

Emmanuel July 21, 2020 Susan Peyton

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, "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."

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

"For I have come to set a man against his father."

When I hear this reading, I think of the Civil War. Not the Korean War, or the Revolution, the Civil War. Because it was a time of war within our country, not against another country. Civil, means ordinary citizens and their concerns. I'm not sure the Civil War was really about ordinary citizens, but about the wealthy citizens, who wanted things to stay as they were. Obviously, the Civil War has not been

forgotten in Staunton. I see the Confederate flag in the back of pickup trucks going up and down Greenville Avenue, flying from flag poles and on t-shirts. This year there will probably not be any re-enactments. In the National Park Service's website, I found an interesting story. And I quote, "In 1996, Congress designated eight counties (which includes Augusta, Highland, and, Rockingham,) in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia as the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District. The purpose of this National Heritage Area is to preserve and interpret the region's significant Civil War battlefields and related historic sites. That effort is ...to preserve the hallowed ground of the Valley's Civil War battlefields, to share its Civil War story with the nation, and to encourage tourism and travel to the Valley's Civil War sites." The Civil War is a part of American history. Here in the valley, we are physically surrounded by that history. And more than 150 years after the Civil War, it still has the power "to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother". In the late 70's I went to a reenactment in Winchester. My parents were from upstate New York, so I definitely was cheering for the wrong side. But seeing it made me think about fighting people you don't know. Your mission is to take over some land, regardless of how many are killed. It means knowing the hills and valleys, the geography of the land. Not worrying if you are ruining someone's crops. I think of the 12 and 13 year old drummer boys, who also helped carry stretchers. I know many enlisted and lied about their age, and wonder if their families ever knew what happened to them.

Friday was Juneteenth, celebrating June 19, 1865, the end of slavery. It is when the slaves were emancipated, or freed in Texas, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued. The Wall Street Journal described Juneteenth as "a celebration of the tenacity, work ethic, faith and entrepreneurial grit of black Americans."

In addition to Juneteenth, there have been a few other very large events this weekend. Yesterday was World Refugee Day, which is observed on June 20th each year. This global event honors the courage, strength and determination of women, men and children who are forced to flee their homes under threat of persecution, conflict and violence. From the Episcopal Public Policy Network: "The Episcopal Church has long been a forceful advocate on behalf of refugees, immigrants, and other at-risk groups. The public policy positions of The Episcopal Church regarding refugees are based on our faith tradition of welcoming the stranger and serving the "least among us." We seek to carry forth the voice of refugees, immigrants, and other at-risk uprooted groups for whom protection through better public policy is needed. This year we are renewing our commitment to those fleeing persecution."

Yesterday was also the rally for Trump in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The stadium was not filled, there were not 19,000 people. Instead there were a lot of empty seats, perhaps due to teenagers signing up for huge amounts of tickets, to ensure there

were empty seats.

And, today is Father's Day. Somehow it kind of got lost among the large events going on this weekend. So to all fathers and those acting as fathers, Happy Father's Day.

"I have come to set a man against his father." Many generations disagree with their parents. And I don't mean the toddler who says no to everything, or the teenager who is devastated her mother wants to go shopping with her. I'm talking about the differences between someone whose heart is open to new people, new ideas. As opposed to someone with a closed heart. Against new ideas, the way of Love, the chance to see people as individuals, not labeling them.

Many of you have either seen or read the message from Presiding Bishop Michael Curry to our church on May 30th. Here are some passages from that sermon:

"Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. We will still be doing it when the news cameras are long gone."

In the midst of COVID-19 and the pressure cooker of a society in turmoil, a Minnesota man named George Floyd was brutally killed. His basic human dignity was stripped by someone charged to protect our common humanity.

Perhaps the deeper pain is the fact that this was not an isolated incident. It's not just our present or our history. It is part of the fabric of American life.

But we need not be paralyzed by our past or our present. We are not slaves to fate but people of faith. Our long-term commitment to racial justice and reconciliation is embedded in our identity as baptized followers of Jesus. We will still be doing it when the news cameras are long gone.

That work of racial reconciliation and justice – what we know as Becoming Beloved Community – is happening across our Episcopal Church. That mission matters now more than ever, and it is work that belongs to all of us.

It must go on when racist violence and police brutality are no longer front-page news. It must go on when the work is not fashionable, and the way seems hard, and we feel utterly alone. It is the difficult labor of picking up the cross of Jesus like Simon of Cyrene, and carrying it until no one – no matter their color, no matter their class, no matter their caste – until no child of God is degraded and disrespected by anybody. That is God's dream, this is our work, and we shall not cease until God's dream is realized.

Is this hopelessly naïve? No, the vision of God's dream is no idealistic utopia. It is our only real hope. Real love is the dogged commitment to live my life in the most unselfish, even sacrificial ways; to love God, love my neighbor, love the earth and truly love myself. Perhaps most difficult in times like this, it is even love for my enemy. That is why we cannot condone violence. Violence against any person – conducted by some police officers or by some protesters – is violence against a child of God created in God's image. No, as followers of Christ, we do not condone violence.

Neither do we condone our nation's collective, complicit silence in the face of injustice and violent death. The anger of so many on our streets is born out of the accumulated frustration that so few seem to care when another black, brown or native life is snuffed out.

But there is another way. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, he made provision for the stranger's well-being. He helped and healed a fellow child of God.

Love, as Jesus teaches, is action like this as well as attitude. It seeks the good, the well-being, and the welfare of others as well as one's self. That way of real love is the only way there is.

Christian race is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Our prayers and our work for justice, healing and truth-telling must be unceasing. Let us recommit ourselves to following in the footsteps of Jesus, the way that leads to healing, justice and love. Amen.