

**“The Open Question”**  
**3rd Sunday after Pentecost – June 21, 2020 – Matthew 10:24-39/A**

[Jesus said to the twelve:] <sup>24</sup>“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.*”  
(Matthew 10:24-39)

**Grace and peace to you from God, the Creator, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

One of the best pastor/teachers I ever had, gave me a great gift as he taught me to study the Bible. He told me to take a piece of lined paper and stick it into the back of my Bible. Whenever I came across something I didn’t understand, or questioned in Scripture, he instructed me to write it down on the sheet. Then, he said, just forget about it. Some day you might find the answer to those questions – maybe another passage will enlighten you – maybe a snip of a sermon will explain – or maybe you might come back at another time and find that it wasn’t such a difficult reading after all. But in the meantime, just live in the open questions. It was good advice for studying the Bible and for life.

For example: What did Jesus mean when he said to the disciples, “take up the cross?” Matthew and Luke tell the story pretty much in the same order of events, so we can say with some certainty that Jesus had not yet spoken of his cross at all. He had called the 12, preached the Sermon on the Mount, healed a Roman Centurions’ servant, cleansed a leper, stilled a storm, cast out demons and raised a little girl from death, all while teaching the Law and the Prophets and ticking off the religious authorities because of his interpretations. And that is only in the first 1/3 of the story!

It’s almost as if Jesus knew the stomach-wrenching response of the disciples when he uttered, “take up the cross.” A cross - an instrument so horrific, a death so tortuous - a Roman cross went beyond anything they had imagined in connection with this loving, healing, light-bringing, death-defying Rabbi they had packed up and followed.

Imagine living in that open question as you followed Jesus, step by step, day by day. Imagine what it is like to know the life you came from, and then experience having that life completely overturned by one encounter with the Son of God. Now your life unfolds hour by hour. Sometimes, you watch him work, and stand in awe of the things he does. You

know nothing past **now** for sure, and each day your trust and faith in him grows in ways you never imagined. But sometimes, the things he says and does scare you right to your bones. How can you understand finding your life and losing it, as well as losing your life to find it? It's not yes and it's not no. It's more like living in the gray – in a disoriented state where you can't go back to the past you've known and the future you might have had in mind is no longer possible. Life in the Open Question.

I have used the phrase The Great Pause to describe our time. When it first began back in March it seemed that the economy, the political scene and then, a global pandemic, were a rather dramatic "interruption." Now it is becoming more and more clear that this is not so much an interruption as a "disruption" and we are going to have to learn how to live **when we don't know where we are going.**

This story is an example of how God speaks to us today through the Bible – In our gospel, Jesus is telling the truth to his disciples – giving it to them straight – so that they are clear about what he is calling them to do. We can read it simply, for we know how that story goes. But we can also read it as a God's word for today; some instruction about how to live in these days of disruption and uncertainty.

**1. Jesus is our model of the Godly life.**

Verse 25 says *"It is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher"*

**2. So have no fear.** Verse 31 says, *"do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."*

**3. Share your faith.** Verses 32-33 say, *"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."* (What about Peter? Didn't he deny Jesus 3 times? I think it's pretty clear that Jesus saved him.)

**4. Use the tools you have.** Verse 34, *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."* (This is not a soldier's sword, or a broadsword, but a dagger/a tool, some might even refer to it as living word of God.

**5. Your life is not your own, it is God's** - Verse 39: *"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."*

It has been said that early Christianity was an experience of power. It seems we are seeing that same power unleashing in people of good faith around the globe. We are watching the beginnings of something brand new, sparked by George Floyd's death; we remember how the world was about to turn, when the Revolutionary War came to a close with the Battle of Yorktown; the dawning of a new day – Juneteenth – as slaves were set free. These times disrupt the Open Question, just as did Pearl Harbor, or September 11, or the global pandemic of 2020, or even Easter - The Day of Resurrection.

Jesus is our model. We do not need to be afraid. We share our faith, by using the tools we already have. And we remember, our life is not our own...it is God's. We are Christians – followers of Jesus the Christ. We were called through Baptism to do God's work in the world by taking up the most difficult tasks we can imagine – without fear – willing to give up our lives for those we love, and for all of God's children. Did you ever wonder why Jesus spent so much time with children? Well, think about the little ones you know. They are all wide eyes and curiosity – responding to a wiggly finger or a big smile or a gentle embrace. They know only one thing, and that is that the world is full of big and wonderful

things to learn and explore. That is why Jesus always pointed to them as the best examples of followers. Pure trust.

They will, as we all have, live in the open questions in their lives, just as we do. They will, at some point, know in their hearts what God says: you can either do life **your** way, or **my** way. If you choose your own way, life will be full of worries and stresses, and cares and concerns and pain and sorrow and conflict. If you choose God's way, all those things will remain. But you will never be alone, your fears will not overwhelm you and your life will be spent willingly.

Because you belong to God. God loves you more than you will ever know. And when you trust that completely, God's blessings will be shared in interruptions and disruptions; in living open questions and dying into God's loving arms. Just as Jesus *always* blessed the children, God's blessings for the world will come through you. And that just about answers any open questions. Amen.

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**Resources:** Luke Johnson, *Introduction to the New Testament; Fortress Commentary on the Bible* for Matthew 10-11 – pp 144-6; Stanley Saunders, *Working Preacher*; Susan Beaumont, *How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going*, Alban Institute.