



LAKEWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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This is Your Life

Matthew 10 :24-39

This morning in worship, we witness two commissions, and they are strikingly different. When I was choosing the Scripture for today, I already knew we would be commissioning our VBS leaders during the service, so I wanted to find a passage that felt appropriate. My first stop is usually the lectionary, and I was delighted to see that today's Gospel reading comes from Jesus' commissioning of the twelve disciples in Matthew chapter 10. Then I read the text. It is quite a passage. Jesus says many things to his disciples that we did not say to our VBS teachers and volunteers. He was sending them into a potentially dangerous situation, where they would likely face opposition. We are sending our VBS volunteers into a much less dangerous situation—we hope!

Still, I love the contrast between these two commissions, because beneath their differences, they share a common purpose. To share the good news about Jesus. That is what you will all be doing when you play and sing and make crafts and teach and act, the reason we do all of this is to share Jesus. It may be the hostile reception Jesus warned about or 80 odd little kids. We are sharing Jesus.

Before I read the text, I want to set the scene.

In chapter 9, Jesus moves from place to place, healing the sick and suffering while gathering followers along the way. He heals a paralytic, calls Matthew to follow him, answers religious questions, restores sight to two blind men, and heals a man who cannot speak. As he travels, the number of his followers continues to grow. Then, in chapter 10, Jesus gathers twelve of his most faithful and trusted followers and gives them the authority to continue his work: to heal the sick, restore the broken, cast out unclean spirits, and cure every disease and sickness. Chapter 10 begins, then, with a call and a commission. Jesus sends his followers to do what they have seen him do. He

tells them what this ministry will look like in the world and calls them to go boldly in faith, to proclaim the good news. They are sent without money, and they are called to cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. But Jesus also warns them that this ministry will be difficult. They will face opposition, and some may even attack them for their beliefs. I am hoping the situation our VBS folks are called to is less dangerous.

Our New testament text is from Matthew Chapter 10: 24-39.

“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. [a] 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.

The Word of God for the People of God.

I suspect if that had been the commissioning service for our VBS volunteers. There is no doubt that this is a difficult for us to hear some of these words of Jesus in our present context. This is the same person that a few chapters earlier said that the peacemakers are blessed, now saying, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword.*" Jesus who tells us to love our enemies and who followed the law that commanded honor your father and mother, saying "*For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother,*

We may struggle with these words and I understand why.

Jesus is not saying that we should fight our family or that we should divide our family, but he understood how his message would be received by some. He would be challenging the established faith. His own faith, he understood that not all would accept him as the Messiah. He understood, His message may divide families.

Our passage begins with Jesus saying that the disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master. In other words, they should expect the same persecution that Jesus himself faced. This is followed by the encouragement that they should not fear those who may harm them, that God cares for them intimately. God knows the hairs on their head. And those who acknowledge Him will be acknowledged by Him to the Father. The good news is there. Be faithful as Jesus is faithful.

Now I don't expect that during VBS you will face that kind of persecution, but it does not mean you won't be tired or frustrated, in among all the fun. Hear Jesus that you are loved intimately.

After Jesus states that his message will set family members against each other, we read these words. "*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.

Why does the lectionary make sure this is included in our preaching schedule. I mean the lectionary does not include the whole Bible, these words of Jesus about setting a man against his father and whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, seems like it would have been a good little chunk for the lectionary to skip on by, but no, not only are we given these passages included, they are included, on Father's Day!

Nowhere here does Jesus say that we should not love father or mother, nowhere does he say you should cause division in your family. But he does say that following him may bring division to your family. For many Christians that has indeed been the case. And he does indeed say that familial love should not supersede love for Him.

I don't see that as some kind of egotistical thing, where he needs us to love Him the most,

I see it more that Jesus knows that we need us to love Him the most. When Jesus is the priority, when that relationship is first, then our other relationships, our other loves, our blessings from God fall into place and those relationships are how they should be.

Now you may say, that that is all fine and well. Love for family is hard to top, but that is the radical nature of Jesus. He knows He is God, He knows we need God's grace, He knows other relationships are better when He is first. We then have this saying that those who do not take up their cross to follow Him are not worthy of Him, Jesus' hearers would have understood the cross to be a symbol of torture and punishment, not the fancy decoration it has become for us. He is doubling down on this idea that persecution may be ahead.

Our passage ends with a saying that may be familiar to you. *Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Many years ago, there was a popular television show called This Is Your Life. It was only on for a few years in the US, but the British version ran from the early 60s through the 90s. The host would surprise a guest and then begin to tell the story of that person's life from a big red book. Family members would appear. Old friends would walk onto the stage. Significant moments would be revisited. The audience would see how that person's life had unfolded over the years.

Imagine for a moment that you were the guest on that show.

The curtain opens. The spotlight shines. The announcer says, "This is your life."

What would be revealed? What would be celebrated? What would be remembered? What would the story say about what mattered most to you?

Jesus speaks to that very question in Matthew 10:39: "Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

How can losing your life be the way to find it? Jesus is teaching one of the greatest truths of the Christian faith: a life centered on self ultimately ends in loss, but a life surrendered to Him becomes life as intended.

Jesus is speaking within the context of sending the 12 and the persecution they may face, including family division. Our context may differ, but we know plenty about putting ourselves before Jesus. When we do that, no matter what we achieve, what we build, something is missing, because we were created for something else. We were created for relationship with God.

Jesus offers a different path. "Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it," does not mean losing our identity. It means surrendering our lives to God's purpose. It means saying:

"Lord, my plans belong to You."

"My gifts belong to You."

"My resources belong to You."

"My future belongs to You."

When we surrender our lives to Christ, we discover what we were created to be.

Imagine that This Is Your Life was produced from Jesus' perspective. The host would not focus primarily on your income, your trophies, or your possessions. Instead, Jesus might highlight different moments.

The prayer no one else saw.

The act of kindness that changed a life.

The sacrifice made for your family.

The mission trip.

The time you shared your faith with a friend.

The visit with a sick friend.

When you served another when no-one was watching.

The week you served at VBS.

The paradox of the Gospel is that when we place our lives in Christ's hands, we do not lose what matters, we discover it.

Jesus words in Mathew 10 are to His disciples, it is their commission, but we know and learn from His words.

For we too, wherever we are this week, whether that be at VBS, in our workplace, our places of leisure or our volunteer hours, in our family, our friendships, our families, our church,

We are commissioned to represent Him.

We are commissioned to speak truth and grace without fear.

We are commissioned to confess Him publicly.

We are commissioned to endure opposition.

We are commissioned to love Him above all else.

We are commissioned to carry our cross.

We are commissioned to surrender our lives for His sake.

So we go serve our mission field, knowing the one who sends us is with us and loves us beyond measure.

And when our big red This Your Life book is opened, Jesus will look through it, and then to us say, Well Done Good and faithful Servant.

Amen.