

Losing life, finding life

God of truth uncovered, you trace the sparrow's flight, and plumb the secret places of the heart: bring our fear and conflict into the light of your presence; help us to lose our hollow life and find our way to you; through Jesus Christ, the master and the slave.

A Collect for Proper 7A, Prayers for an Inclusive Church

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Jeremiah 20:7-13; Psalm 69:8-11, 18-20; Matthew 10:24-39

JUNE 26, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve apostles, "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 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! So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 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. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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; and one's foes will be members of one's own household. 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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

On Friday I had an experience we have all had living here, driving along under a radiant blue sky in an impossibly beautiful

landscape, caught again by the magnificence of this particular place – and then: a column of smoke rising and you realize it's a a

bit windy and you remember who lives near there and you recall the times a little spark became an inferno lasting days and costing lives of people and animals and millions of dollars, blackening everything in sight... It's here, but can all be swept away... it can all go up in smoke – literally....

And it seems life is like that: made up of both threat and promise, struggle and possibility, confidence and confusion. We can be ready to move ahead and we know we can make the journey, but just don't know which way to start out. Days seem light, bright, but then there's darkness, some remembered threat on the horizon.

How can we relax in what we're confident about or assured is true, when we don't know what is coming at us?

We hear those mixed messages in this reading from Matthew today – and we can be reminded that scripture does, through centuries and different cultures, continue to reflect the very human lives we live.

So in this brief passage from the tenth chapter of Matthew we find both the Jesus we want and the Jesus who scares us. We like God's eye being on the sparrow and counting the hairs of our heads to keep track of every aspect of each of us... but then not so sure about not bringing peace but a sword and

setting members of a household against one another....

Matthew is writing this gospel, telling this story of Jesus at the end of the first century and it reflects his life and the life of his community as second-generation Jewish Christians. By the time this is being written the temple in Jerusalem had its "911" moment; something everyone thought would be there forever was razed to the ground by the Romans in 70 AD.

More gentiles were entering what was a Jewish-messianic movement that arose after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the larger Jewish community was increasingly at odds with this group within the group. The whole Jewish community felt both their internal conflict and the hard press of the Roman occupiers.

So now it starts to be clear why a man would be set against his father or mother against daughter-in-law and so on....

Those in Matthew's community were like us: seeking God, loving God, finding their way to God through Jesus, wanting to carry on his vision and work of healing and wholeness in the world in the Spirit, but also struggling with what was not working, what was undermining them, their own fear, beset by the tensions that arise when one group calls the other "devil inspired" – dissension,

division, power dynamics, how to advance their cause and so on...

Part of the problem is the way in which we divide life into black and white, insiders and outsiders, what we know and what others *don't* know, our way or the highway, win or lose....

Jesus was beyond those exclusive views and ways of acting – and so it has been a curious and often painful interplay through the centuries of what we recall of Jesus and how we enact his life in the world. Humanly we are taken hostage by our vulnerabilities, our frailties and failings, our blindness, our greed. And then, even in the worst moments, we discover God in Christ again calling us from our personal and social divisions – whether in faith groups or national or cultural groups.

Apparently God really is counting the hairs on our heads – but not just mine and yours – rather, everyone's.

And so the challenge continues: how can we see, as Jesus saw, the holiness, the sacredness of Jew and gentile, male and female, slave and free, the goodness of the Samaritan?

Truly, everything, everyone is holy, all is God-given. How can this reality work its way more and more into the life of the world, leading us away from envy, division, violence and destruction? Look again at our

collect, the opening prayer today:

God of truth uncovered, you trace the sparrow's flight, and plumb the secret places of the heart: bring our fear and conflict into the light of your presence; help us to lose our hollow life and find our way to you; through Jesus Christ, the master and the slave. Amen.



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