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***Straight Talk From Jesus
Matthew 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 him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.^[e] 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.***

I love those first verses of **Romans 6 today**,
*Should we continue in sin in order that grace may increase? ² By no means!
How can we who died to sin **go on living** in it?*
We should **NOT keep on sinning**, just because we have God’s grace!
Unfortunately, we all have **blind spots**,
places where we continue to sin, and make mistakes, right?

So we praise God for grace—
All while we try to **learn** from our failures and **grow** in our faith!

That's the challenge from Jesus, here in Matthew 10.

He is ***urging his disciples to grow in faith—and be like him.***

He says: *it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher*

A disciple by definition was someone who strived to ***imitate*** their teacher.

C. S. Lewis once wrote: “[T]he Church exists for nothing else but to draw [people] into Christ, to make them ***little Christs.***”

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1980): 171.

So, what does it mean to be like Jesus?

To be a ***little Christ?***

Who was Jesus Christ and what did he do?

Well, Jesus came to ***share the Good News—***

AND to ***confront the sin*** and evil in the world.

Jesus says here, *Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered.*

Jesus didn't just share the coming Kingdom of God,

He didn't just heal and cure and preach good news.

He called out those who were against it.

He called out the ***Pharisees*** for their pride, hypocrisy and oppression.

He called out ***secular leaders*** for hurting the people they should have protected.

He called out the ***rich, the comfortable***, those who thought ***they had no need*** for God.

And Jesus says right here that we are to be like Him.

Which is no easy calling, is it?

Jesus, who offers compassion and empathy everywhere,

who welcomes little children,

is now giving us some ***straight-talk***, right?

These verses come right after Jesus has been teaching, healing, and preaching,

And then he sends out the 12 disciples on their own

to do the same---to proclaim the kingdom,

to cure the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons.

In other words, Jesus ***transfers his ministry*** to his disciples!

Then Jesus is brutally honest!

In Matthew 10:16 he says that ***persecutions will come***,

because they are being sent out *like sheep amidst wolves*,
so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

In Matthew 10:19 he offers *comfort* for those days:

When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Then Jesus lays it all out there for us in our passage today:

Everything covered up will be *exposed*.

What happens in the dark will be brought into the *light*.

If we *deny* Jesus, we will be denied.

Jesus has not come to bring peace, but a sword.

Whoever *loves family* more than Him is not worthy!

All who follow must take up a *cross* and

lose their lives in order to find them!

Wow!

Doesn't sound like the gentle Jesus of a picture Bible, does it?

These are *tough words*.

Humbling, and convicting.

As I read this I wonder—

do we have what it takes to be *true disciples*?

And where is our *true allegiance*?

Is it to *Jesus Christ*?

Or is it really to our family? community? Political party? Country?

Is our faith something we do only on the side?

Or is it the *guiding principle* of our lives?

Lindsey Krinks says in the Upper Room Disciplines this week:

Jesus isn't interested in a FAN CLUB.

He's interested in disciples who take his teachings to heart and walk the walk.

"Take up the cross and follow me," Jesus says,

foreshadowing the ultimate cost that he and many of his disciples would pay.

Lindsey Krinks, Upper Room Disciplines.org, June 22, 2023.

Are we just ***FANS*** of Jesus—or *disciples*?

Do we understand that imitating ***Jesus IS tough***?

I mean, he was a *revolutionary* teacher and preacher, speaking out against those who oppressed others, and showing religious people a whole new way to God. Jesus was **VERY controversial**. He *made enemies — so much, that he was crucified!*

I wonder, do we lose some of that today?
Do we *domesticate* Jesus, and make him more the way we want him to be?

What if we believe what Jesus says right here?
That *our lives as Christians will be NOT be easy*.
That we will be *troubled and challenged, with confrontation and conflict*.
That it will be like carrying a cross and losing our lives!

Do we understand that *discipleship is not easy*?
It's not about comfort, or success.
It does not bring wealth, it doesn't necessarily bring the accolades of anyone.
Discipleship is a calling that *takes us BEYOND* all of that.
Jesus wants us to *lose our attachment* to what seems successful—including what people think of us, and just follow Him.

Lindsey Krinks writes:
If we find that our discipleship has become too comfortable and easy, it is time to ask what Christ we are following.

Or as another pastor said: *if we as a church never anger anyone, are we truly serving Jesus Christ?*

Now, does this mean we should live our faith like a bull-in-a-china-closet?
Is *making people angry a necessary part of following Jesus*?
No.
I don't think that's what Jesus is saying!
Being difficult, or causing offense doesn't necessarily win people to faith.
It doesn't necessarily change any hearts or minds.

We need to just *be faithful to Jesus*, and then *accept the outcome* of that faithfulness, knowing that God is with us.
Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 *Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added unto you.*

There are *times when people will be on our side*,
 Welcoming our faithfulness, applauding our dedication to Jesus.
 Following our footsteps as we follow Christ.
 But other times we will be ridiculed, or worse.

Following Jesus has many **REWARDS**,
Peace, comfort, strength, eternal life,
 And a *joy* that no one can take from us.

But like anything worthwhile, it also has a *high COST*.
 Following Jesus means *sacrifice, and risk, and sometimes it will put us at odds*
 with people around us, even our own families.

In fact, *no human relationship*, not even friends or family,
 Should come before our relationship with and commitment to Jesus Christ.
 Our *primary ALLEGIANCE is to God*,
 And our *primary IDENTITY is as a child of God*.

Our *FAMILY is the body of Christ*, even more so than our nuclear family.
 Jesus himself when asked where his family was, said this about his followers:
 “*Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in
 heaven is my brother and sister and mother*” (Matthew 12:49-50).

God asks for our *unwavering loyalty*.

We are God’s.

God’s family is our family.

So, following Jesus *can lead to division*, even within our closest relationships.
 This is what Simeon prophesied when Jesus
 was dedicated in the temple as an infant:
 Simeon blessed him and said, “*This child is destined for the falling and rising of
 many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed*” (Luke 2:34).

It reminds me of the story of a *young man who came for baptism*,
 in a country hostile to Christianity.

A visitor asked the pastor why the young man
 had brought his suitcase to the church service.

*Oh, he knows that his family will disown him if he is baptized,
 so he came prepared.*

Are **WE that committed** to our Christian faith?
 To following Jesus?
 Or are we more committed to the **IDEA** of it?
 Do we live out our **faith 24/7, or only when convenient?**

And what about **uncovering the darkness** in our world today?
 Are we willing to do that too?

It makes me think of what we are facing with **hatred, racism and prejudice**.
 It's kind of like what Jesus says here—what was **hidden**
 is now out in the light for everyone to see,
 in the mainstream of our culture.
 And it's fed by leaders who say that whole groups of people
 are inferior, or dangerous, or less than.

But this kind of prejudice is **not part of our Christian faith**.
 This darkness is **not compatible** with following Jesus,
 who came to set all people free (Luke 4).

As Christians, we believe that ALL people are **children of God,**
made in the image of God.
 And Jesus came to teach, and heal, and preach to ALL image-bearers.
 And now it is **our turn—to carry out His mission**.
 Just like he sent his 12 disciples, He sends us!
We are the body of Christ on earth—the hands and feet of Jesus.

Which means WE are called to **confront evils like hatred, prejudice, and racism**.
 And it's not enough to just say we are **color-blind, or not racist**.
 It's not enough to just say **All Lives Matter**.
 (Which misses the point about how Black Lives Matter—in a country where black
 lives have mattered less than white ones).

It's not enough to **just say we WELCOME everyone**,
 Do we really welcome **EVERYONE**—regardless of orientation or identity?
 how do we live that out?

How do we hear what Jesus says about discipleship,
 and put it into practice when it comes to **confronting prejudice? Sin? evil?**
 And are we willing to hear **new perspectives to help us do that?**

Today is the last Sunday of *Pride month*.
 How are we working to include and welcome people in that community?
 How are we allies?
 How are we standing alongside,
 especially those who are being discriminated against?

And what about racism?

I love that we learned about Juneteenth, and had such a wonderful celebration.
 In the past two years Mission Commission has read books about racism.
 Two books that have given me new perspectives:
Between the World and Me, by Ta-Nehisi Coates.
 And ***Waking Up White*** by Debbie Irving.
 Coates' book is a letter from a black father to his teenaged son,
 about growing up as a black man in America.
 Irving's book is about how much whites are not even aware
 of all the privileges of being white in America.

It is also exciting to see how our denomination is so often represented
 by people of all races and backgrounds.

The PCUSA has often elected people of color as leaders.

We currently have two women—Rev. Ruth Santana-Grace, a Latina, and Rev.
 Shavon Starling-Louis a black pastor—as our Co-Moderators.

Christians have always been ***called to address the challenges and sins of their day***
 and ***we are no different.***

The question is—how will we do that?

How will **you**?

How will I?

How will we share the Good News and speak out against evil?

How will we ***make disciples***, regardless of the cost?

How will we ***live out our faith***—no matter what we face?

When we think of our calling as disciples,
 we need remember ***THE REFRAIN*** in our Matthew passage today.
 It's one of the most famous phrases in the Bible.
 Three little words that mean all the world to us—no matter who we are:
Do not fear.

In Chapter 10, verse 26, Jesus says *Have no fear of them....*

In verse 28, He says *do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul.*

In verse 31, Jesus says *Do not fear, you are of more value than many sparrows.*

Three times, in some tough verses,

Jesus reminds us that we *do not need to be afraid.*

Which is true as we confront the sin and evil around us—we don't need to fear.

Why? Because Jesus is with us.

Jesus is the one who works through us.

Jesus says that God gives us the words and actions we need.

It is the *Holy Spirit* working behind the scenes,

To help us to share the Gospel and live our Christian faith.

Friends, that is the *Good News of the Gospel* today!

Let us *not keep sinning*, just because we have grace!

And *let us not fear*—but be courageous as we follow Jesus Christ,
even when it brings challenge, confrontation or conflict!

Even when following Jesus is hard.

Because *God is always with us.*

And for that, all God's people can say together, Amen!