


***“Tough Call”***  
**Sunday, June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**

 **Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)**

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor 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!

“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 hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from

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.

“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.

“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.

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.”

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

*Thanks, be to God.*

## **[2<sup>ND</sup> Service: Affirmation of Faith]**

### **[MESSAGE]**

I recently read the story of Clarence Jordan, an agriculture major at the University of Georgia and a Master of Divinity graduate of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where he also earned a PhD in New Testament.

This is an impressive resume for anyone seeking to serve God through preaching or teaching.

Jordan, however, founded the racially integrated Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia in 1942.

Hear that: **1942**! Long before the Civil Rights movement, Jordan invited anyone to join his “*koinonia*” – community of Christian fellowship.

Your race didn’t matter, as long as you love Jesus.

Deep in the heart of Georgia, in the 1940's, this community of disciples tried selling peanuts from a roadside stand.

The Ku Klux Klan dynamited the stand.

Stubborn, *like most saints for justice*, Jordan put up another stand; it got blown up too.

Finally, the Koinonia Farm resorted to mail-order ads: ***“Help us ship the nuts out of Georgia.”***<sup>i</sup>

Clarence Jordan is a good example of the kind of militant discipleship Jesus presents in this text.

Go out in the daylight, shout from the housetops.  
Not peace but a sword.

Cling not to fathers and mothers, but only to Jesus;  
cling not to this life, but give your life for the sake of Christ.

No middle of the road, conciliatory Christianity here.

No compromise, no accommodation, no middle path, no fear.

**Let us pray...**

Lord, this morning we come to a passage that challenges us to understand what you mean to say. Please guide us now and help us hear you and take your words to heart. We come now in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

It seems that Clarence Jordan had no fear as he tried to follow Jesus in the midst of Georgia's KKK.

When you read his whole story, you find that things are not always as they seem.

Jordan persevered *through* his personal fear; he understood that there was danger in what he did, but his call from Jesus was stronger.

You may have encountered his work through ***The Cotton Patch*** translations of the New Testament.

Some of you may be aware that the **Habitat for Humanity** movement originated at Jordan's Koinonia Farm.

History shows us countless examples of faithful disciples who knew the fear of violent resistance.

Jesus encourages his disciples to live beyond fear.

This passage is directed to those radical Christians who somehow enjoy confronting both fear and power; speaking truth to both.

Fear is an interesting emotion; since we were born, fear has been a source of learning and motivation.

*“Don’t touch that stove; you’ll catch yourself on fire.”*

*“Look both ways before you cross or a truck will splat you all over the pavement!”*

Fear has saved many children from some really unpleasant injuries.

Fear has motivated a lot of cleaned-up bedrooms and washed dinner dishes.

The truth is, I think, we don’t like to be afraid, but we are somewhat accustomed to it.

We have learned a lot from fear over the years.

And, for our own protection, being fearful of things that can harm us may not be such a bad thing.

Maybe we should think of this as healthy caution;  
this is not the paralyzing kind of fear that  
prevents us from becoming disciples.

Many a faithful Christian will tell you that they simply  
do not like this part of Matthew's gospel.

We understand that the life of faith will include  
times of struggle and even opposition.

We know that some disciples will suffer as Christ  
suffered, and that the community of the faithful  
must persevere even in times of fear.

But here in this passage, Jesus just goes too far!

The Jesus we know and love came to bring peace,  
not a sword.

Most of us have spent enough time around church to  
know that discord happens within the community  
of the faithful.

But, our Jesus would never encourage such  
division within a family.

*This* Jesus pits son against father, daughter against  
mother; how did **that** ever get into the Bible?

We need to be honest and acknowledge that sometimes, what Jesus says is not what we *want* Jesus to say **AND**, *often*, what we hear is not what Jesus is *really* saying.

That's why following Jesus is such a **tough call** for us: discernment is difficult.

It is certainly possible for someone to take this passage out of context and at face value and make a case to justify a religious cult.

Cutting “believers” off from their family and friends fits right in with that culture.

That is not, however, what Jesus is suggesting in this Scripture.

Jesus is talking to those who seek to live into their Christian faith while facing conflict and discouragement.

He's describing the **tough call**.

For the disciples, the idea of going out and preaching and healing in Jesus' name means facing trouble.



The days of sharing a quiet meal with Jesus and listening to him teach are over.

The Christian story becomes one of persecution, fear, and anxiety.

We may not face the same kinds of challenges they faced, but there is an important lesson for us here.

There is comfort for us within the cocoon of our church family; going out to **be** the church takes us out of that comfort zone.

Sharing Jesus with someone who has never heard your story is daunting and you will face opposition and rejection.

We're safe here; we can talk about Jesus and our faith and our struggles without fear in here.

When we answer the call to go share with people we don't know, who don't share our faith, we do so at our own peril.

Matthew remembers people who abandoned home and family to announce the reign of God, in a time and place where that could get a person killed.

In our culture, religious belief is much less likely to bring physical harm, but faithful discipleship still provokes resistance.

Some among us protest increased militarization and interference in global affairs.

Some speak out against the realities of racial injustice and segregation in our communities where civil rights have not yet taken hold.

Some of the faithful express solidarity with the LGBTQ community and seek equal rights and compassion for persons who are different.

All of these claim gospel grounds for their actions and believe they are following the path of Jesus.

These radical disciples may not suffer violence, but they often face scorn and rejection from family, friends, and church.

For example, I read a story the other day about a man who lost his job when he protested the company's fraudulent practices.

Others have lost the opportunity to purchase desirable homes by rejecting the chance to undercut minority buyers.

There are those who choose to accept smaller investment returns by avoiding stocks that support tobacco companies, gambling, or other industries that profit from activities which go against their beliefs.

Each of these represents a **tough call**.

Seeking to live as a follower of Christ is almost always a **tough call**.

Every day we face decisions and choices that call on our understanding of God.

Jesus told us that all the law rests on the commandments to love God and love others.

We must make decisions by asking ourselves how what we decide will achieve those commands.

This takes a little extra effort; it leaves no room for snap decisions; it requires careful thought.

It also invites criticism and ridicule from those who choose not to let their faith inform their lives and their decision-making.

In many cases, it may also result in decisions that carry negative consequences in this world.

There is reassurance in this text that there is no power that can destroy us or keep us from God.

This should empower us to “*take up the cross*” in a new way.

The cross does not mean passive acceptance of the injustice and misery of this world.

Instead, the cross is a sign of the realm of God that is to come, a strength that can be known by those who are obedient to the call of Jesus Christ in their lives.

Knowing that the way of God will prevail against every fear and every challenge, helps take the sting out of making the **Tough Call**.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=99](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=99)