

THE SERMON SUPPLY



A Resource from
Region 6



Lectionary 12, Year A

CJ Clark, Southeast Michigan Synod

Director for Evangelical Mission

Gospel Text – Matthew 10:24-39

Matthew 10:24-39

[Jesus said to the twelve:]²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master;²⁵ 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!

²⁶ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known.²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted.³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven,³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴ "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.

³⁵ 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,

³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷ "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, ³⁸ and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

SERMON TEXT:

I serve as the Director for Evangelical Mission here in the Southeast Michigan synod.

In this role, I get to work with congregations to help them better understand their mission...their purpose...their why...and how they live that out.

...helping them better connect their words with their actions...and sometimes reminding them that who they say they are...MUST be matched by what they do.

These are challenging times for the church at large, and it can be easy for a congregation to lose track of its mission...its purpose...its why...

...It can be easy for a congregation to lose track of these things amidst the struggle to simply survive...as church membership and attendance wanes...as financial resources become more scarce...as facilities require costly maintenance.

Truth be told, a significant portion of my time as Director for Evangelical Mission is spent walking with congregations that have succumb to these very challenges...and now face the realities of closure.

Because just as surely as it is true at the beginning of a congregation's life...it is also true in the middle...and at the end...that our mission...our sense of purpose...our why...WHO WE SAY GOD IS and WHO WE SAY WE ARE...must be evidenced by tangible actions...the way we live...and even the way we die.

Maybe you're worshipping today with a congregation that feels as though it is buckling under the weight of the challenges I've mentioned...struggling to hold it all together... maybe your worshipping with a congregation where these challenges are nibbling at the edges...or maybe you're worshipping with a congregation that isn't feeling the struggle much at all...

Regardless of where you find yourself today...what is true is that the only way forward is to make your mission...your purpose...your why...real...

Many, if not all, of the congregation's I work with in this role as Director for Evangelical Mission...want to know what they need to do to experience growth...

And the hard truth is that there are no silver bullets that make that happen.

There isn't a list of things that can be prescribed...or a road map to follow...that guarantees an outcome of growth...

...but I do believe there is a way to set the stage for the possibility of growth...

What I think it takes to set the stage for the possibility of growth...is for EVERY member of your church community...to think of themselves...as the primary evangelist for your church...and then act accordingly.

Every person...including you...needs to feel that the gospel of Jesus Christ...as well as your faith community...is a gift that simply must be shared with others...

And every person...including you...needs to get busy sharing that gift with everybody you know...and everybody you meet.

We are far beyond a time when the work of sharing the story of Jesus and inviting people to be a part of our faith community is only the responsibility of the pastor.

It's our collective responsibility...

...and yes...that means that specifically...it's your responsibility...

In today's gospel reading from Matthew chapter 10...I think Jesus is calling us all to share this responsibility...

...tasking each of us and all of us to share the good news of the gospel...

...tasking each of us and all of us to welcome people into the community of faith...

...when he says to his disciples..."What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light...and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Let me read that again.

"What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light...and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Friends...our mission...our purpose...our why...who we say God is and who we say we are...CANNOT be kept a secret...

It's not something that can remain in...or be contained by our buildings...

It's not something meant only for Sunday mornings...

And it most certainly is not something meant to be a PART of our life as people of faith...but rather something that CONSUMES our entire life...

As people of faith...we are called by these words from Matthew's gospel today...to reveal God's story in Christ Jesus...dragging it out into the light for the entire world to see...

...and we are called to receive the whispers of God's word...the quietly told story of Christ's life, death, and resurrection...the hushed promise of love, forgiveness, and life everlasting...we are called to receive these whispers...and transform them into SHOUTS...proclamations...so that the whole world takes notice...so that the WHOLE WORLD might experience these same gifts.

That is what Jesus is asking of his disciples in this gospel text...

That is what Jesus is asking of each of us and all of us right now...today...

And...by my measure... that is what it takes to set the stage for the church to flourish.

I'm hoping...that this resonates with you...

I'm guessing...that it sounds at least a little terrifying...

I'm supposing...that you might feel ill-equipped.

Here's what I want you to know...

...you already know how to do this...

...because your whole life...you have shared things with others that have been meaningful to you...

You've put a post on social media about a great plate of food you got to eat...

You've told somebody about a really good book you've read...or a meaningful TV show or movie you've watched...

You've explained to other people about how you met your partner or spouse...

You've shared about the birth of your children or grandchildren with people you barely know...

You know how to proclaim from the housetops about a great many things because YOU DO IT ALL THE TIME...

In this gospel text today...Jesus is calling each of us and all of us to use that same muscle...

...to tell his story...

...to build community around it...

...to really live into it...through our sense of mission...our purpose...our why...so that the world can see the evidence of the difference it makes for us...and get curious about how it might also make a difference for them.

Just a few verses after Jesus tells his disciples (and us) to bring his story into the light and proclaim it from the housetops...

...Jesus says in verse 34, "Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace...but a sword."

..."I have not come to bring peace...but a sword."

I think what Jesus is getting at here...is that even though we are called to bring his story into the light and to proclaim it from the housetops...the world (by and large) is simply not ready to receive it...and perhaps inclined to resist it.

I mean...think about the state of our world today...

There is a lot of divisiveness, hate, and violence.

Our politics have us all twisted up.

We're demonizing each other.

We're busy dividing ourselves...deciding who's "in" and who's "out."

We're literally at war...a methodology that claims to establish stability through organized murder.

Does the world feel ready or equipped to embrace the peace, love, and unity that is at the very center of the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Does Christ's command to love our neighbor AND our enemy...feel like something people are seeking in the midst of all the madness we are watching unfold?

When Jesus says "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword," I believe he is saying that we need to prepare ourselves (as his disciples) for the fact that love and forgiveness are OFFENSIVE concepts to a world seemingly committed to discord and chaos.

Jesus is giving us the tools we need to set the stage for growth by calling us to bring his story into the light and to proclaim it from the housetops...

...but he's also being real with us that to do so is a risky endeavor that will almost certainly be met with resistance...and likely cost us something...

This was surely his experience wasn't it?

The gospel of Jesus Christ...invites us into a kind of uneasiness...because it upsets the way in which we understand and experience the world...

It invites us to lose our lives...or at least the lives we've been living...in order to find a new way to live both in this world...and in the world to come.

And as much as we might already have the muscle developed that we need to share the gifts of Christ's story and our faith community...it's not unreasonable for us to feel scared...

...scared about what we don't fully understand...

...scared about how the world will respond...

...scared about what we might lose...

Three times...in this gospel reading today from Matthew chapter 10...Jesus tells us not to fear...

...he says, "have no fear."

...he says, "Do not fear."

...he says, "Do not be afraid."

In a world bent on madness...in a world that may not always feel ready to receive Christ's story...

You don't need to be afraid...because you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit...who dwells in you...and guides you...and strengthens you...

So that you might have the tenacity, resilience, and fortitude to bring Christ's story into the light....and proclaim it from the housetops...

So that you might live actively everyday as people of faith with a mission...a purpose...a why...that declares who you believe God to be...and who you believe you are... in a way that draws people in...with you...to experience this gift of new life promised through the cross.

This gift of new life...that saves us all.

Amen.

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