

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Matthew 10:17-33**  
**“The Cost Of Loyalty”**

August 23, 2015  
(13<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

IVA'2a-b: MATTHEW 10:17-33 "THE COST OF LOYALTY, Part 1"

a) vv.17-23 REJECTION AND OPPORTUNITY: ON THE DEFENSIVE.

// Mk. 13:9-13 + M

10:16 "Wise/ Innocent," What Wolves Look Like, Sir. 13:17-18

DD 1) vv.17-18 Persecution From Officials (3), Opportunity For Witness. 2 PRESENT BENEFITS

17 "Beware of men; 24:9-14, With Power (vv.5-16) Goes Suffering, Jewish Discipline  
 (-) 1 for they will deliver you up to councils (local courts), //v.4 (Judas), Is. 53:6 (LXX), 17:22, 20:18-19, 26:2  
 2 and flog you in their synagogues, 20:19, m. Makkot 3.10-12, Jn. 16:2, 2 Cor. 11:23-33  
 18 3 and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, Acts, Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10  
 (+) to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. Beyond vv.5-16, 28:19-20 **1) WITNESS**  
 v.14, Anticipate Resistance As Master, Disciples

(-) 2) vv.19-20 Response: Abandon Anxiety, Trust Holy Spirit. Means (How?), Content (What?)

19 1 And whenever they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak 6:25, Speak-Say//Say-Speak  
 2 or what you are to say; Trial = Opportunity For Trinitarian Mission  
 (+) 2' for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; p.v. Not Resist Evil Except By Speech  
 20 1' for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. **2) PROPHECY**  
 7 Verbs: Deliver, Flog, Dragged, Death (2x), Hated, Persecuted, Slandered

1') vv.21-22 Persecution From Family (3): Opportunity For Salvation. 2 FUTURE BENEFITS

21 1 Brother will deliver up brother to death, Strife, Betrayed By Intimates, Mic. 7:6, 1 Enoch 100:2  
 (-) 2 and the father his child, Under Stress, Normal Bonds Of Affection Broken  
 3 and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; 5:10-12, Jesus Is God's Continental Divide  
 22 and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. 24:9b, Goes Beyond Family Rejection  
 (+) But he who endures (is faithful) to the end will be saved. End Of Age, 28:20, **3) SALVATION**  
 No Man's Land: Hostile Community/Resentful Family

2') v.23 Response: Flee, Look For Deliverance At History's End. M, Courage, Not Foolishness

23 And whenever they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; 4:12, 5:10-12, Acts 14:5-6, Not Seek Martyrdom  
 (-) for truly, I say to you, //v.42 (1 // 1'), 10:15, Jewish Mission Not End  
 (+) you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes.// 11:1, **4) RESCUE**  
 Mission Has Eschatological End, 13:41-43, 16:27, 24:14, 36, 25:31, 28:19-20

DD b) vv.24-33 DEALING WITH FEAR AND DIVINE PROTECTION. Death (vv.21a,c, 28a,b, v.38b)

Courage Under Fire, Call To Fearless Confession

1) vv. 24-25 What Is A Disciple? Likeness Of Disciple And Teacher In The Present.

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, //Lk. 6:40 (Q) + M, Jn. 12:49-50, 13:16, 15:20, Not Above Teacher  
 nor a servant above his master; 23:8, Principle, Only With Jesus, Sifra On Lev. 25:23  
 25 it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, Share His Authority, Also Shame/Persecution/Death  
 and the servant like his master. Shared Kingdom Work, Still A High Standard  
 If they have called the master of the house Be-elzebul, Application, 9:34, 12:22, 27, Vilified Like Master  
 how much more will they malign those of his household.// Beelzebul = Lord Of House/High Abode (pagan deities)  
 Disciples Are Jesus' Household

2) vv.26-31 Don't Fear People, Fear God: All Will Be Known & You Have Worth.

26 1 "So have no fear of them; Lk. 12:2-9 (Q) + M, Right Side Of History  
 for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, p.v., Truth Revealed, Future  
 or hidden that will not be known./ No Secrets //Mk. 4:22  
 27 What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; Night Meetings, Public Witness  
 and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops. Receive Oracles, Job 4:12  
 Who Gets The Most Fear/Awe?  
 28 2 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; i.e. Humans  
 2' rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Dualism, God, 3:12  
 Who We Fear (4x) = Whom We Obey  
 29 1' Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Worth, 6:25-34  
 And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will (knowing). God Knows  
 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. p.v., Ps.40:12, 69:4, God Knows  
 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Value Gen. Rab. 79:6  
 vv.31-32 Popularity Not Ultimate

1') vv.32-33 What Is A Disciple? Loyalty Of Disciple And Teacher At The End

32 So every one who acknowledges (confesses) me before men, 12:36-37, Rev. 3:5, Call To Allegiance/ Confession  
 I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; Your Father to My Father  
 33 but whoever denies me before men, Wilt Under Pressure, 26:34, 70, Peter Restored!  
 I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.// 7:21, Jn. 14:6, Jesus Shares In God's Judgment

**A Brief Treatment Of Matthew 10:17-33 (IVA'2a-b)**

This is the second part of Jesus' mission speech to the twelve and those who will later follow in expanding the kingdom mission of healing and freedom. The initial focus is Jews only (v.5). Six pairs are sent as his ambassadors (vv.5-6), given a royal message (v.7) and confirming credentials (v.8), travel light and vulnerable (vv.9-10), survive by hospitality (v.11-13), face rejection (vv.14-15), and live amidst danger (v.16a) with a blend of serpentine savvy (v.16a) and avian innocence (v.16b). In part two (vv.17-42) the theme of persecution is elevated. Jesus brings division as people side with him through his ambassadors or against both, and thus against the Father and his inbreaking rule. The overall arrangement of vv.17-42 is a 3:1 concentric pattern (a. vv.17-23, b. vv.24-33, a' vv.34-42) with each paragraph having its own internal structure and sources. Several terms in a//a' act as inclusions: *for my sake* (vv.18a, 22a // v.39b), *father* (v.21b//v.35a), *truly I say to you* (v.23b//v.42). Six themes also link a//a': 1) conflict (vv.17-18//v.34), 2) provision (vv.19-20//vv.40-41), 3) family division (vv.21-22//vv.35-37), 4) "truly I say to you" (v.23b//v.42b), 5) arrival language (*the Son of man comes* [v.23c] // *I have (not) come* [vv.34-35a]), 6) death (v.21//v.39b). These observations about a//a' give us the paragraph divisions and mark b. vv.24-33 as the central unit with 2) vv.26-31 as the pivot of the whole. A stylistic feature is the repeated use of triples: *deliver up* (vv.17b, 19a, 21a), *for my sake* (vv.18a, 22a, 39b), hostile venues (vv.17b-18a), family groupings (v.21), *Father* (vv.29-33), *I have (not) come* (vv.34-35a), *worthy* (vv.37-38), *reward* (vv.41-42). The fourfold use of *fear* at the center (vv.26a, 28 [2x], 31) breaks the pattern of threes and points to a central concern: in the threats that come with mission, fear is rightly placed in God alone (v.28) who calls for a likeness with (vv.24-25) and loyalty to Jesus (vv.32-33). To lose ourselves in him and his work (v.39) is to enter a quality of life found nowhere else. It is possible to become sacraments (vv.40-42).

The initial paragraph (a. vv.17-23) is structured in a four part step pattern (1-2//1'-2') with warnings about persecution from officials (1. vv.17-18) and family (1' vv.21-22) alternating with faithful responses in speech (2. vv.19-20) and action (2' v.23). To each a promise is attached as an encouragement (vv.18b, 20, 22b, 23c). The source is Mk. 13:9-13 with editing evident in the initial warning (*Beware of men*, v.17a), the additions of *flog* and *dragged* (v.17b), the distinction of *their* synagogues (v.17c), the extension of the mission to *the Gentiles* (v.18b), the distinction between *how you are to speak* and "what you are to say" (v.19a), the addition of *of your Father* to "the Spirit" (v.20a), and the whole of v.23 (M). Synagogue discipline and government hostility are occasions for testimony, and God will provide both content (*the what*) and the inspiration (*the how*) in the moment (vv.19-20). It is not cowardice to flee family hatred (v.23a), and solemn assurance is given they are not alone (v.23c); Jesus will soon join them (11:1).

The central paragraph (b. vv.24-33) has a 3:1 concentric pattern (1-2-1'). Outside units (1//1') answer the question "What is a disciple, and what can they expect?" In vv.24-25 a disciple is like his master which means sharing Jesus' slander (9:34, 12:24); they too will be accused of sorcery. The source is Q (//Lk. 6:40) with considerable editing and the addition of the Beelzebul saying (v.25b). In vv.32-33 a disciple continues to confess Jesus and in the end can expect to be publicly claimed by God. At the center in 2. vv.26-31 the issue of fear is addressed in a 4:2 chiasm (1-2//2'-1'). All they can do is kill you, so fear God, not those who persecute (v.28). Because all will be known at the end (v.26b), now is the time for bold witness (v.27). If God knows when a sparrow falls and the number of hairs on our heads, he cares for us no matter what loss we endure. The source of vv.26-33 is Q (//Lk. 12:2-9) with the addition of the initial command, "So have no fear of them," and a highlighting of the *body* and *soul* distinction.

## THE COST OF LOYALTY (Part 1)

*“But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”*

Perseverance is a virtue necessary for faith to hang on and hold out.

M A T T H E W 1 0 : 2 2 b

**A**sian Access— or A2 for short— is a missions agency in South Asia. They recently listed seven questions church planters ask new believers who are considering public baptism. The country is predominantly Hindu, but in recent decades Christianity has grown in popularity— especially among poor and tribal peoples. These questions serve as a reality check for what new followers might experience if they *go public* with their decision:

- Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?
- Are you willing to lose your job?
- Are you willing to go to the village and those who persecute you, forgive them, and share the love of Christ with them?
- Are you willing to give an offering to the Lord?
- Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?
- Are you willing to go to prison?
- Are you willing to die for Jesus?

The questions help new converts face the cost in a culture where religious deviants are thought dangerous, where religion and family and tribe and national heritage merge. They also help us safe, Western Christians identify with the threats faced by our brothers and sisters in other countries.<sup>1</sup> If I were to reshape the seven for our context, it might read like this:

- Will you invite unchurched friends and family to your baptism?
- Will you go back to those you’ve sinned against, share your new loyalty to Jesus, ask their forgiveness, and make restitution where possible?

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<sup>1</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Mt.10:17-42.

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**Matthew 10:17-33 ..... 5**

- Will you become a serious student of the Bible and the faith, and will you be part of a small group for accountability and growth?
- Will you keep our Christian sex ethic of celibacy in singleness and fidelity in heterosexual marriage as a witness to God's best?
- Are you willing to be trained to pray and operate in the gifts of the Holy Spirit?
- Will you restructure your finances so you can give a minimum of ten percent to God through the church for the support of our mission?
- Will you find a place to befriend and serve the poor, the lonely, and the neglected across the street and around the world?

Deep convictions, when they lead to public action, have a cost attached. The person who goes public for a cause of faith or justice had better prepare for controversy, for resistance and ridicule, and— in extreme cases— even martyrdom in and for their cause. Catherine Booth— founder with her husband William of the Salvation Army— wrote, “If we are to better the future, we must disturb the present.”<sup>2</sup>

I have some difficult news. If you are true to Jesus Christ, meaning you confess he is indeed God in the flesh with all this implies concerning divine revelation and its implications for other religions, and if you intend to follow him as an apprentice with others, you will suffer. New choices and sacrifices will find their way into your life as part of the curriculum of discipleship. Your courage will be tested; you will fail many times. All fears of anything but God will be exposed; the very worst about you will be known to you— and perhaps others. Ambition and pride dealt with, self-sufficiency crucified. You may have to go where you don't want to go with people you'd rather not be around. Loves and loyalties will be sifted and reordered around a new center. Jesus Christ has come to remake our lives; he saves us by transforming us over a lifetime of challenges, which is why he said in verse 22, “But she who endures *to the end* shall be saved,” so don't stop short of the goal.

This is not about setting out to be a self-styled martyr always drawing attention to your faith with pious comments. No, it simply means that to follow the Lord of the church will set you against the agenda of much of this world and its current management. At our best, disciples represent the rightful owner of this world and currently serve behind enemy lines. It's why we sing to the devil and his helpers— human and demonic— our great song of protest, “This Is My Father's World.” My Abba owns it all. And when we go public about our Father's claims as embodied in

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<sup>2</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 10:17-42.

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Jesus, why should we be surprised if they don't always like it?

Christian faith cannot be reduced to a religious veneer on the American dream, though we have often tried to make it just that by telling people Jesus will solve all their problems and deliver into their lap the good life. And it's partly true, depending on how you define *the good life*. Forgiveness of sins is a great gift to a guilty conscience. Having a God who hears prayers is an incredible benefit. Discovering the spiritual and intellectual treasures of this grand faith is an adventure. Finding a calling gives meaning to life and a focus to your gifts. Having reliable moral rails to run on breeds conviction and develops the conscience. Baptism is a new beginning, the Lord's Supper a high privilege. Having a Bible to study and hear preached is a foundation of truth for the whole of life. Finding a new family is a great asset. Having the Holy Spirit at your side is strength. Looking to the kingdom of God and experiencing its effects even now is a present and future hope. But, as Jesus warned his followers before he sent them out in his name to— as John Wimber said— *do the kingdom stuff*, he sends them in a battle zone. Not a play ground, a battle ground.

Our mission is more than well meaning do-goodism; it's hand-to-hand spiritual warfare for which you need protective armor and a plan of battle.<sup>3</sup> Consider verses 17 and 18? He deliberately sent them into danger, "Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils, and flog you in the synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my names sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles." In other words, church and state will find you and your mission difficult and bring pressure to bear to stop you. That Jesus warned us ahead of time is meant to protect us from being shocked when difficulty comes our way. "Oh Yes," we say, "Jesus told us about this. We should not be surprised; he warned us it would be hard." The companionship of Jesus is blessed, but also difficult. Our temptation for marketing reasons is to lower the bar and make it sound easy.

Jesus was not bashful about laying out the issues of eternal life and eternal death, verse 28: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him (meaning God) who can destroy both soul and body in hell."<sup>4</sup> Reverence and awe for God is the only thing I know strong enough to keep us from

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 6:10-20.

<sup>4</sup> On a neglected topic, see *The Nature of Hell* (London: The Evangelical Alliance, 2000); Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Oxford, England: OUP, 1992).

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living in craven fear of people and their opinions. “Don’t fear them,” said Jesus, “after all, all they can do is kill you, and then they’re done. Instead, fear the God who has a reach beyond death.” I admire the courage of Desmond Tutu when he was under scrutiny by his apartheid government’s Eloff Commission. The Anglican bishop and Nobel Prize winner declared in the face of the worst of modern bigotry:

“There is nothing the government can do to me that will stop me from being involved in what I believe God wants me to do. I do not do it because I like doing it. I do it because I am under what I believe to be the influence of God’s hand. I cannot help it. When I see injustice, I cannot keep quiet, for— as Jeremiah says— when I try to keep quiet, God’s Word burns like a fire in my breast. But what is it that they can ultimately do? The most awful thing that they can do is to kill me, and death is not the worst thing that could happen to a Christian.”<sup>5</sup>

In October of 2006, Pope Benedict XVI spoke out publicly about the irrational and violent side of Islam at an international conference. The result was that Father Amer Iskender— an Orthodox priest in Mosul, Iraq— was kidnapped and beheaded. We must weigh the cost of our words for others, but we must not be intimidated into silence by Islamist extremists who do not value our traditions of free speech, civil discourse, political cartoons and religious critique. The five hundred brave souls who attended his funeral also put themselves in the line of fire to honor a Christian martyr.<sup>6</sup> We tend to think of dying for the faith as associated with early Christian history, and that is where it started, but it’s never ended. “It is estimated that more people have been martyred for Christ in the past 50 than in the church’s first 300 years.”<sup>7</sup> Since the rise and spread of ISIS just two years ago, the stories we hear regularly are as brutal and grisly as anything in history.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Richard H. Schmidt, *Glorious Companions: Five Centuries of Anglican Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), 328.

<sup>6</sup> The Associated Press, October 12, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 10:17-42. For a fresh, critical appraisal of early Christian experience, see Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented the Story of Martyrdom* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> John Casper, “Libya’s 21 Christian Martyrs...” [www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/february-web-only/libya-21-christian-martyrs-with-their-blood-unify-egypt](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/february-web-only/libya-21-christian-martyrs-with-their-blood-unify-egypt). For a

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**Matthew 10:17-33 ..... 8**

Think about it. People are dying for the faith, and we have trouble getting our own people here on Sunday. Is the preaching that bad? People are dying for the faith, and many in this room have not cracked a Bible in a week. I will hear complaints if we go past noon. We are not ready morally or intellectually or spiritually for the challenges that are already upon us. Who fasted this week? Who helped the poor directly? Who visited a prison? Who witnessed for Christ? Who read a book about racism or immigration or health care or peacemaking or the environment or childhood obesity or abortion or restoring integrity to political discourse or some other issue crucial to our common life? Who has written a government leader and pledged not only your opinion but your prayers? Who has joined a political party and made a commitment to speak for Christ to the political left and right?<sup>9</sup> Who has visited and prayed for the sick? Who's gotten on their knees and cried out for mercy for the nation and for revival in the church? Christianity is not a spectator sport, and you are not fans in the bleachers. It's about direct action with whatever happens to be in front of me. Wherever we go and whatever we are doing, that is where Jesus takes his stand against the way the world is currently run and the spiritual powers behind the chaos.

I often hear people whine and accuse God, complaining about problems and suffering that's come their way. I listen, bring to bear the resources of pastoral care, make referrals if necessary, offer books, read relevant Scripture, pray, and open my heart to them, but at some point— and especially after several sessions on the same issues— I look at them and say something like the following. It is my come-to-Jesus reality speech, or— as I sometimes say— my *minority report*:

“This is your world, and however you ended up here, and whoever there is to blame, you have a decision to make. Is Jesus true? Does he show us the truth about God and all that we need to be saved? Is he worth following, even if he doesn't fix your problems to your satisfaction? Do you think you are doing him a favor by following him, or do you think he is doing you a favor by letting you be his follower? It's time to grow up and get real, time to bear your burden and learn to value him more

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book of narrative testimonies on recent martyrdoms in the Middle East, see Tom Doyle, *Killing Christians* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> A helpful read on this issue is George Hunter, *Christian Evangelical & Democrat?* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 2006).

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than you value your own life. We will walk with you, but you have a decision to make. Your past does not have to determine your future.”

What need in our day a recovery of a practical theology of Christian suffering, and the expectation everyone will have some, some more than others, and that if we respond in faith it will be used to our good, wherever it comes from: from the Evil One, from human sin and stupidity across the generations, from crashing around in a fallen world, or straight from the throne of God. People often come to me as if my job is to wave a spiritual wand and make life easier. No, my job is to make your life hard by equipping you to serve on the front lines where the kingdom of God is challenging all the pretensions and promises of this fallen and lost and violent and morally deceived world. So if you want entertainment religion or feel-good emotions or a positive thinking attitude or a big dose of have-it-your-way religion or six of the ten commandments or a five percent tithe or a license for self-indulgence and endless therapeutic self-exploration, this is not the place for you; you will not be happy under current appointed leadership. This is a church with a cross on the wall and an open Bible on the pulpit. Here we do Christian realism, which according to my reading of Scripture, is the only path to real joy. *Christian realism*: I like the sound of it! Telling the truth, living in the truth, naming issues and facing them in faith together!

In a letter to his sister Sabine, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis for his part in a plot to kill Hitler, wrote:

“It is good to learn early enough that suffering and God are not a contradiction but a unity, for the idea that God himself is suffering is... one of the most convincing teachings of Christianity. I think God is nearer to suffering than to happiness, and to find God in this way gives peace and rest and a strong and courageous heart.”<sup>10</sup>

The church in our day— as at other momentous times— is tempted to give up its distinctive claims about the One and Triune God and to become a chaplain to a self-indulgent culture. The Episcopal Church— our blessed mother in the faith— is already torn asunder; the ripping apart of the children of John Calvin can be daily heard in local Presbyterian circles, and we United Methodists are teetering between faithfulness to our vision of Scriptural holiness and an agenda which makes Jesus just one of the world great religious leaders and abandons our distinctively biblical sex

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<sup>10</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 10:17-42.

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ethic of celibacy in singleness and fidelity in marriage. We have the very different challenges of secularism and radical Islam on the outside pressing in, and the challenges of heresy and moral compromise inside our walls, not to mention the neo-pagan culture emerging around us. These are battles that will test our patience and last a very long time, perhaps fifty to a hundred years, so hunker down and get informed. Ignorance is negligence, and moral toughness will have to be developed. But what a great time to be a classic Christian, reciting the Nicene and Apostles' Creed without mental reservations and trusting in the deposit of divine revelation given us in Jesus and inscribed in Scripture. It is precisely in the hot cauldron of these challenges that our faith will be tested. The good-ole-days from which ever slice of nostalgia you happen to cherish, are gone!

Good manners are as important as clear convictions in such strained times as ours. We listen to our critics because they have much to teach us about where we have not lived up to the example of Jesus, and where they are right— as Islam surely is about our wholesale exporting of sexual immorality around the world through our engulfing American entertainment industry— we gladly agree and begin to repent and rebuild a culture that is pro-life and pro-marriage. When gay activists ask about our selective enforcement of moral standards since we in the church have for so long winked at the heterosexual sins of fornication and adultery, we agree with them and begin to repent by a recovery of humane teaching and church discipline. It is precisely at the point of our engagement with other faiths and philosophies that we discover how poorly has been our obedience to our own. Their charges are sometimes true, and God can use them— if we will listen— not to lead us away from this faith but deeper into its heart and soul. This grand Christian faith is grounded in the conviction that God vindicated Jesus and him alone through resurrection so that his whole story is the very life of God written in the sweat and blood of one, historical life.<sup>11</sup> And if so, then it is intellectually binding on all our thinking and living.

In the passage before us this morning, Jesus continually makes comments that are unapologetically self-referential, as if not only his message *but he himself* was the issue God was using to provoke the world. He speaks with divine authority as if he has the perfect right to do so and be obeyed. Persecution was *for his sake*, as if he

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<sup>11</sup> See my *Resurrection* (Fort Valley, GA: Bristol, 2014) for a pastoral and theological treatment of all the major New Testament texts on resurrection.

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had the same rights as God to utter loyalty.<sup>12</sup> He made promises about the Holy Spirit speaking when his people were under pressure, promised salvation to whoever endured to the end, and spoke of his own return as the Son of Man.<sup>13</sup> He called disciples to share in his spiritual warfare; he spoke about hell as if he knew the terms of condemnation and why.<sup>14</sup> He gave instructions for a world-wide mission to Jews and Gentiles that would not end until God said *Enough*.<sup>15</sup> He announced that loyalty to himself was the one thing that would count when each person stood for judgment, “So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I will also deny before by Father who is in heaven.”<sup>16</sup> Think about that promise the next time you are called to speak up for the faith and fear chokes back your words. And while some think it a low form of motivation, Jesus did not hesitate to use fear of punishment and hope of reward as a stick and carrot strategy to push us in the direction of courageous witness. He even claims access to the latest accounting of sparrow deaths and the changing count of hairs on every head;<sup>17</sup> in other words, he has access, when needed, to the data of divine omniscience. As Son, Jesus shares in the knowledge of God.

The voice of God is not hard to find; it is etched in creation and echoed in conscience, written in Scripture and heard wherever Jesus is spoken of with devotion. So if you’ve not heard from God in a while, start watching and reading and listening. So we conclude from this review that Jesus did not mind speaking about himself in the most exalted titles and of defining his singular role in the divine economy.<sup>18</sup> He was not hesitant to drop big hints that to follow him is the path into the divine life.

In Jesus of Nazareth, who is God the Son, Savior, and Lord, we have all the

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<sup>12</sup> 10:18, 22.

<sup>13</sup> 10:20, 22b, 23b.

<sup>14</sup> 10:24-25, 28.

<sup>15</sup> 10:18, 23b.

<sup>16</sup> 10:32-33.

<sup>17</sup> 10:29-31.

<sup>18</sup> On implicit Christology, see James Edwards, *Is Jesus The Only Savior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), Chapter 5, “Did Jesus Consider Himself God?” 67-99.

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revelation about God that will be given until history ends, and his life is the anvil on which all our thinking is hammered out. A church that has lost its confidence in Jesus Christ as God in flesh has lost its reason to exist, as is happening in Europe and England, with the same thinking infecting the mainline churches here in the U.S. We have lost our theological convictions and therefore our accompanying ethical nerve and missionary passion. Why bother with any of this if Jesus not who the church claims him to be? We need to learn again the children’s song, “Everybody ought to know, everybody ought to know, everybody ought to know, who Jesus is...” And after that statement of missions, we praise him, “He’s the lily of the valley; he’s the bright and morning star; he’s the fairest of ten thousand; everybody ought to know.”

Here is the agenda: Through reasoning and persuasion, through theology and preaching, through suffering and martyrdom, through hidden service and loving the enemy, through signs and wonders, in exorcisms and in healings, through music and the arts, through loving the poor, through prayer and worship and reading the Bible aloud and in coming to the font and the table, through lending our voice to public debates, through all these and more we bear witness to Jesus Christ and invite men and women to enroll as his disciples in the way that leads to life, now and later.

The command to honor father and mother is number five of the ten God gave Moses; the command against adultery and thus for the integrity of marriage is number seven, but the commands to honor God are numbers one through three, and that is the spot Jesus claims for himself! In this accounting, family is a secondary loyalty after Jesus and his mission through his people. First Jesus, then the cost of sharing in his mission, then family. But we in the American Christian culture have often made family the be all and end all, which it is not. It is a very good limited good, and in the kingdom the man who in history was my father will be my brother in Christ from an earlier generation. All will be God’s children with one Father. We know that Jesus was not against family; he defended marriage against casual divorce.<sup>19</sup> But he would not allow it to get in the way of the cost of discipleship. He would not allow the tender ties of kinship to be an idol, a rival god. How often I hear the excuse, “I can’t, Pastor, that’s the only time I have for family.” Sunday is for boating and fishing and soccer games and golf and laying around and recovering from too much to drink on Saturday night and going to grandmothers, and I say Yes, but only *after* Sunday School and worship. In this regard Methodists need a dose of Baptist loyalty and an infusion of Pentecostal devotion. As a word of hope on this matter of the family, I

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew 5:27-32.

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quote from C.S. Lewis:

"When I have learnt to love God better than my earthly dearest, I shall love my earthly dearest better than I do now. Insofar as I learn to love my earthly dearest at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving toward the state in which I shall not love my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased."<sup>20</sup>

The artist Gustave Dore— famous for his biblical engravings and one of the patron saints of the old DreamWorks team of Spielberg, Katzenberg, and Geffen— was handed a painting of Jesus just finished by one of his students. Asked for a critique, Dore studied it, his mind searching for the right words. At last he handed it back to the student. "If you loved him more," he said, "you would have painted him better."<sup>21</sup>

It is the job of this and every church to offer a convincing portrait of Jesus in our common life. We together are the prisms through which his light shines and the cells through which his life flows. The more we love him, the more we will honor him; the more we honor him, the more we will follow him; the more we follow him into difficult places, the more we will understand his teachings and the more convincing will be our living portrait here at the center of Greenwood.

I leave you now with three challenges: one about Jesus, one about his church, and one about you.

The church has tried and tested statements about Jesus Christ, who he is and why he matters. They are grounded in Scripture and tested in church councils, preserved in creeds and official statements. They are to be understood and defended as I have done today. Apparently Jesus thought his identity was part of the gospel package. Jesus is our window into the mystery of the Triune God. He came as Son to reveal the Father, and he is the test for what may be claimed for the Spirit. The message and the messenger are one. There is no salvation without this particular Savior, and suffering is the only way it could be accomplished, as Bishop Will Willimon wrote:

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<sup>20</sup> PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 10:17-42.

<sup>21</sup> Idem.

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“If we or the world could be saved through human kindness or clear thinking, Jesus either would have formed a sensitivity group and urged us to share our feelings or would have founded a school and asked us to have discussions. But knowing the ways of God, the way of the world, and the persistence of human sin, he took up the cross, called disciples, gathered the church, and bade us follow him down a different path of freedom.”<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, Jesus’ mission through us is ongoing, and the warnings he gave to the twelve are still in force. We don’t seek out suffering, but neither are we surprised by it. To be associated with him is our highest honor.

And finally, a personal word. You are of far more worth than you know. The God who monitors the death of sparrows knows the intimate details of your life. Your worst fears and secret dreams. How you were shaped for good and misshapen by sin and evil. What makes you laugh and what makes you cry. Where you are in bondage, where your weak spots are. This is the God who calls you to find your life in Jesus and for him to move to the center of your affections, displacing any other that claims first place. There is important work for you to do and for us to do together. Are you willing to pay the price to find out what that is?

In his novel *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, Alan Paton tells the story of Robert Mansfield, the headmaster of a school in South Africa during the days of apartheid. When Mansfield's school was barred from competing against a black school, he finally took a stand against apartheid and resigned his post. A friend said, "You know you will be wounded. Do you know that?"

Mansfield replied, pointing to heaven, "When I go up there ... the Big Judge will say to me, 'Where are your wounds?' If I say I haven't any, he will say, 'Was there nothing to fight for?' I couldn't face that question."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in a sermon by Vernon McGarvey, “Confronted By The Cross,” April 1, 2002, located at <http://www.ninetyandnine.com/Archives/20020401/cover>.

<sup>23</sup> (New York, NY: Scribner, 1996), 66-67.

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