Sermon Notes Fourth Sunday after Pentecost Jeremiah 20:7-13 Matthew 10:24-39

In the Gospel of Matthew for Sunday, we hear Jesus is sending his disciples to proclaim the good news, ""The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matt 10:8) The difficulty for us this Sunday is that as Jesus continues in his commissioning and sending forth, he reminds his disciples that it will not by easy. "Not easy, Jesus? What do you mean?" His words do not sound like the pre-game pep-talk prior to a 10-year old's soccer game. The repetitive "do not fear" is small assurance for the task at hand. God cares for us—and what? The world is dangerous? Life is hard? You choosing to care for the hungry, the sick and the vulnerable in your midst will be challenging and even dangerous? Yes.

The Gospel of Matthew was written when the early followers of Jesus were already being persecuted for following Jesus. And, as any soccer player knows, just being in the game might mean being hit hard by the ball, or another player, just by being on the field. So, we might ask, what does Jesus want the disciples (and us) to know? Are we as a community working together being called into living life with a belief that all are precious in the realm of God's love? Yes. Is it scary? Yes.

Fear is a helpful emotion because it warns of danger. Jesus is warning the disciples that to follow him means going against the cultural expectations of the Roman Empire; privilege and a transactional economy work to exclude others. You do for me; I will do something for you. Slaves have no rights, and even Jews who worked as fishermen lacked status; protecting the vulnerable, feeding the hungry, and healing the sick because God cares—for free--was not the way things worked. Mercy in action challenges Empire's status quo of privilege. The divisions perceived in families, is not limited to the first century. Following The Way in different cultures and belief systems does divide families. Jesus' Way is not about who sits at the head of the table, but about how all are welcome to the table. Manners aside, living in this way is disruptive to Empire, culture and family.

Jesus bringing a sword, not peace is not about war, but about disruption. *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."* The sword divides, or calls out the truth about the vulnerable, in the anticipation of healing, forgiveness, and a new life. Thinking about a sword that does not bring peace, but divides is another way of thinking how people are divided against one another because they value different things. To follow Jesus here is to remember that to antagonize the Empire and culture, may lead to the worst kind of punishment reserved for those who disrupt the Empire, the cross. The coach's pre-game talk is about the promise of God to the followers who are working together. "Do not be afraid." The promise is: God sees all, notices all and holds all, even the least. In this text the example is the tiny numerous sparrow, who even the disciples would not have particularly valued.

The Gospel of Matthew is hard to read and to hear. Can we do this hard thing together? The passage for chapter 10 that is not in this reading reminds us we are able to serve Christ in our midst. "*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me… and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward." (Matt 10:40,42)*
We enter the joy of serving Christ by putting love into action, as best we can, together and personally, because God is with us and we are not alone. *Susan+*