

Matthew 10: 24 – 39

The message of Matthew for this morning brings people to divide into two different groups.

The message brings comfort and peace to those who desperately need it for one group of people. The message also brings discomfort and conflict to another group of people.

Because Jesus says that he comes not to bring peace, but a sword. And he tells us that he has come to set a son against his father and a daughter against her mother. (Matthew 10:35).

In Genesis, we find conflict between two women in Abraham's house. (Genesis 21:8 - 21).

There is jealousy between two women, Sarah and Hagar, may be between Isaac and Ishmael. Abraham faces a conflict between two women. God promised Isaac, but then Sarah, with her knowledge, brought a slave girl for Abraham to bear a child. Conflict begins with these two women and spreads a bit further. This conflict still continues.

With the passages that we hear today, not everyone will agree with the message. The message Jesus preaches can and does divide homes, families, and for that matter, churches.

The gospel is good news to some people. Jesus says he comes to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and sight to the blind in Luke. And the gospel is offensive to those who are of the world.

When Matthew called the Jewish community and preached to them to live not according to law, but to live according to love, they were offended.

When Jesus sat with sinners, dined with them, and preached to the poor and rejected, it offended the religious leaders and others.

It certainly can divide homes, families, churches, parties, and countries.

In our days, particularly where we live in this country, we Christians are not persecuted and rejected or kicked out of the community or country for what we believe.

I've witnessed individuals being expelled from this country due to their acts of terrorism or severe crimes against the government.

However, we, on the other hand, are not subjected to persecution, in small ways. Nevertheless, we are not persecuted in our religious practices, and even our families don't oppose our attendance at church.

If we proclaim the gospel on the rooftop to the neighbors in the way Jesus preached, I don't think even that act leads us to any kind of persecution or stop from someone. Worth the try.

But we can pause with what Jesus says to us.

We may doubt our priority, as we read chapter 10 of Matthew in verse 37. "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Through these verses, we might ask ourselves these questions:

How do we remain true to the message when there is resistance?

How do we stand firm when what we believe is true puts us in difficult situations with friends, family, or even our country?

Certainly, Jesus came not to bring comfort, peace, and harmony, but conflict, offence, fight against one another, and discomfort.

There is a cost involved in this practice.

That is the cost of discipleship. When we say the cost of discipleship, we have a true example of the cost of discipleship.

There is a German theologian, Bonhoeffer. In 1945, when he preached the message, his message didn't sit well with everyone. Especially with the German nation and Hitler's Nazi.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was initially devoted to his country, but he became increasingly disturbed as Hitler's ideology clashed with Christian values and threatened the church.

As he was recognizing the danger of the regime, Bonhoeffer shifted his perspective and became an active critic of Nazi policies. His conviction led him to join the resistance movement.

His commitment to faith and justice cost him his life as he was executed for his resistance and his faith.

Bonhoeffer defined discipleship as having great cost, and we are saved by the costly grace of Jesus.

To become a disciple of Jesus has always been difficult.

However, the gospel speaks to us in a way that makes discipleship easier.

That is to know that Jesus came to suffer and die, and we also expect to follow the same footsteps.

Jesus brings his message to the disciples that he has lived a life of conflict, suffering, and rejection.

When you live the same kind of life, walk the same kind of road, and take the same kind of journey, you can expect the same kind of conflict and trouble as mine.

That is how we take the discipleship of Jesus seriously.

In Matthew 10:24, we hear that Jesus is saying, "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters."

Jesus could have taken the sword and stood against the Roman government; he could have walked away from his suffering and his death. But he didn't choose that. Maybe he could have spared his life from the Roman government.

We might imagine what if Jesus didn't take the way of persecution, suffering, and death on the cross, if he walked away from his cross and refused to die on it?

What if he lived an ordinary life, married, and had children? Can we imagine that in real life?

What would happen to the world, what would happen to us?

Instead, he chose the way that cost his life.

Jesus showed that the way of discipleship would be costly.

He is inviting us to follow that pathway. There is a great cost of discipleship. We are challenged to choose what costs us. What does cost us? What does it cost you and me to follow Christ's way of life?

I like to bring up the question that I asked earlier.

How do we remain true to the message when there is resistance?

How do we stand firm when what we believe is true puts us in a difficult situation with friends, family, or even the country?

There is a minister who shares a story of an elder who committed her life to Christ.

There is an elder and a mother of a teenager. She doesn't look religious, but her devotion was clear and articulate.

One evening at a dinner table, a daughter of the mother and elder asked the mother, why are you so religious all the time?

As an elder and mother, at the dinner table, she responded to her daughter and everyone at the table with these words.

Every morning before you awake, I rise and walk into the living room.

I lift my arms and ask, who's in charge here?

The answer always comes back: not you, that's why I am religious.

Because I am not in charge.

Through the cross, we find that Christ is in charge of life. "Whoever loses that life will find it, whoever gains that life will lose it. "Matthew 10: 38, 39.

Division is an inherent part of the work of Christ.

The same God who permits division in the world is also the God who brings love to the world.

Ultimately, it is the love of God that guides us through the cross and discipleship, transforming division into life and resurrection.

This is the work of Christ for the people who want to stand firm in their faith.

Amen.