

Jesus of Nazareth always comes asking disciples to follow him--not merely "accept him," not merely "believe in him," not merely "worship him," but to follow him: one either follows Christ, or one does not. There is no compartmentalization of the faith, no realm, no sphere, no business, no politic in which the lordship of Christ will be excluded. We either make him Lord of all lords, or we deny him as Lord of any.

Mere discipleship: radical Christianity in a rebellious world / Lee Camp. 2003

Related topics

For further study:

Paschal mystery; mystery of suffering; kingdom of God; cross; trust; faith; hope; eschatology; soteriology/salvation; prophetic life; discipleship; sin and grace.

Closing Prayer

True and faithful God,
you give courage to the fearful
and endurance to martyrs.

Sustain us as followers of your Son Jesus,
that with boldness and conviction
we may acknowledge him before the world.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers, Ordinary Time 12, Year A²

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999,*

Proper 7

19 to 25 June, if after Trinity Sunday

Principal Service readings

Jeremiah 20.7-13	Jeremiah's 'confessions'
Psalm 69.8-11 [12-17] 18-20 [or 69.14-20]	Cry for help from one insulted and betrayed
Romans 6.1b-11	Baptized into Christ Jesus
Matthew 10.24-39	Open and fearless speech; renouncing self to follow Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Open and fearless speech; the cost of discipleship

Jesus summoned the twelve and sent them out with the following instruction:
²⁴A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it 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!

²⁶So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For 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;

³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷Whoever 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; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.'

Matthew 10.24-39 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

Matthew's gospel, from which many of our gospel readings for this Year A of the three-year cycle are taken is sometimes known as the 'Church's gospel'. In it we read the Sermon on the Mount, and the standard form of the Lord's Prayer, as well as about Jesus giving the keys of the kingdom to Peter, with the phrase 'upon this rock I will build my Church'. In fact, the very word 'Church' appears only in this gospel. At twenty-eight chapters it is quite long compared with Mark's sixteen chapters. It is not surprising that it was placed first in the New Testament canon.

Today's gospel reading is part of what is known as the 'Apostolic Discourse' or the 'Discourse on the Mission'. Jesus reminds his disciples that they will experience persecution and rejection by their own people as they go out to preach the gospel. He encourages them not to be afraid of those who oppose the mission of Christ. They are to proclaim their mission with boldness – 'from the rooftops'. Before they heard the message they were in darkness, now they have heard they have come into the light, and having come into the light they have become light. Disciples are the light of Christ.

Matthew's Jesus uses Greek images when he speaks of the body being deprived of life but not the soul. The Greeks believed that the body was

subject to decay but the soul was immortal. Matthew makes the point that both body and soul are in God's hand, so he is the one to take note of. We can reflect that the soul is not inherently immortal, for God can destroy both, but he can also grant everlasting life, which is hinted at in his care for his people. The mention that 'the hairs of your head are all counted', indicates that God knows us better than we know ourselves. V.32 gives a sense of judgement but judgement is not only to condemn it is also to reward.

The evangelical mission demands that the gospel be preached, whatever discord or problem that causes, even if it creates division in families (Jesus quotes Micah 7.6). The message of the gospel is bound to conflict with other values – confrontation cannot be avoided. A gospel that bothers no one is no longer the gospel. Jesus' teaching is in line with Rabbinic teaching about following God rather than one's parents. The way of Jesus doesn't give protection from harm, but despite the risks, the disciple can be assured of their eternal worth and value.

Quotations

1

One does not surrender a life in an instant. That which is lifelong can only be surrendered in a lifetime. Nor is surrender to the will of God (per se) adequate to fullness of power in Christ. Maturity is the accomplishment of years, and I can only surrender to the will of God as I know what that will is.

Shadow of the Almighty: the life and testament of Jim Elliot / Elisabeth Elliot. 1958

2

If there is no element of asceticism in our lives, if we give free rein to the desires of the flesh (taking care of course to keep within the limits of what seems permissible to the world), we shall find it hard to train for the service of Christ. When the flesh is satisfied it is hard to pray with cheerfulness or to devote oneself to a life of service which calls for much self-renunciation.

The cost of discipleship / Dietrich Bonhoeffer. 1937

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.