

Pastor Dane Wood

Sermon Proper 7A/ Pentecost 3

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Well... Anyone want my job right now? Abraham casts out Hagar and Ismael... Jesus says he's not bringing peace but the sword. Both of these texts are preaching nightmares, who wants to talk about Angry Jesus or God encouraging Abraham to break up his household? Frankly, upon seeing these verses listed in the lectionary for this week, and noticing it was Father's Day, my reaction was... NOPE! Change it to prodigal son! That's what everyone wants to hear anyway, and it's all fatherly and ra-ra, yay dad! Slide away from this week in the pulpit and give people what they want. I swear, Rev. Amy is tricking me and dropping all the hard weeks on me. (She's totally not, but maybe God is.)

I REALLY wanted to walk away from these... but frankly, that's the exact thing Jesus is speaking against. How can I call myself a preacher, a proclaimer of the WORD if when the word speaks, I defensively dodge out of the way? How can any Christian just duck to the side when confronted with the truth of God?

“A disciple is not above the teacher; not a slave above the master; 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!”

Jesus here in the Gospel of Matthew is talking about himself and God as the Master of the house. You, as followers, as servants, as children, are the slaves. The student is under the teacher. You don't get to ever be the teacher, just be glad that you get to be like the teacher. So lesson one today: You are not the Boss, the Master, the authority, or the Teacher. Check your pride at the door and let it die if you want to follow Jesus. You are to be a humble servant who is just trying to be like Christ. And what that means for your life? Stop trying to talk so much like a teacher and spend more time listening like a disciple.

Lesson 2: Don't be so surprised when your friends, family, your country, and the world disagree with you. They are calling Jesus the Devil and hate him, so guess what, they'll hate you more! They will claim religious authority, they will throw logic in your face, they will act defensive and claim they could never be in the wrong. They'll even hold up bibles and quote scripture. Oh, I know it's happening, it's happening to all of you right now. You're afraid to even think about speaking out because they will hate you so much. If you say something about what your faith leads you to do... you might lose a friend, or... get in an argument... or God forbid you do something socially taboo. Jesus is scolding us for acting surprised and is about to tell us to get over it.

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.”

Lesson 3 from Jesus: Do not be afraid! Thanks... like that's easy. Jesus tries to assure us though saying that all hidden things will be revealed. The ulterior motives of those who will hate you, don't worry, it'll come to light. And what we will Jesus tells us when we are reading and praying alone, we should tell to everyone, not just keep it for ourselves. When we feel an urging of the spirit, its not just to be shared in a safe space, but out in the open where the public eye can see. The servants of Christ have little to fear from people who can only kill our bodies. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way:

Human beings should not be feared. They cannot do much to the disciples of Jesus. Their power stops with the disciple's physical death. The disciples are to overcome fear of death with the fear of God. Disciples are in danger, not from human judgement, but from God's judgement, not from the decay of their bodies, but from the eternal decay of their bodies and souls. Anyone who is still afraid of people is not afraid of God. Anyone who fears God is no longer afraid of people. (Discipleship, D.B. Works, Vol 4, p196)

What are you afraid of, so called disciple of Christ? Are you holding your tongue, keeping silent, because you worry what someone else will think? Is your discomfort or inconvenience more important that the saving news of Jesus Christ?

“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Oh thank God for Lesson 4: God loves you and values you. Sparrows are cheap, used for sacrifice in the temple and so forth. God looks after these small creatures, knows them entirely. God knows you too. God is the one who sees. In the midst of these admonishments from Jesus, he reminds us that we are not forgotten nor are we worthless as students, servants, slaves in the household of God. We are valuable and God never forgets that.

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

Lesson 5: You are valuable before the Lord, but what you do, what you say, and what you don't do or say matters. As you go about your lie, what are you prioritizing? What is the message your life tells? What are you evangelizing on social media? Is it Jesus or Selfish Pride? We are being asked to get serious and really evaluate what we put out into the world. Jesus has asked us to share the Good News of God's coming Kingdom, and instead we do what? Post comments about how “All Lives Matter?” Is that really about saying Jesus loves all or is it about trying to make yourself feel better? Or when you go and judge leaders or your friends, claiming they must be evil to not see things the way you see them; then you tell them to unfriend you or never talk to you again. I find it hard to see the Jesus in that... you know, Jesus, the guy who went and talked to the broken at the gates and the pharisees alike. Seems more like a defensive stance so you don't have to deal with listening to others and can listen more to yourself.

If I just crushed your toes or punched you in the stomach... Sorry, not sorry. These are just two recent social media examples I have witnessed in multitudes of late. What are we telling the world? Are we sharing Jesus or just our own pride?

“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 set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

Lesson 6: This ain’t going to be easy. This has always been hard work. Talking about Jesus, whether you’re message is reconciliation, justice, liberation, victory, or grace is never going to be an easy walk. The Kingdom of Heaven is going to ruffle feathers as it comes. We’ve an illusion that everyone in our life is Christian... oh they believe, they’ll be fine, and what we do is “good enough.” Christendom, the Kingdom of Christ, a reference to the widespread and dominant belief of Christianity in the Western World, has sold us that lie. But my friends, Christendom is dying, or frankly, its dead, been dead for a while, the vultures are picking the corpse apart and we’re doing nothing about it, because we think things are “fine.” Doing the right thing will cause conflict, even in the heart of your closest relationships. Honestly, if you haven’t had a moral, religious, faith conflict amongst your family or friends... are you even trying to be faithful and share what you believe to be the most important thing in your life... or maybe we’ve decided its actually not that important?

“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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Lesson 7: Lay down your life for Christ. The culmination of this text is the implication to take up “THE” cross, note that it’s not our cross here, but “THE” cross and follow Jesus. If we live for ourselves, for this world, for pride and selfishness... then that life will be lost, but if we die for Christ... and it will feel like death to put these relations at risk... then we will find the life in Christ. What we say, how we live, where we go and what we do is not for ourselves... we are students and slaves... we do it for Jesus... because of what we have been given, which is everything and more.

I just came at you, hard. Many of you probably feel attacked, a sense of guilt, or punished even. As I read through this text numerous times and prayed about it... All I could hear from Christ was this passionate, perhaps aggressive tone. So that’s what I tried to channel in going through those verses. Why was Jesus so... heated and harsh here? Because he cared... a lot... about what will happen to the disciples in the future. He knew it would be harder than we can even now imagine. I can hear my own Dad in some of the words, that sort of harsh, hard love that men give sometimes. I’d have excuses for this or that, and I’d hear from my father... “You have

the same 24 hours everyone else has.” Ugh... I hated that phrase, and hated him for saying it. I didn't listen always... but I still needed that, and other things said to me. He cared. He valued me. Jesus cares. God values me.

All of this text boils down to “Evangelism.” That dirty “E” word. But to hopefully make it easier to stomach: What is the message your life is sharing? What is the story you are telling? If it's not a message about the coming Kingdom of God, the salvation of our lives through Jesus Christ, or the power of the Holy Spirit... well... we need to give ourselves a long hard look in the mirror and decide if we are really disciples of Jesus or just faking it. It's a hard message to hear today... but I find solace in knowing that no matter the size of our wilderness, no matter how long we wander, no matter the conditions around us, no matter the message we are currently telling... God sees us, God values us, God is our hope and is ready to provide a fresh spring of living water, to revive us for the only message that matters.

Amen.