

Sermon for 24.6.17

The gospel passage is a group of sayings, gathered together by Matthew and used in the context of Matthew's account of Jesus sending and instructing disciples about mission.

The first sentence: the disciple is not above the teacher - sets the scene.

The term *disciple* means learner or student and in the context of being a disciple of Jesus, the student will always remain the student, and Jesus always the master, because what Jesus teaches is divine wisdom about life itself.

Now Matthew makes this point because the Jewish school relationship between teacher and student of that time, was such that once the disciple had learned what the master had to teach, he would move on to another master or become a master himself.

Matthew makes it clear that this is not the case in the Jesus /disciple relationship, for Jesus is not only a teacher, but an abiding Lord of life itself.

Once this point is made Matthew takes us deeper into the way of discipleship.

It was to be expected that the disciple would not receive any better treatment than the master – if they persecute the master, so they will persecute the disciple.

There will be name calling and all sorts of strife in the life of a disciple.

There will be the challenge also to confess the name of Jesus openly without fear of the consequences to themselves.

Jesus words spoken in secret must be told in the light – proclaimed even from the house tops.

Disciples are encouraged to face whatever may come in the confidence that they will never be left without God - they are to remember that even the lowly sparrow is under the providential care of God – how much more will they be.

There could also be family strife to deal with.

Divisions and conflicts in domestic life can happen when one chooses to follow Christ.

And I believe some of us would have experienced this personally, for even when someone chooses to change denomination, perhaps from protestant to Catholic or visa versa, other family members can object and there can be family strife.

But, Matthew tells us, the risk of alienating members of ones family must not be weighed against alienation from Jesus Christ, because he is where life is.

Loyalty to faith in him, in the manner of love, that is, experienced in understanding and tenderness, particularly with family members, must endure even with the closest family ties.

Enduring peace will be the ultimate outcome; but the immediate effect of the preaching of peace is often strife.

The message from Matthew about mission is so comprehensive that it moves far beyond the mission of the 12 disciples to be carried on in the villages during the life time of Jesus.

It speaks into every era and connects with the relevance of each 'strife' - pertinent to that era.

Matthew's discourse about mission is hardly a job description for the faint hearted. It may even lead the disciple into joining Jerimiah in a personal lament like we hear in the first reading.

This is the 5th lament of Jerimiah, for his life's journey as God's prophet is interspersed with his crying out to God. In this lament he accuses God of deceiving him and of exerting irresistible power over him.

And when he works through all these feelings, and we hear the detail of this in the lament – Jerimiah is filled with hope for he accepts and proclaims that the Lord is indeed with him, and therefore his enemies will not succeed against him.

To lament our life experience can be very healthy in our relationship with God.

Many of the psalms do this – they begin by expressing the experiences of the psalter in this way. In so many words they cry out things like – why me – how long will you be silent – when will you punish the unjust- they cry out and ultimately are brought into a state of grace in which they praise God for his majesty and love.

To lament can be a healthy exercise, remembering of course that it is very different to wallowing without hope and remaining in despair.

In Romans today, Paul speaks about the power of Grace as God's love and mercy having defeated the power of sin and death.

And he begins by asking the question *should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?* - *By no means!* He answers. Grace is much more than simply a matter of being relieved of the punishment for trespasses.

Paul writes of the personal Christian experience as someone who has been endowed with a newness, a new way of life through their baptism into Christ.

But this life means a reshaping of human beings.

And I believe this is why we accept the way of discipleship in Christ, - what it is we are called to be and do, even though at times we may lament along the way.

We accept that Christ is the divine wisdom of life - the Lord of life itself. That we are touched and called by him -that we are endowed with a newness that enables personal transformation or a reshaping into a life of true freedom.

A life like we see in Christ's own humanity, in Jesus of Nazareth – one that flows in the love of God – one of humble strength - without resentment, or anger or jealousy or fear.

A life in which we can transcend ourselves, that is, get beyond ourselves, and see clearly the other one before us, and their needs.

A life in which we can shine as the light of Christ in the world and illuminate the darkness in the world.

This is our mission as Disciples of Christ - to live in the newness that we are to proclaim.

I'd like to close with something that I recently read from Thomas Merton (20th century mystic and theologian). *We have to be found in him and yet be perfectly ourselves and free from the domination of any image of him other than himself.....we follow him, we find him...and then we must vanish and we must go along without him at our side. Why? Because he is even closer than that. It is he who lives in us – He is ourself.*¹

The Lord be with you.

¹ Thomas Merton, *The Hidden Ground of Love*, Mariner Books: USA, 1993, p 561-562.