

Natalie W. Bell  
July 12, 2020

**Straight Talk From Jesus**  
**Matthew 10:24-39**

*A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup> 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!*

<sup>26</sup> *“So **have no fear** of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup> What I say to you in the dark, **tell in the light**; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup> **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. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> **So do not be afraid**; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

<sup>32</sup> *“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup> but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*

<sup>34</sup> *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to **bring peace, but a sword.***

<sup>35</sup> *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;*

<sup>36</sup> *and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.*

<sup>37</sup> *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; <sup>38</sup> and whoever **does not take up the cross and follow me** is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup> Those who find their life will lose it, and those who **lose their life for my sake will find it.***

I love those first verses of **Romans 6 that we heard**,  
about how we should NOT keep on sinning, just because we have God’s grace!  
How true is that?  
But isn’t that hard to actually practice?  
Don’t we all have **blindspots** in our lives,  
places where we continue to sin, and make mistakes?

***Praise God for grace—***

but we are still called to ***learn*** from our failures and ***grow*** in our faith!

And then we have Jesus, here in Matthew 10.

***This is not an easy passage, is it?***

This is the same Jesus who offers compassion and empathy everywhere, who welcomes little children.

But at this moment, Jesus is doing some ***straight-talk***, right?

***So where do these verses come from?***

Jesus has been teaching, healing, and preaching in Chapter 9.

In Chapter 10 he sends out the 12 disciples on their own to proclaim the kingdom, to cure the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons.

Jesus transfers his ministry to his disciples!

***Then Jesus is brutally honest!***

He says that ***persecutions will come***,

because they are being sent out ***like sheep amidst wolves***,

***to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves*** (verse 16).

In verse 19 he offers ***some comfort***:

*When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; <sup>20</sup> for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

***But then he says some difficult words:***

Everything covered up will be ***exposed***.

What happens in the dark will be brought into the ***light***.

If we ***deny*** Jesus, we will be denied.

*Jesus has not come to bring peace, but a ***sword***.*

Whoever ***loves family*** more than Him is not worthy!

All who follow must take up a ***cross*** and

***lose their lives*** in order to find them!

That's a lot to take in, isn't it?

***Doesn't sound like the gentle Jesus*** of a picture Bible, does it?

These are ***tough words***.

*I wonder—what do you hear in them?  
How does this work in your life?*

Do you believe that ***Jesus IS tough?***

He was a ***revolutionary*** teacher and preacher,  
speaking out against those who oppressed his people,  
and showing religious leaders a new way to follow God.

Jesus was ***controversial***.

He ***made enemies—so much, that he was crucified!***

Do we lose some of that today?

Do we tend to ***domesticate*** Jesus?

But what if we hear what the Gospels say.

And today we hear that ***our lives as Christians will be not be easy.***

We will be ***troubled and challenged, with confrontation and conflict.***

It will be like carrying a cross and losing our lives!

Which makes me think of what we are facing today with ***racism***.

A sin that is rampant.

It's kind of like what Jesus says here—what was ***hidden***

(like the KKK, or glorification of the Confederacy)—

is now out in the light for everyone to see,

it is in the mainstream of American life.

It's fed by leaders who say that whole groups of people  
are inferior, or dangerous, or less than.

But these are ***not the beliefs of Christian faith.***

The darkness of racism and prejudice are ***not compatible*** with following Jesus.

Not the Jesus who came to set all people free (Luke 4).

We believe that all people are ***children of God, made in the image of God.***

And Jesus certainly came to teach, and heal, and preach to all image-bearers.

And now it is ***our turn—to carry out that mission.***

Just like he sent his 12 disciples, He sends us!

***We are the body of Christ*** on earth—the hands and feet of Jesus.

Which means we are called to **confront evils like racism**.

It's not enough to just say we are *color-blind, or not racist*.

It's not enough to just say *All Lives Matter*.

(Which misses the point about Black Lives Matter—because truth be told, black lives have not mattered as much as white ones, for the entire history of this country).

So how do we hear what Jesus is saying, and **confront this systemic sin?**

What if it's time to hear some **new perspectives?**

Our denomination is challenging Presbyterians to take a **21 day Racial Equity challenge** to dismantle racism.

I will be sending out information in the days ahead— and I encourage you, as you are hunkered down at home, to take some time to look at the resources—short videos, TED talks, articles, books, and artwork.

Take the time to read a good book on racism.

I am especially moved by two that have given me new perspective.

The first is called ***Between the World and Me***, by Ta-Nehisi Coates.

The other is called ***Waking Up White*** by Debbie Irving.

Coates' book is a letter from a black father to his teenaged son, about growing up as a black man in America.

Irving's book is about how much whites are not even aware of all the privileges of being white in America.

***You know, this year the PCUSA elected***

a Native American Elder--Elona Street-Stewart, and a black pastor—Rev. Gregory Bentley, as Co-Moderators. Our stated clerk is black.

It is exciting that our denomination is now being represented by people of all races and backgrounds.

Next year, our Oklahoma ***Presbyteries will meet in Tulsa, and remember*** 100 years since the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

We'll pray and repent and commit to dismantling racism.

Christians have always been ***called to address the challenges and sins of their day*** and ***we are no different***.

Which is why we need to be ***reminded of a refrain*** in our Matthew passage. It's one of the most famous refrains in the Bible.

Three little words that mean all the world to us—no matter who we are:

***Do not fear.***

In verse 26, Jesus says *Have no fear of them....*

In verse 28, Jesus says *do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul.*

In verse 31, Jesus says *Do not fear, you are of more value than many sparrows.*

***Three times, in some hard verses,***

Jesus reminds us that we do not need to be afraid.

Which is true as we confront sins like racism—we don't need to fear.

***Jesus*** is with us.

***God*** can give us the words and actions we need—Jesus says it right here.

The ***Holy Spirit*** is at work in our lives, so that we might find real life.

Friends, that is the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today!

Let us ***not keep sinning***, just because we have grace.

And ***let us not fear***—but be courageous as we follow Jesus, even when it brings challenge, confrontation or conflict!

Even when following Christ is hard.

For God is with us.

And for that, all God's people say, Amen!