

## **Satisfying the Need for Connection**

**Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matt 10:24-39 at SALC on 6/21/26**

Psychologist Krystine Batcho said in the internationally recognized Psychology Today Blog, “Two years ago studies revealed the prevalence of loneliness in the United States. One online poll of over 20,000 adults suggested that nearly half of Americans reported sometimes or always feeling alone or left out, one in four rarely or never feel as though there are people who really understand them, and one in five rarely or never feel close to people or feel there are people they can talk to.” A year ago The World Health Organization, WHO’s Commission on Social Connection said that globally 1 in 6 people reported feeling lonely, that is, not occasional loneliness, which we all feel now and then, but loneliness as a pathological, chronic condition. We are in an epidemic of loneliness, said the US Surgeon General 3 years ago.

The reality of loneliness in the US is right before our eyes. I’ll put it this way, the cry of the soul for nearly half the people in the US is, “Will somebody please love me, even like me or just befriend me.”

That is how it is now in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, but there’s no reason to believe that in the time of Jesus, people did not also long for and cultivate relationships. In fact, as far back as in the creation narrative of Genesis, God affirmed relationship. God said, “It is not good for people to be alone.” So God created people and animals, and gave them the ability to reproduce – creating ongoing relationship!

Now Jesus in the Gospel reading for today, Matthew 10, is often misunderstood to be saying that human relationships are irrelevant. At first glance at this passage, with a readership

acutely aware of the reality of loneliness and disconnectedness in modern society, maybe many will throw up their hands and say, here goes the rabbleroising Jesus, turning our stable society on its head again.

See, Jesus knew that for some this so-called “order of society” was working. “Honor your father and mother”, says the law. Many saw the law as the way to monitor peace in society. On the contrary, says Jesus, the law should and most certainly will bring division. I, the embodiment of the Law, have not come to bring peace, or more correctly - using the full translation from Greek to English – I have not come “to maintain” peace but I bring a sword. I came to upset the applecart. V 35. “For I have come to set a son against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup> and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.”

That’s a painful thing, especially if you are amongst those for whom family is your safe space, your comfort zone. I know it’s Father’s Day, and I missed Mother’s Day, but let me say this to parents: Many parents think that their sole purpose in life is to bring up their children. Well, it is one of the very important things in society, if you have children. Of course it is, but is it your main purpose? Also, many children feel that they are charged with the responsibility of maintaining the heritage of their parents. They feel duty bound to protect that heritage at all costs! As a parent I’m thinking, “of course it is!” Many parents think, “I’ll come back from my grave if my children dare to stray from the values I taught them and from what was dear to me.” Those who allow their so-called “love” for their children and loved ones to rule them TO the grave, have no place for Jesus. Similarly, those children who allow their so-called “love for” or “love from” their parents to rule them from the grave, have no place for Jesus. When I say “no place”, I mean that Jesus is just an “add-on”. To that Jesus says,

"You are not worthy of me." (v.37) You fall short if you love anyone or anything more than Jesus.

Why were people then and now surprised by that teaching? Some biblical commentators say Jesus simply uses hyperbole as a teaching style. Let me quote Jesus fully in v. 37 of today's reading from Matthew 10:

<sup>37</sup> 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;" In parallel gospel narrative, Luke described Jesus as saying "Unless you hate mother and father and so on... you cannot be my disciple." (Luke 14:26)

That's a painful thing. Perhaps it's better if we simply call it hyperbole. But no, Jesus knew that it is hard and painful. Remember Jesus was speaking to a culture of extended families and very close family relationships, which is still so in the middle east. So the Lord explains further in v. 38. What I'm trying to say, Peter, Martha and all my people is this:

<sup>38</sup> whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me." Or in Luke's narrative, "he or she cannot be my disciple if they cannot take up their cross". Taking up your cross means leaving everything else behind.

So the first place to take up the cross is not the public square on days like Juneteenth which was on Friday or at any other gathering of public witness. The first place to carry our cross is within us. Because, what is dear to us becomes the resistance to the cross. Relationships, ambitions, even fears and cares of this world are all things that are, yes, "dear to us." "Don't take away my relationships, they are dear to me. Don't take away by sport, my hobbies, my past times." Oh and don't take away my phobias and my fears. They are what make me who I am!" Sounds ridiculous, but even those can become our preoccupation. Leaving no place for God. Remember the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment to

love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind? That is what Jesus is still elaborating on, because it is central to our faith. Is it too much Law to say Jesus above all else?

Well in this periscope, Jesus finally comes to the promise, the Grace, if you will - actually, the point of it all. Verse 39. <sup>39</sup> "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

When I give my life to Jesus. When you lose your life to Jesus, you will find it! What will we find? A life that is totally rearranged for our own good and the good of all. God knows we need relationship, and God provides that with Godself AND with God's creation, including humans.

Yes, we still need relationship. We are learning that even more in this time of social media – and I'm not going to debate whether social media creates isolation or remedies loneliness, not today. But God is not denying us relationship, yet He is saying, keep your eyes on me. Don't let anything be in the way, as good as it is, focus on me – things eternal, as Paul says – focus on things above, and you will find a full and abundant life. Don't let the thief of creaturely comforts AND human relationships steal your soul. Taking about soul, to the cry of the human soul for "someone to love me", Jesus says "I have come that you may have life and life in all its abundance (If you didn't know, I was quoting Jn10:10). And listen: that abundant life is not just for eternity. Abundant life is our now, if we get our priorities right. Then – let me end with this – then having loved God, as we should, we WILL find ourselves loving our neighbor. Why? Because we would want our neighbor too to have abundant life. In that Jesus satisfies our need for connection – full and free in Jesus Name. Amen.