the Wednesday morning prayer meeting. And After sharing it, and our discussion, I began to think of the coming July 4th holiday. From that I thought about our most recent national defense crisis on 9/11. Remember 9/11? Remember? Who could forget it? I can remember the student who walked into my classroom and told me about what was happening. I turned on the tv in time to see the second aircraft fly into the trade center. Then the fighter jets flew overhead on their way to Shanksville.

We can’t forget 9/11 any more than the “Greatest Generation” can forget Pearl Harbor. Let’s talk about it for a minute… After the initial shock wore off, what did we do? We gathered together and prayed. As a country we re-grouped. The Patriot Act was passed. The Department of Homeland Security was formed. The airlines began a tighter scrutiny of passengers, trying to ensure that nothing was brought on board an aircraft that would even come close to being used as a weapon of any kind. We began thinking in terms of colors… red alerts, yellow, orange. We went back to the basics when it came to protecting our borders. We pulled in our loved ones close to our sides and we vowed that our enemies would never find us so vulnerable again.

In the years since 9/11, security at airports and border crossings are much more stringent and I do not believe these measures are being let up. I believe at times we may have overreacted a bit but it was fairly understandable. We had been attacked on our own soil, and we didn’t like it… not one bit. And now I present you with our sermon passage from Matthew 10:24-39 and an analogy. Join me as we share our sermon passage.

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So here’s the analogy… In the year 70 A.D., the city of Jerusalem was destroyed by Roman forces. An attempt had been made, on the part of some Jewish zealots, to expel the hated Romans from the Holy City. So, the Jews revolted against what they considered to be heavy-handed oppression on the part of the occupying army. Needless to say, they were not successful against the heavily armored and well equipped Romans.

In retribution the Roman Empire decided to show the Israelites what power they really had. They had tolerated these spiteful Jews long enough, and this, quite frankly, was just the excuse they had been looking for to show off their military ability. Roman soldiers swept down upon the city with all their power and force. Thousands die, and the survivors of this first-century holocaust are left homeless and in despair. The temple – the very one that Jesus’ disciples had marveled at, and the temple that Jesus said if it was destroyed he would rebuild in three days… that temple – was demolished. The only thing left of the temple to this day is what we now call “the wailing wall.” If you are a first-century Jew, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. is your 9/11, it is your Alamo, it is your Pearl Harbor, all rolled into one. That’s the analogy.

The dust has settled over the destroyed city of Jerusalem. You count the number of people who have survived, and you take stock of your situation; 60 % of the population remain. What do you do after a disastrous event? The same thing we did after 9/11. You stop, you grieve your loss, and then you re-group. You consider what you have left and think of what is so basic to survival that you cannot do without it.

And you ask basic questions. What is the one, major force in your life that is still standing? What is the one thing the Romans cannot destroy with all their military might? It is your religious devotion, your faith, and you will defend it with your very life. If nothing else remains, your worship, your faith in the one true God of Israel, will prevail. You are the children of Abraham, and even without your beloved temple you will make sure the faith is kept alive. You will see to it, and if need be you will see to it personally.

Except, there is a fly in the ointment, and it comes at the hand of your very own people. For the last thirty years or so, there has been a growing movement within Judaism based on the Galilean peasant named Jesus, the one who was crucified. At first, his followers simply called their religious expression “The Way.” Now, they are starting to be called “Christians” because they believe Jesus to be the longed-for Messiah, the Christ. You would have thought this movement would have died a natural death, unlike that of its founder, but no. They are growing in numbers, and you are hard-pressed to figure out just exactly why.

Because the Jews have, for the most part, not taken well to any new expression of faith, but especially this one, Jesus’ followers have expanded their borders by taking their message to the Gentiles. In some cases, they are not even requiring the Gentiles to adhere to Jewish law before they can embrace this new religious faith. Something has to be done about this and done quickly. If Judaism is to survive – and it will survive – it has to deal with this Christian movement, and the sooner the better.

So, in the years following 70 A.D., the followers of Jesus not only suffer at the hands of pagan persecution, they are oppressed by the Jewish leadership as well. It has become a very hateful world to those who put their faith in Jesus. Some family members believe in Jesus and others don’t. In the process, families are being torn apart. It’s to these Jewish Christians that Matthew, a Jew, is writing his gospel and sharing these words of Jesus. “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.”

The people who hear these words of Jesus, recorded by Matthew, know exactly what Jesus is talking about because it’s happening to them. At that very moment, because of their devotion to Jesus, many of them have been cut off from the rest of their family. Mom’s not having anything to do with Daughter, and Dad has disowned Son. The early Christian church took to heart what Jesus said. These strange, and seemingly hurtful, words meant something to them, something very important. If they don’t mean as much to us, that is because something has been lost in time – not to mention translation. And that just may be our fault.

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Many have looked at this passage and asked the question, “What are we to make of such a harsh pronouncement?” Think about it… Jesus tells us to love our enemies and then turns right around and encourages his followers to turn against family members. It just doesn’t seem to make sense, does it?

Not only that – and this is something to consider as we look ahead to our Independence Day and in the weeks to come baby dedications. – he has just brought back from death to life a little girl, at the request of her Father no less. It is the time when Jesus is asked by the synagogue leader to come heal his child. On the way, Jesus is touched by the woman with the twelve-year hemorrhage. He stops and heals her of her illness, only to find when he arrives at the home that the little girl has died. Picture him speaking tenderly to the small, lifeless body. She begins to stir, take Jesus’ hand, sit up. Perhaps she rubs her eyes as if she’s merely waking from a long night’s sleep. Jesus takes her into his arms and then hands her to her father. It is one of the most endearing of all the stories in the gospels. It gives us goosebumps just thinking of it, and maybe even puts a tear or two in our eye. But then, almost in the next breath, Jesus is found saying, “Whoever loves father and 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.”

“Where, please, is the good news in it?” Some people think they know what Jesus is talking about. Family life may have been rough for some. Parents who were addicted, abusive, or just not there. Chaos within the home may have been the order of the day. The only thing normal about it was the abnormality of it. But that’s not what Jesus is talking about here. He says that family members will be turned against one another, not because of some psychological defect or abnormal family gene – or a drinking problem. Mother and daughter, father and son, are turned against one another specifically because of what Jesus said and did, and what Jesus stands for. If we are to believe in Jesus, the gospel – which is supposed to mean “good news,” I will remind you – it does not always bring people together. Sometimes, it divides them. We only need to look at the different denominations of the Christian Faith.

Many people cannot agree to disagree. They feel that their description is the only one that is correct. They believe there can be only one idea that is right and it is theirs. Unfortunately, what if we are all wrong. What happens to family loyalty and relationships when Jesus comes first? That’s what Jesus is talking about. It is a painful, painful subject. How many times have you heard of families who have shunned a family member just because he found faith in Jesus? Many of us here today may think who would do such a thing? Let me tell you about the persecuted church. Good Jewish young people are pushed away from their families and friends because they choose to believe differently. They believe Jesus is the son of God. In the Muslim faith I have heard that it is punishable by death to convert from Islam to Christianity; we have heard of mass executions in Islamic countries for such reasons.

Maybe it would be helpful for us to understand where Jesus was when he was saying these things. He is on the way to Jerusalem, the very city that a few decades later will be destroyed. He knows there’s some dirty business to be taken care of, and such business involves a cross, a cross with his name on it. He knows where he’s going, but nobody else seems to be aware of it. So, it’s a lonely journey despite the fact that he is surrounded by his friends. There are those who try to engage him in conversation. “Let me first go and bury my father,” one man says to Jesus. Won’t Jesus be impressed with his loyalty to family? “Follow me,” Jesus responds – rather coldly, it seems – “and let the dead bury their own dead.” What in the world does that mean? How can the dead bury the dead?

Is Jesus suggesting that those who do not follow him are dead, dead in their trespasses and sins? Could be, especially when you consider that Jesus now defines God’s family as those who believe in and follow him. Besides, you see, there is no indication that the man’s father has actually died. Dad may still be fairly young and robust. The man is using his family loyalty as an excuse not to follow Jesus to the cross, and Jesus accepts no excuse – no excuse – for a lack of commitment to his way.

And, of course, we are familiar with the time Jesus was teaching and his family came to get him, to take him home for some much-needed rest and recuperation. When word has reached him that his mother and his siblings have come to see him, he answers by saying, “Who is my family?” And then he defines his family as those who follow his Father… his heavenly father. “Where, exactly in this passage, is the good news?” Well, understand this, if you will… Jesus doesn’t despise family… not yours, not mine. In fact, he values family. But he does re-define family, doesn’t he?

My father-in-law teases me because I can go almost anywhere in Bedford county and identify with a distant member of my family. I have the strength of connectedness which means that I connect everything and everyone together in some way. Family is no different. Denny claims that I am related to half of Bedford county. He can tease all he wants, but I know who my family is, I value my family and who they are, even when they don’t quite measure up to my expectations. We are all connected through common ancestors.

If you look on the internet there are all kinds of websites and podcasts that talk about tracing your family tree. On Facebook there are several people who have taken on the responsibility to document and archive pictures and stories of places like New Paris, Ryot, Pleasantville, Lovely and Pavia. And as I look at these sites, I smile because I read about a distant relative here, a neighbor there, and people I am acquainted with somewhere else.

Family and memories… They are all very important to me, even though people may poke fun at me for it. Family; it is who we are, and we can’t change that even if we wanted to. Even the gospel writers gave us Jesus’ family tree. It was important to them that we see where Jesus had come from. Partially so we can see how we all tie together, but also how we are bound together in this life and the next.

I’m not so sure that Jesus' lineage was so important to him because he talked about his mother and brothers, his sisters and aunts and uncles and cousins, as being those who give their devotion to his heavenly father. And that is why, when a person is baptized into the faith, we say that he is our brother, she is our sister, in Christ. We are kin, you and I, we are kin… if we believe in Jesus and we choose to follow him. That also means we have family who don’t look like us or bear a physical resemblance to us in any way. Their skin color is different, their culture is not the same, and they speak a different language. Yet, we are family because we are one in Christ Jesus. And Jesus says that this kinship is the most meaningful and eternal of all. And we, the church, are bound together through the blood of Christ.

So I wonder today, who is your family, and how do you want them to treat you? Who is your family and how do you treat them?

If you truly identify with Jesus and believe that those in the church are your family, you need to identify the way you treat others within the church, and how you need to change your attitudes? I like to think that in this church we are very accepting, but I am not so naïve to think that there are those who are on the fringe who feel left out, unaccepted, maybe even shunned. So it is up to each one of us to do our part in making them feel accepted, loved, valued; and, strengthen their walk with the Lord.

We need to have an attitude of acceptance, forgiveness, and thankfulness. Accepting those who enter our fellowship no matter where they come from or what they look like. Forgiving those who may have hurt our feelings, excluded us, or maybe even lived a life that we do not approve of. And we need to be thankful for all of those who have gone before us, who have accepted us when we were on the fence, forgiven us of whatever we may have done, and those who have encouraged us when we felt less than perfect.

If we truly believe that we are family, we need to begin to treat each person we encounter in the church as if they are family, our brother or sister. This is what Jesus is talking about, and this is God’s desire; that nobody be left out of his plan of salvation and that all be redeemed and accepted into Heaven.