

A Proper 7 2026
Saint Barnabas Church, Falmouth MA
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Matthew 10:24-39

Happy Juneteenth plus two days. Happy Summer Solstice. Happy World Cup frenzy, and Happy Father's Day

Talk about a medley of cultural and psychological states surrounding us today

We gather on a gorgeous Cape Cod day, the longest day of the year in the afterglow of hundreds of people celebrating Juneteenth on this campus, thinking more about Scottish kilts than anytime in memory, all as we tip our hat to the fathers in our lives, however blessed or textured their life stories have may be

Proving once again that our weekly scripture texts are not necessarily tied to cultural events, let's also address it up front: it's just a little weird to hear a gospel reading, coincidentally on Father's Day, that includes a sentence like, "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother..."

If that's not enough, you might call it a firm grasp of the obvious to state that we live in stressful, transitional times, times that echo the social chaos to which Jesus speaks in Matthew's gospel

Today's passage may feel weird in the context of Father's Day, but also feels stressful amid an Iranian war gone sour and the heretical underpinnings of white Christian Nationalism that challenge our culture

It makes more sense to see that Jesus in Matthew wants us to embrace a faithful mission that necessarily is accompanied by difficult choices

Some conservative households, for example, may become stressed out when we critique hypermasculinity or the misogyny that accompanies evangelical proclamation

An uproar can ensue that feels more like a sword than gesture of peace

Let's remember that in the same chapter 10 Matthew captures Jesus' transformative way of living, a way of peace that stretches even to the love of our enemies

In today's passage, the 'sword' that Jesus brings is not literal but serves as a metaphorical sword of making hard choices, loving choices that care for God's world, even when it causes conflict within a family or with people who have lost their way

As in every generation, going back even before Jeremiah, whom we hear in our Old Testament lesson, we do not so much choose the issues of our day as we weigh our response to forces much larger than ourselves

This tension, this worldly reality, this cosmic drama takes us directly to the root of our Gospel story in Matthew, in which Jesus shapes his ragtag disciples into a cohesive missionary force

Even in the first words of today's Gospel story, we experience the same edginess that permeates our own day

Jesus says, "I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves"

Not exactly a Tik-Toc selfie moment or a serene Cape Cod sunset

Jesus knows what the future will hold for himself and his disciples; he wonders how quickly he can rally and move the disciples from naïve assumptions to a deeper grasp of the 'real'

Further on in the passage, Jesus addresses the domestic upheaval that can result from proclaiming God's Kingdom

Remember that by now, James already had left his father Zebedee (another ironic reference for Father's Day) with the fishing nets but no economic safety net in order to follow Jesus

In today's passage, Jesus ominously predicts that brother will betray brother to death, inter-generational conflict will take place, and the disciples will be hated for their faith

Historically, we know that this passage had particular poignancy as Matthew wrote his gospel some 60 years later, just as Christian/Jewish differentiation navigated particularly tough waters

I hope you conclude, as do I, that the stressors and defining moments of today are at least as biblical, as apocalyptic, as those of Jesus' earthly ministry

Contrary to Hollywood's inevitable negative and catastrophic machinations with the term, the biblical understanding of apocalypse speaks to God's invading of the created order to redirect it for God's own purpose

Hence, an 'apocalypse' is not a thriller movie but a recognition that God's will remains God's will in spite of our idolatrous delusions of self-control

Biblical apocalypse speaks to revelation, the invasion of God for the purpose of rectifying a situation gone amuck by human hands

When Jesus gives his pointed admonition to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves, he recognizes that we must be savvy travelers on this earthly journey

But the daily stressors, even in a sometimes chaotic world, remain small potatoes compared to God's rectifying of the world according to His plan

In this spirit, Jesus provides us with inspiration, consolation and a vision for living in a tenuous world

Jesus tells us to claim our faith, avoid hiding under our desks and—instead—proclaim that anyone can kill the body but we should fear those who attempt to snuff out both our bodies and souls

Tragic events happen—they always have, they always will—but the real tragedy occurs when we lose our souls in the process

Jesus assures us that God remains in charge and values us infinitely, providing more protection to us (with all due respect to sparrows) than a couple of birds

Jesus fully embraces this apocalyptic world-view, in which we view 'reality' simultaneously from two perspectives

Hefty doses of street smarts, combined with the avoidance of human cynicism, help us claim our role as people of the resurrection, as the community of hope

Even as we navigate the vicissitudes of daily existence, we remain ever receptive to God's invasion of this world with holy, transforming love

As the great Reformation theologian John Calvin understood so well, we present-day disciples are called to be on sentry duty, as we watch and wait for the power of the resurrection to break through the suffering of this world

Jesus reminds us with his image of sparrows falling to the ground

Everything—however wacky or evil—remains within the providence of God

Here, Jesus rejects the pagan notion of Fortuna—the pagan goddess of misfortune who turns a blind eye to the tragedies of the world

We proclaim God's loving providence, even as we acknowledge our own limitations that offer us no clues at a given moment

As Emily Dickenson once wrote at the death of a friend's child, we remain in the hands of providence that at the present moment now seems not to include our present happiness

Even on our worst days, we must remember that hell does not exist outside the will of God: Jesus descended into hell, and even in hell we remain in the hands of God

Whenever you are tempted to turn Jesus into Mr Rogers at the petting zoo, remember today's edgy passage that reminds us of life's inherent tension, even the spiritual tension of living as a faithful Christian in a crazy, broken world

As our Assistant Bishop Mary Glasspool reminds us, Jesus said to his disciples: *Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.* (MT 10:31)

What kinds of fears do we have? Do we fear other people who may think or believe differently than we do? Do we fear failure or the future? Do we fear loss or separation? Physical injury or even death?

You may be familiar with the little triad that goes: *Fear knocked on the door. Faith answered. There was no one there.*

What is our faith if not the assurance that we are never alone?

That God, *Whose eye is on the sparrow*, is always with us, either to transform our situation; to empower *us* to transform our situation, or, short of that, to enable us to endure our situation without being destroyed by it.

God never promised us a rose garden, where nothing painful or destructive can happen.

But God did, and does, promise us companionship, no matter what our situation, and we are given the assurance that nothing can ultimately separate us from God and so, destroy us.

God said, in essence, through Jesus Christ: *We're all in this together* – and God meant it.