

Teach Us

Psalm 86: 1-10, 16-17

Matthew 10: 24-39

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Psalm 86: 1-10, 16-17

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication. In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl. Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

Matthew 10: 24-39

“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.”

“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.”

Wow. Ouch. Those are hard, strange words to hear from Jesus, the Prince of Peace. It is almost impossible to reconcile these harsh words that Jesus has come to bring a sword and not peace, that he has come to set family members against one another and that to love our own child means that we are not worthy of Jesus Christ.

Our Christian faith over and over teaches us that Jesus is the very reason we can live peacefully, intentionally, with God. This relationship is the bedrock foundation of our faith. Jesus has many names that define him- Savior, Redeemer, Messiah, Son of God, the Great I Am- yet it is with the Prince of Peace that we find our comfort, our trust, our grounding, our identity with Jesus. The Prince of Peace alone is able to heal broken relationships, equip us for a balanced life, and offer us the assurance of eternal life.

So how do read these words and hold the tension, the confusion, the discomfort and awkwardness that rises up within us? What are we to learn from Jesus’ words? What lesson is Jesus teaching us? Could Jesus really be demanding that we choose between faith and family, or that our worth is measured only by how we carry his cross, or that there is no rest from sacrificing ourselves?

In *Let Us Trust*, pastor and poet Andrew King offers some insight into Jesus’ strong words, an insight that moves the image of the sword as metal and violent to instead be an image of love for what is life-giving. Jesus’ words are not an aggressive battle cry to deny the relationships of loved ones, but rather to have the right priorities and mindset. If we put our relationship with God first, if that is our highest priority relationship, then all the others will be held, tended to, and cared for in the right and loving perspective.....

As Jesus’s disciples we’re urged not to dread:
the hairs are all counted on each of our heads.
For as God holds the sparrows in loving concern
so our lives are held too; and in life we can learn
that when hardship comes, as it will, to the just,
God’s love is still near: it calls us to trust.

Yes, to trust that even the people with whom
we’re in conflict are loved; that the rooms
in God’s house are not only for those
who agree with our views, wear similar clothes.

The “sword” Jesus brings – love, sharp as a knife –
divides the deathly from that which brings life;
but neither hatred nor rage is given excuse –
caring’s the reason that sword is turned loose;
and if on occasion a family’s at odds
it may help to recall that all members are God’s
children, and thus equally cherished:
forget not forgiveness; let anger soon perish.

For Christ did not say we're forbidden to love
our children or parents, just not placed above
his way of the cross: his way of self-giving,
of mercy and grace – the way of full living.

Let us therefore repeat that we don't need to dread
(though the follicles fall from each of our heads!)
Just as God holds the sparrows in loving concern
our lives are held too; thus in life may we learn
that when hardship comes, as it will, to the just,
God's love remains near; and so, let us trust.....

Jesus' sword severs the relationships that we value over our relationship with him when they do not let us serve God with our whole mind, body, and heart. The sword redirects our values, attitudes and beliefs into certain behaviors.

Jesus' message is to teach us that what we hold with the highest regard will impact everything we do and believe. It will be the compass by which we navigate our lives. The sword cuts us out as individuals from a crowd response, from the herd mentality, from following a leader blindly, and requires us to have our own accountability. Jesus calls us to responsibility for our actions—or the inactions- of our faith practices. It is not enough to 'go along to get along.' Jesus teaches us as individuals—distinct from our parents, our siblings, our children,- that we bear duty, obligation and liability for our choices. He guides us to have God as our priority relationship so that our responsibilities are just, accurate and follow the right priorities. In bold, clear words, Jesus is ultimately asking us a straightforward question: who do you love the most?

His life, his ministry, his work that carries on through the Pentecost wind and fire of the Holy Spirit continues to teach us how to answer that question: who do you love the most?

The question is asked in such a way that it is hard to read. It is hard to hear. Yet that calls us to see the challenge of being honest in our answer. When we say that our relationship with God comes first, it means that we see what that sacred relationship is really expecting from us. We are to be reaching out to those in need, to be the voice of those who have been silenced, ignored or marginalized. We are to call out injustice when we see it. We are to offer tender care and compassion rather than judgment. And we may be called to do these things in response to our parents, our siblings, our children, our friends, our co-workers, our community, our elected officials or the stranger on the street.

This is not a measure of our *worth*—God's grace, love and mercy give all of us worth. Jesus calls us to be *worthy* of our Christian name—not a lip service kind of faith, not a simple "I'll pray for you," that is quickly forgotten, not a checkbook faith that has no experience with the trenches of poverty, racism, homelessness or living on the margins, but rather a faith that genuinely welcomes, supports and cares for others created in the image of the One we love the most. That is how we find our lives. Amen.