

2023 Matthew 10 - family

It's a cryptic gospel lesson from our Lord today. These are not the "nice" words of the make-believe Jesus who just wants us all to get along, and who doesn't think anything is right or wrong.

No, these are stern words, given to his disciples before he sends them. He sent them with instructions to bring peace to people. So what is all this about not bringing peace, but a sword? A contradiction? Or, the natural response to their message? Go preach peace, God's Kingdom does bring peace, peace I give to you, peace I leave with you, Jesus said. But that message, almost inexplicably, will be and still is, met with derision, conflict, and so much so that people will draw their swords to stop it.

Jesus is not ignorant of the danger he is sending the twelve into, he is not ignorant of the struggles we face either. And we might think at this point he might say something like, "Well it's too dangerous, don't go." But no, he still sends them. He still calls and sends us.

And he makes it even more personal than just the risk of our own lives. What of our loved ones? "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." That's tough.

It's something we don't like to talk about, how can we? And it isn't to say we should stupidly risk our children's lives to share the Gospel, it is not saying the Pastor who ignores his family for "kingdom work" is making the right call. Not at all – in fact that goes against these words today. Because, believe it or not, these words of Jesus are for your family's good – not their harm.

Pr. Dinger talks about the idolatry of family. The secret we in the church, who are pro-family, can't talk about. But it's a real thing. Your God is what you fear, love, and trust in the most. And if you fear for your kids more than you fear God, if the safety of your kids is more important to you than God that will control you, not him and his word. And so in Nigeria they don't just put the gun to your head and tell you to deny Christ, they put it to your child's. Lord, have mercy.

And if you love them more, than him, and get all your meaning from them, if you fear for them more than you fear God, then what are you going to do? And what does that make your children? Your god.

And I get it, it seems harsh, it seems like Jesus is the narcissist – "Gotta love me more than them, I can't stand any competition." But is that why he says this? Or, is it because they can't save you and you can't save them. I was helpless to stop my son from getting diabetes. I couldn't do anything but carry him into the doctors and to his shots. We can try and try and try to bubble wrap them and force feed them

vegetables, but folks, don't you realize this? – unless the Lord comes back someday, that child of yours is going to die and there is nothing, nothing you can do about it. And it's so depressing it makes one wonder, "why should we even have kids? Spare them the pain of this broken world!"

But that ignores the gift and joy of life and laughter and those hugs. And, more importantly, and back to this sermon – You can't save them from death – but you know someone who can! Don't you? Jesus! Which is why he is first, everything, and I mean everything else, is second.

Feed them veggies, bubble wrap them if you want, give them the best education and sports team, but please, please, give them Jesus. Feed them Jesus, literally in word, and in time, in body and blood. Nothing else is even close in importance.

And when you realize that, that He is better equipped to save your family than you, then perhaps this verse sounds less like a narcissist, and more like a God who longs for all to come to him in saving faith.

And so as the enemy army invades the desperate mother hands her baby up to the soldier on the wall, she will never see her child again, but maybe on the other side of that wall, there is life for her child. And yet we cling to our families so tight, refusing to hand them to the Good Shepherd who has conquered the grave and can see them so safely, so safely, to life eternal. Folks, let us rebel against the idolatry

of family. The darkness of this world, a gun to your child's head, is not the worst thing that can happen to us, or to them. Lord, have mercy.

This is why Abraham offers his son, Isaac. Not because he didn't love Isaac, no Hebrews 11 tells us it's the opposite. It's because he knew only God could ever raise him up again! And he did, and he will again on the last day.

So as we read these cryptic words of Jesus as he sends out the twelve I invite you to challenge yourself to read them not as a vicious boss who doesn't care about who he sends or what they love. But I challenge you to read them as someone who cares and loves those he sends, and their families, more than even you do.

Even those of us whose grown up children have wandered from the faith. Jesus is not ignorant of that pain. He tells us today, his truth will set a father against son, and so forth. And we can be mad at ourselves, thinking, "what did I do wrong when I raised them?" We can be angry at God, "Nice of you to save those children, what about mine?" We can be angry at them, "They know better, and they stubbornly refuse." And I imagine we feel all of them. I suppose the question in a sermon is – what can you do. And you already know – you try to maintain the relationship, you apologize, you forgive, you try to reason with them without pushing them away. Or are we too busy or stubborn for that? You can also continue to go to Jesus, the One who weeps over the lost, and ask him to continue to search

– or is he too busy and stubborn for that? No, he isn't. Even as he isn't too busy to care for you as you deal with swords in families and persecutions without.

And I think that is in our text. I think his care shines through. He cares, so much, for those who receive the Word, even if through us, that “If they receive you they receive me and the One who sent me.” You see his care in the rewards he offers his sent ones. He knows it's hard, he knows there is pain, which, I think is why he makes sure that all those who go, whether you convert a thousand, or move a mountain, or maybe you don't. Maybe you stuck your foot in your mouth. Maybe you seem to have made it worse. Maybe you are struggling so much it's been hard for you to help others. Maybe your frightened. Well, maybe all you could manage was a cup of water to someone who was thirsty. “You will by no means lose your reward.” He cares.

And if, in the struggles and fears of life, those words seem inadequate. If you think he can't possibly know the pain of parent losing their child. Well, “he gave his one and only Son.” To torture, to pain, to unjust end and undeserved death. Not as child abuse. But as a substitute, for justice, for forgiveness, and so that all God's children and yours might be with him – safe and sound – what he made us for. Is this a vicious, bitter, uncaring, taskmaster? Or is this one who knows what pain and loss is like, who bids us go, that more might be saved?

These are difficult feelings and words today, from all sides. So much so it may be hard to stand under them. My encouragement then, is to lean. Lean on a merciful God who has given his Son to show his love and heart for the world and the lost. Lean on that Son, now Risen, who leads his children, even if through tribulation, swords, and crosses, to victory and healing of body and soul.