

In His Footsteps**Matthew 10:24-31 (32-39)****Sunday, June 21, 2020****Beargrass Christian Church****I. INTRODUCTION.**

- A. Again, Happy Father's Day—Dads, we love you!
 - 1. And we are aware that the role of being a faithful father is extremely important in today's world.
 - 2. Dads are called upon to play more of a nurturing role in caring for their children—especially during these quarantimes.
- B. One father noted that children go through four fascinating stages.
 - 1. "Their first words might be Da-Da—then they call you Daddy."
 - 2. "As they get older and mature, they call you 'Dad.'"
 - 3. "Later they call you...to ask for a Venmo deposit."
- C. Another Dad came home and found his frazzled spouse.
 - 1. It had been a long day—their little boy was giving her fits—running in and out, ignoring her requests to stay outside.
 - 2. Then he knocked an important part of dinner off the table!
 - 3. She started after him, but he scrambled outside and disappeared.
 - 4. She sternly said to her husband: "Go discipline YOUR son!"
 - 5. He changed clothes and found him in a space under the porch.
 - 6. Then he heard a timid voice ask, "Dad, is she after you too?"
- D. Yes, things have changed—and changed for the better.
 - 1. There is a greater emphasis on a partnership in raising children.
 - 2. Fathers are called to nurture the children, be supportive partners, and share in offering moral and spiritual leadership.
 - 3. So, on this Father's Day, we give thanks for our earthly fathers.
- E. And we also give thanks and praise for our Heavenly Father, who is mentioned several times in today's passage.
 - 1. Last Sunday we began what will be an extended exploration of messages from the middle of the Gospel of Matthew.
 - 2. The focus in Matthew 10 is on the demands of discipleship.
 - 3. Jesus gathers his dynamic dozen and gives them power over the diseases of mind, body, and spirit—and sends them out.
 - 4. Undoubtedly, they feel honored, humbled, and excited to be ambassadors for Jesus and to follow in his footsteps!

II. BUT THESE FOOTSTEPS CAN BE FRIGHTENING.

- A. Jesus also tells them that the honor comes with a cost.
 - 1. He describes the reality of rejection, refusal, and active persecution that they will face.
 - 2. But give them credit—their mission goes from being glamorous to what could be a dangerous (and possibly one-way) trip.
- B. And yet, Jesus encourages, equips, and exhorts them.
 - 1. In all that they encounter, the disciples will find their strength and their identity in being like Jesus, their teacher.
 - 2. He gives them confidence to proclaim the Good News boldly and tells them not to be afraid.

- C. The image of “Father” is a positive one for Jesus—and we hear one of the most reassuring images for God in the entire Bible.
 - 1. Jesus says, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny?”
 - a. “Yet none of them fall to the ground apart from your Father.”
 - b. “So, don’t be afraid; you are worth more than the birds.”
 - 2. What a comforting description of God’s love and care for us!
 - a. And the image may even be more reassuring than we realize.
 - b. We probably hear “falling to the ground” as dying.
 - c. But the translation of the word “fall” is closer to that of “landing” or “alighting” on the ground.
 - d. In other words, God is not just aware of the sparrow’s dying.
 - e. God knows every time it lands and knows of its living!
 - 3. And if God does that for the birds, how much more does God care for the rest of the flock—for you and me!
 - a. This is no “cheep” expression of love!
 - b. God loves us with a love that is greater than we can imagine!
- D. On top of that, God knows us very intimately and personally.
 - 1. God even counts the number of hairs on our heads!
 - 2. It doesn’t take as long for some than others—especially the “hairing” impaired.
 - 3. But this is great and comforting news for the fearful faithful!
- E. And yet, we are still called to follow difficult footsteps.
 - 1. Someone said: “Those who aren’t following Jesus aren’t his followers—it’s that simple—followers follow.”
 - 2. “To follow Jesus means to continue to bring about a society where justice rules and where love shapes everything.”
 - 3. “To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it.”
- F. Today’s text reminds us that there is life beyond this paralyzing fear of rejection and more important things of which to be afraid.
 - 1. Jesus offers us the ultimate perspective of the realm of God.
 - 2. We need to let go of the fear of rejection and loss, the fear that drives us to cling to what we eventually must lose...
 - a. The fear that keeps us from saying what must be said...
 - b. The fear that keeps us from going where we must go...
 - c. The fear that keeps us from doing what needs to be done...
 - d. The fear that keeps us from being who we need to be.
 - 3. Imagine what the world would be like with a fearless Church...
 - a. Unafraid of losing worldly praise and esteem...
 - b. Unafraid of losing its possessions, buildings, stained glass, tax-exempt status, and its freedom to assemble!
 - c. What would we have—what could the Church look like?
 - 4. It might be like the ones in countries that aren’t free to gather...
 - 5. But which are experiencing an explosion of growth!?

III. SO...THESE FOOTSTEPS CAN ALSO BE FULFILLING.

- A. But fulfillment comes from self-denial and taking up our crosses.
 - 1. A pastor said: “There are at least four crosses in the world.”
 - 2. “But these are things worthy of giving our lives to and for—and these include love, truth, justice and beauty.”

3. "We are to take up one of these crosses and follow Jesus."
 4. "When we do, we deny ourselves on behalf of love, the pursuit of truth, the making of justice, and the creation of beauty."
 5. "We deny and devote ourselves—but we also find ourselves."
- B. Jesus tells us to speak the truth to power—and Dr. Walter Brueggemann has been doing it for decades.
1. He says: "Faithful gratitude believes that the God who has given us good gifts...has more good gifts to share."
 2. "While God's gifts are welcome, they do, in fact, disrupt."
 3. "God's gift of truth disrupts our systemic deceitfulness that denies our lethal social practices."
 4. "God's gift of generosity contradicts our selfishness."
 5. "God's gift of mercy interrupts our hard-hearted indifference."
 6. "God's gift of justice exposes our systemic injustice."
 7. "God's gifts amount to an inconvenient reality among us."
 8. "They remind us that what seems 'normal' continues a deep abnormality in which we can have no complacency."
- C. Jesus' 2000-year-old words remain amazingly relevant.
1. Ponder the parallels between this week's passage and what is happening in the streets and cities—here and around the world.
 2. What is motivating more people to "speak truth to power" now?
 3. Jesus tells us that if we do, we may suffer significant losses—read on in chapter 10 to see what he is talking about.
 4. Have you parted ways with any friends or family members because of your passionate differences of opinion?
 5. Jesus talks about a possible redefinition of family and the importance of becoming a part of a community.
 6. Would you give up your friends, your family members, your life...because of your faith?
 7. Would you lose your life because of your vocation or calling?
 8. We are seeing people on the front lines—protesters, law enforcers, peacekeepers, caregivers—who are taking those risks right now because of their calling.
- D. I heard an interesting conversation recently.
1. One asked: "What crime most changed the course of history?"
 2. After a few moments someone said: "Gavrilo Princip assassinating Ferdinand."
 - a. "The crime triggered World War I, led to the Revolution and the end of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires."
 - b. "It rewrote the world map, set the stage for World War II, and affects just about every person alive today."
 3. Other people shared different opinions and options.
 4. Then a woman asked: "What about the execution of Jesus?"
 - a. "It was an extreme travesty of justice, but his followers' belief that he rose from the dead kept the movement going..."
 - b. "The Roman empire ended...and the world changed forever...and the world continues to be transformed today."
- E. We are seeing those kinds of changes in many places on the planet.
1. Painful crimes from the past and present are galvanizing people.
 2. A global movement is saying "Enough!" to what has been.

3. Significant policies and procedures and rules and regulations and executive orders and directives are being made that are bringing about justice and sweeping reforms.
 4. Designating Juneteenth as a holiday was long overdue.
 5. The Supreme Court delivered two compassionate decisions last week.
 6. These are anxious times—but they are also amazing, hopeful times.
- F. Some of you are familiar with Brian McLaren and he says that “the surprise is not that Christians would care about justice.”
1. He says: “What is truly shocking is that we would succeed in missing this very obvious message in the Bible.”
 2. “It is my hope that if enough of us raise our voices right now—our children and grandchildren—when they hear the word ‘Christian’—will think about something far more oriented toward justice and compassion than most people think of today.”
- G. As we follow in his footsteps, we get to be a part of all of this!
1. And it does not have to be all that complicated.
 2. If we are feeling anxious, stressed, or fearful about what to do—let’s refocus.
 3. Jesus trimmed 600 commandments down to two!
 4. He gives us a “Great Commission”—not a “Great To-Do List.”
 5. “Love God, love your neighbor, follow me.”
 6. Micah trimmed them down to three and said: “Do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.”
 7. Jesus calls us to transform the world—even during a pandemic!
- H. In “A Vision of Hope for Our Time” Desmond Tutu proclaims:
1. “All over this magnificent world, God calls us to extend his kingdom of shalom-peace and wholeness...”
 2. “This is a realm of justice, of goodness, of compassion, of caring, of sharing, of laughter, of joy, of reconciliation.”
 3. “God is transfiguring the world right this very moment through us because God believes in us and because God loves us.”
 4. “What can separate us from God’s love? Absolutely nothing!”
 5. “And as we share God’s love with our brothers and sisters...”
 - a. “There is no tyrant who can resist us...”
 - b. “No opposition that cannot be ended...”
 - c. “No hunger that cannot be fed...”
 - d. “No wound that cannot be healed...”
 - e. “No hatred that cannot be turned into love...”
 - f. “And no dream that cannot be fulfilled.”
- I. Let it be so. Amen.