

## **I Seem to Remember**

A Sermon by Rich Holmes on Matthew 10: 24-39

Delivered on June 21, 2020

I seem to remember. I seem to remember the time we did this together. I seem to remember the time we did that together. I seem to remember that thing which happened at the beach or in the mountains or at that ski lodge.

What do we mean by the phrase “I seem to remember”? Well, of course we mean that we can think back to something happening in our lives at some time or another, but maybe it was so long ago that what you think happened was not what actually happened. Maybe two different things happened that were similar in some way and you got them confused, like the trip you took to the beach two summers ago and the trip you took three summers ago. Maybe a dream you had was in some way similar to reality and you got the dream and reality confused. I guess all things can happen which make your memory go wrong. And I also think you would probably agree that the older you get, the more your brain fills up with memories and the more some of those memories recede into the past, then the less sure you are about what you definitely remember and what you only seem to remember.

I tell you that today, because I seem to remember that when Jesus was born the angels sang Peace on Earth and Good Will Toward Men. I seem to remember Jesus teaching that if someone strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other. I seem to remember Jesus teaching blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God. I could go on and on. Now, ordinarily I would say I’m sure I remember these things, but today I only say I seem to remember, because Jesus says something to make me wonder if I am not terribly confused. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a

sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one's enemies will be the members of his own household. I must be confused about all the things I seem to remember, because how can the Jesus who says this be the same Jesus who taught peacemaking, who is associated with peace, and who is celebrated as a peacemaker. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword—a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and one's enemies will be the members of his own household." I must be mistaken because Jesus here says he comes to create not peace but conflict, and not just conflict with some nation far across the ocean, not just conflict with some people half way around the world, but conflict between people in your own household. I can remember when I was a kid being taught that the civil war in our nation's history was so horrible, not just because it divided the nation in two and not just because it was so bloody, because it was a war of brother against brother. And what that meant was that on occasion a family would have two sons and one of them would enlist with the union and the other would enlist with the confederacy, and so they would literally be pointing guns at each other across the battlefields of places like Antietam and Gettysburg and Bull Run.

Well, on this Father's Day 2020, I want to tell you that I don't think Jesus is saying it's good to divide your family or it's good not to love your own family. In fact, he goes on to explain that this is all about our absolute devotion to him. He goes on to say in fact, that if anyone loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. So Jesus is not talking about creating division for divisions' sake, conflict for

conflicts sake. He's talking about the conflicts and divisions that inevitably follow whenever you put your allegiance to him above your allegiance to everyone else, even members of your own family. But if that's right, then why should we do that? Why should we love God more than our own families? Why should we put allegiance to Christ above allegiance to mother, father, son and daughter.

There were once two sets of parents. It doesn't matter what their names were. Let's call them Smith and Jones. The Smiths and the Jones each had a son. And both the Smiths and the Jones' loved their sons as much as anyone could. But the Smiths and the Jones' raised their sons differently with different ideas in mind. The Smiths wanted their son to be happy above all else. They wanted their son to be popular in school. They wanted him to find someone to love and share his life with. They wanted him to have a successful career and never want for anything. And naturally they wanted their son to be a good and decent person, too. But if he had to be happy by not being such a good person from time to time, that wasn't the end of the world. So in high school when they found it made their son popular to bully the overweight kids and the kids who were too poor to afford all the cool clothes, they weren't proud of him, but they thought it was better to bully than be bullied. And when he confessed to them that his eyes had to wander around class to look at other people's answers on an exam in order to make an A, again they weren't proud but their advice was don't get caught. And later in life if he had to exaggerate things on his resume in order to get the job of his dreams, just make sure it's believable. Just make sure it doesn't raise suspicions. Now, again the Smiths weren't exactly proud of their son for doing these things, but if that's what he had to do to get what he wanted out of life, that's what he had to do. The Jones' though, were not that way with their son. They

also wanted all the best things for their son. They wanted him to be well liked in school. They wanted him to find love and happiness in marriage. They wanted him to find success with a good job. And like the Smiths, the Jones wanted their son to be a good and decent person, but unlike the Smiths, they wanted their son to be a good and decent person even if it meant missing out on certain things in life. They wanted him to be kind to everyone even if kindness meant that he wasn't one of the cool kids in school. They wanted their son to be honest not just because if he were dishonest he might get caught, but because it was the right thing to do. They wanted him to get into the best schools and get the best jobs and get all the promotions he ever wanted but only if he could do so by keeping his soul and not selling it to the highest bidder. Now tell me, which of these two sets of parents would you rather be friends with? Which of these two would you be most proud of knowing? Which of these two would you most admire? That's what it means to put Christ first in your family. That's what he meant when Jesus said whoever loves son or daughter or mother or father more than me is not worthy of me.

Now, you see it's not that the Jones' would stop loving their child if he turned out not to be a good person. If he ended up being a bully or a liar they wouldn't love him any less. But they would think there was something really wrong with him if he did those things. And how wrong? Well, they know that it is worse for him to go through life with a corrupted soul than it even is to go through life blind, or deaf, or unable to walk. Jesus said do not fear the one who can destroy the body but cannot destroy the soul. Instead fear the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Yes, there is something bad about going through life without functioning arms or legs or eyes or ears. I love A Christmas Story, I hope you all out there in TV land have all seen

A Christmas Story at least once because it's a great, hilarious movie about a boy named Ralphie and his family back in the years after World War II, and if you know the movie you remember that more than anything else Ralphie wanted a bb gun for Christmas, and his parents and everyone else around him kept telling him if he got a bb gun he would put his eye out. How many times as a kid were you told you were going to put an eye out if you did this or put an eye out if you did that? Your mom and dad cared about your vision and your hearing and your ability to walk because part of being a good parent is knowing that your child is better off with arms and legs and vision and hearing. You are better off with these things than without them. You are better off with friends than without them. You are better off with a good job than without one. But to put Jesus at the center of your life is to know that none of these things, none of these things are worth losing your soul. None of these things are worth becoming someone who doesn't care about his neighbor, who doesn't care about injustice, who doesn't care about kindness or honesty.

But what does that mean to raise a son like the Jones' had instead of like the Smith's had. Well, it means sometimes saying the word that is the hardest word a parent ever has to say. Sometimes it means saying no. Sometimes it means inviting conflict. Sometimes it means saying we're disappointed in you because didn't raise you that way. Because raising a child who cares about such things doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't happen without effort. And on this Father's Day, if you either are a father, or you had a father who went through that effort by sometimes saying those hard words to you, I hope that's something you thank God for.

When I was in my first pastorate, there was someone in that church whom I'll never forget. I'll call this person Lucy. Lucy was someone who just loved to create conflict for the sake

of creating conflict, and you couldn't ever win with Lucy. One time someone came to church named Ben who hadn't been there for two months and I said it's good to see Ben here today. Lucy said why didn't you say it was good to see me? And she's go around telling everyone the pastor didn't like her. But then, on the other hand you did say it was good to see her, she'd say something like why are you trying to embarrass me by making me the center of attention? You see what I mean. I couldn't win. Lucy loved to fight for the sake of fighting. She fought with people in the church; she fought with people in her own family. She just enjoyed creating conflict. If you have ever known someone like that, I have no doubt you are sorry to have known such a person. Peace is important, and those who don't value peace are the kind of people that most of us don't want to be around. But while peace is important, it will never be as important as raising a child with love in his heart, raising a child with justice in his heart, raising a child with kindness and integrity and truthfulness in his heart.

Do not think I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. And we should be thankful that Jesus calls us to put him first. We should be thankful for the sake of everyone we love that Jesus calls us to put him first. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.