Text: Matt 10: 5a,21-33

**Text**

The Gospel according to Matthew, more than the other three, is the one concerned about the teaching of Jesus. It ends with the great commission given at the ascension, “Make disciples, baptizing and teaching them everything I have commanded you.” So, unlike most world religions, modern and ancient, which are primarily about practices. Take for example the five pillars of Islam: Prayer, Fasting, Alms, The Hajj, and Jihad. Islam itself means submit. Ultimately to God, but the path of submission is through these five practices. Yes, there are things to believe – God is one and Mohammed as the prophet – but they are small in comparison to the practice. The Christian’s can have a wide variety of piety practices within their Christian freedom. The only commanded ones are Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But the teaching of Jesus isn’t that reductive. The Gospel of Matthew is organized around 5 sermons of Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount (chapts 5-7), The Missionary Sermon (chapt 10), The Parable Sermon (chapt 13), The Church Sermon (Chapt 18) and the Eschatological or Endtimes sermon (Chapt 24-25). In fact calling it a teaching for the way we normally take that word is a category error. We take teaching as an information exchange. We would probably be better using something like “The Way” of Jesus.

Is there information involved in a way or a philosophy? Sure. But is that the primary thing? Absolutely not. Each Christian has to walk their own way, as Paul would say “with fear and trembling.” And that way is not simply a checklist, but it is a life governed by the same understandings and goals as the Jesus.

So, when the time came for Jesus to send out his apostles as his representatives, he gives them the teaching. We started reading this sermon last week and we will complete it next week.

**Summary of First Points**

Last week’s gospel, the first third of Jesus’ Missionary Sermon, had two points. The primary point would be that the mission is one of proclamation. “Proclaim as you go, ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.’” If they accept it, let your peace rest upon that place. If they don’t or they won’t listen, shake off the dust. It is not a mission of conquest. It is not a mission of direct power. It is a mission of the word. The acceptance or rejection of the word is in the mystery of the Spirit.

The second point, being a mission of the word, is what words? Surely some words are better than others? How do we have the best words? And Jesus point is “don’t worry.” “Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit.” Now that is a tough word to hear for someone like me who spends hours pondering what I’m going to say each week. There are definitely traditions that would just say I don’t have enough faith in the Spirit showing up. But these words are given in the context of one of the major points this week – persecution or conflict. There is nobody hauling me up to this pulpit demanding answers on penalty of injury. No, instead I have been given this time explicitly by people who have received the teaching. I would say that you are more likely to find yourself in an analogous position than I am. Someone who is not a Christian has asked you why you are. They don’t ask pastors for some reason, or rarely. But if you are like me you’ve had that experience of the in the moment spiritual question. And then you spend the next week with the Spirit of the Staircase thinking of better ways you could have spoken. Jesus’ missionary sermon in good news for this. Whatever you said, whatever you will say in those moments that God has already laid out for you, are what He wants said. Do not be anxious, it is the Spirit speaking through you.

The temptation in missions is to place all the burden on us for the outcome. The only thing Jesus asks is that we are faithful, meaning being willing to speak the word given to us. The outcomes, even the Words themselves, are the Spirit’s.

**Persecution & Discipleship**

And that brings us to our portion of Jesus’ sermon today. Speaking the Word of God is not a no-consequences thing. Speaking the Word of God will make people angry. The fundamental fact of speaking the word of God is the creation of a division. The division between those who hear it and those who reject it. “Brother will deliver brother…father his child and children against their parents.” Proclaiming the Way of the Jesus will make some people very angry. “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

There are two temptations here. The greatest temptation is to cease being faithful to the Word, which means to cease being willing to share it. To this temptation Jesus tells the disciples he’s sending out “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Somehow the conversation turns and the moment to share Christ is there, but we don’t share the word because we intuit that it will cause anger. The second temptation would be to water it down or to substitution our words for the world of God. To tell the other person what we know they want to hear, not what the Word says. For this temptation we have the example of Jesus himself. The Chief Priests and the Pharisees knew what they wanted to hear from Jesus, but Jesus would not change his message. “A disciple is not about the teacher.”

The Way of Jesus – being a disciple – is understanding the potential cost and persisting. The one out that Jesus grants is that if we know persecution is coming, we can flee. Christ himself went to the cross. But our calling is not to save the world, but to witness to the one who did. If that witness has been clearly rejected, we may flee.

**Eternal Life**

All of this is fine, but why would anyone actually follow through on this?

There have always been a few philosophers – say Socrates – who would be killed, largely because he was annoying, rather than tone down their teaching. But they were rare enough to be noted by history. Jesus is sending out 12 guys, most of them who had been fishermen not 18 months ago. And though them this sermon comes not to the highly refined philosophers or only to a special class of Friars. Although we’d love to outsource it there. No, the Way of Jesus, comes to all disciples. And if the Way says: 1) This is going to make people mad and cause division, 2) You must speak it, and 3) You can’t water it down; why would anyone take it up?

The only real reason is being convinced of the resurrection to eternal life. And I think Jesus gives us this reasoning in two ways. “Don’t fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” You can summarize that in the phrase, “these men fear God.” You probably don’t like hearing that word fear, but the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Without an appropriate fear of God we would never even stop to hear the rest. Everything is going to be revealed. God is Truth and the truth always comes out. What we think we can hide because we live in a dark time, will be brought into the light. What we whisper today, because we are afraid of what the reactions might be, is going to be shouted from on high. The disciple of Jesus has properly gauged fear. There is nothing that this world can do that can hurt, kill or embarrass more than that final plumb line. The Disciple has come to properly fear God.

But that fear eventually turns to the question, is God a God of fear? Would eternal life in a state of fear be something that one would even want? And this is Jesus second and most powerful argument.

Look at the sparrow. You can buy two for a penny. A comparison today might be look at the factory chicken. It lives maybe 90 days. It may never see the sun. And it does this so that we can have $2/lb chicken breasts and $5 KFC. And not a single one falls without the Father. You are worth a lot more than chickens. The hairs on your head are numbered. God is rightly to be feared, but he is not a God of fear. He is the God who knows you better than you know yourself.

**Conclusion**

We have been invited into the eternal life of God. The Kingdom proclaimed is an eternal one.

But the Way of Jesus is through this fallen world. And that Way is through this world so that some might find it and be saved.

How all of us have found it, is because some disciple heard the proclamation and was willing to risk the anger and division and persecution to be faithful, to walk the way themselves. And that is the invitation to us. Will we be faithful? “Everyone who acknowledges me before me, I will also acknowledge before my Father.”

Do we fear, love and trust the one who made that promise above everything else?