

LENT 6 2011
Matthew 10:16-23; 11:20-24; 12:38-42; 16:1-12
April 13, 2011
Central, Anchorage

THE OTHER WAY

A motif or theme for these four readings, these “Missing Matthew” texts, is opposition. Jesus, his ministry and mission face opposition, controversy and conflict. He warns his followers that they also, at least in as much as they are faithful to him and live in his way, will face hostility, even persecution. We know this to be true, thus the early church father Tertullian commented: “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” The church grew despite the persecution.

So, proclaiming Jesus and following in his Way is not easy or popular. We are not called to be popular, nor are we called to be successful. We are called to be faithful.

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

To be faithful means being vulnerable and innocent, not powerful and in charge. This is not the wisdom of the world. This is the way of the cross. The gospel of Jesus proclaims grace and faith, not dominance and security; justice and peace, righteousness and reconciliation, not power and control. God is with us.

God’s Word forever shall abide, no thanks to foes, who fear it;
for God himself fights by our side with weapons of the Spirit.

Were they to take our house, goods, honor, child or spouse,
though life be wrenched away, they cannot win the day.

The Kingdom’s ours forever.

When Jesus asks us to follow, he asks for our lives, the whole of our lives. Too often, in our time, the Christian faith is sold as a way of life that leads to stability and order, to “green pastures” and “still waters” rather than “darkest valleys” and a “table in the presence of enemies”. Following Jesus is no picnic; it is a feast among angels and enemies, a feast on the way to the cross.

Thus, we hear Jesus chastising his own people, the most pious and religious among them, because the faith is not a show of piety; it is a journey of repentance, turning from our own way, from the way of the world, to go in the Way of Jesus. People want a religion that fits their habits, their presuppositions, their illusions. Jesus offers a way that challenges all of that. Being baptized into Christ Jesus means dying to the powers and principalities, and dying to self.

We want a “sign” from heaven to support our religion, to make us feel good, a pat on the back and a gold star in the record book to validate our religiousness. We want God’s “good housekeeping seal of approval.”

Jesus says this is not faith, but rather unfaith. It represents our “evil and adulterous generation” which lacks loyalty and integrity. We are not living the covenant God has made with us. We are the rich man dining sumptuously while poor Lazarus begs at our gate. We are people honoring God with our lips but our hearts are far from true. We are children in the marketplace saying, “We play the flute for you, so come on, dance!”

Jesus offers us an alternative vision and proclaims an alternative reality. We must rub the sleepy illusions from our eyes so as to see the world as it is and to see the world as God intends it to be.

We must rub the sleep from our eyes to read the signs of the times. To read the signs of the times is to see with the eyes of the prophet, which means we will be standing against the common wisdom and the popular illusions of the day: might makes right, the wealthy make the jobs, greed is good.

Rather than read the signs of the times, we want a sign from heaven, a sign which will not require us to change, not have our lives turned upside down, not have to die. Jesus refuses to give us any sign other than the sign of Jonah, i.e., the sign of death and dying which only then leads to new life as a gift from God. There is no way to get to Easter without Good Friday, no way to the resurrection without the cross. It is impossible to follow Jesus all the way to the empty tomb without dying to the world of lies, violence, greed and the idolatry of self.

Fresh from his encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees, Jesus has to deal with the disciples who are worried about bread to eat. Jesus tries to give them advice about the bread of life, telling them to beware of the leaven of the religious elite. The disciples don't catch on that Jesus is talking about the bread that truly matters, i.e., God's word and God's way. Because Jesus is faithful to God's word and God's way he will end up on the cross.

In closing, remember two weeks ago we looked at Matthew 7. Jesus, in a series of warnings, said that it really matters how we live, what we do: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." He said, "Enter through the narrow gate that leads to life." He said, "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." So, again in these readings, Jesus says that it matters how we live. Let us journey with Jesus, not in the world's way, but in the other way, the way that leads to life.

To God Alone Be Glory.

Amen.