

All of Me
Psalm 86:1-10; Matthew 10:24-39

A majority of ministers would prefer to avoid this passage of scripture when considering the Lectionary choices for this Sunday. However, the other choices for this Sunday are not much more enticing!

First, it is important to point out that this passage from Matthew is but a collection of sayings given by Jesus to the disciples as they set out on a mission of healing and preaching good news. These sayings point out that the life of faith will include struggle and even opposition. However, some insist that Jesus goes too far. After all, the Jesus we know comes to bring peace, not a sword. While all who have spent any time at all in the church recognize that discord happens within the community of the faithful. The Jesus we all know, love, and have faith in would never encourage such discord in the midst of the family. Yet, here is Jesus promising to set a son against his father and a daughter against her mother, "Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

This text is a fine example of the biblical word's not saying what, at first glance, it seems to be saying. Jesus is actually addressing the faithful who seek to live into their Christian Faith while facing conflict and discouragement, with even the threat of their physical well-being, because of the gospel's calling.

Hear these same verses as interpreted by Eugene Petersen in *The Message*:

²⁴ "A student doesn't get a better desk than her teacher. A laborer doesn't make more money than his boss. ²⁵ Be content—pleased, even—when you, my students, my harvest hands, get the same treatment I get. If they call me, the Master, 'Dungface,' what can the workers expect? ²⁶ "Don't be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open, and everyone will know how things really are. ²⁷ So don't hesitate to go public now. ²⁸ "Don't be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands. Forget About Yourself. ²⁹ "What's the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right? And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. ³⁰ He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! ³¹ So don't be intimidated by all this bully talk. You're worth more than a million canaries. ³² "Stand up for me against world opinion and I'll stand up for you before my Father in heaven. ³³ If you turn tail and run, do you think I'll cover for you? ³⁴ "Don't think I've come to make life cozy. I've come to cut—³⁵ make a sharp knife---not between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law—cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. ³⁶ Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. ³⁷ If you prefer father or mother over me, you don't deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don't deserve me. ³⁸ "If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. ³⁹ If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

Contrary to what we think we hear when we first read these verses from Matthew, Jesus is really telling his disciples that he wants their complete and total dedication. Their faith should not be divided between family or friends and God, vying for their time and attention. God wants their full and complete dedication. If they are persecuted in the way that Jesus knows they will be, then with complete dedication to Jesus, they will not be tempted to give in to the fears that come from those who persecute them.

Jesus is no champion of family values. He has kingdom values. Believers who have the assurance that my fate is in the hands of a loving God understand that there is nothing to fear or to worry about. Armed with this assurance we are empowered to approach the cross in a new way. Some people feel threatened by the cross, repulsed by the cross. However, I look to the cross as a temporary part of Jesus' journey. It is through the shadow of the cross that I challenge the evil powers of this world, knowing with certainty that the way of God will prevail against every hurt and every challenge.

On Thursday, the Fun Folks met for lunch. The conversation was loud and rowdy as we ate and laughed and enjoyed each other's company. Sue Hunter called the group to order for some business and asked us to begin by naming one thing that had happened in the week for which we were thankful. There were many wonderful things cited as each person had blessing upon blessing in their lives. Don Osborn shared that he and his friend David made their usual trip to the Y, enjoyed their routine exercise and prepared to leave, only to realize that Don had misplaced the keys to his house. He searched and searched, asking almost everyone they had encountered along the way, recounting their way back home, but not finding the keys. But in Don's words, "I did not get upset. I knew they would show up. I also knew there were far more important things to worry about and I just did not worry about it. "Upon returning to the Y, he asked if anyone had turned in any keys, and yes, the keys were there all the while. The attendant had changed, and they had asked one attendant and not the other.

On the other hand, Tina Sinatra tells the story of her father, Frank Sinatra, in his early eighties, his health was in tatters, his life mired in financial wrangles, but Frank Sinatra refused to stop giving concerts. "I've got to earn more money," he said. He forgot lyrics to ballads he had sung thousands of times; he needed oxygen from a tank he kept on hand to complete a concert. He had always said he wanted to go out on top but when his daughter told him, 'Pop, you can stop now; you don't have to stay on the road.'" With a stricken expression he said, "No, I've got to earn more money. I have to make sure everyone is taken care of."

When we give our whole selves to God, our faith is strong and overrides our fears and there is no need for worry. As a friend of mine says, "God's got this." However, when there is just a little room, the negative voices move in, our faith is compromised, and fear takes over. Worry sets in. God becomes smaller.

Amy Grant re-wrote an old hymn with a contemporary twist that says it well. I invite you to allow the following to be your prayer:

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, Thy will receive
Will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve
Because Thy promises I believe
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Jesus, take all of me
I come to You, I run to You
There is nothing that You don't see
You love me just as I am
You love me

Just as I am broken in two
Just as I am I come to you
Because I know Your Word is true
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Just as I am, Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down
Now, to be Thine, yes Thine alone
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

Jesus, take all of me
I come to You, I run to You
There is nothing that You don't see
You love me just as I am
You love me just as I am
You love me just as I am
You love me

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee
O Lamb of God, I come, I come

I come.....Amen.