

INTO GOD
Sermon for Pentecost 3A, Proper 7-Mt 10:24-39
LPC, 6/25/17

For those of you who like to know where a sermon is going, I'm going to start today by talking about a common real-life situation, then I'm going to do a little exercise to facilitate understanding of today's Gospel lesson, then I'm going to pull the two together by relating the Gospel lesson to the real-life situation.

First the real-life part: Have you ever been in a one-sided relationship? In love with someone who didn't love you? Or maybe you have a friend who seems to leave the entire responsibility for relationship maintenance on you. You're the one who always has to initiate contact, or suggest lunch. You're the one who always has to understand when an appointment or a promise is broken. The relationship is a priority for you, but it doesn't seem to be as much of a priority for the other person.

Please bring this situation to mind and hold it there for a moment. Now put this mental picture aside and we'll return to it in a minute.

Now the exercise. I am going to switch gears and read to you the climactic sentences my last five sermons. I will do this without connecting material. I'm doing this to make a point, which I will clarify soon.

Know what you are going to say to those who would challenge you, or to the challenges that spring up from within your own ego.

We may not see the wind, but we see its effects. We don't see the Holy Spirit, but we see its effects.

First we gape in awe. Then we go and share.

Harmony in distinctions... Distinctions in ultimate harmony... that could be a definition for love.

When you read the Bible, ask what the universal truth might be in your passage. Ask how it is authentic for you personally, and then ask, what way does love lie?

Did that make much sense to you? The words are obviously not nonsense. I'm sure if you had the text in front of you, you could make sense of each sentence and perhaps even place it in context, if you happened to hear the original sermon. But the lack of connecting tissue would make understanding the whole body of sentences a bit difficult, wouldn't it? You would just be getting your head around the vast wisdom in one pronouncement before you would have to shift gears slightly and get used to another sentence subject and set of predicates.

I have just offered you material that I trust is good and truthful, but I have offered it in a somewhat confusing format. I do not typically deliberately confuse people in my sermons, but I did it this morning to make a point about today's Gospel passage from Matthew.

In this passage we have a collection of sayings from Jesus. First he talks about how disciples reflect their teacher, then he talks about why there is no need for fear, then he says that those who acknowledge Christ will be acknowledged and those who deny Christ will be denied. Here we begin to transition into a darker set of teachings, for Jesus ends by saying he brings not peace but a sword, even into families, but that those who lose their life will find it. These are hard teachings, but that's not all that's hard.

Given the way these teachings are presented in Matthew we at first assume they are part of one continuous sermon. If this is so, Jesus must have had Attention Deficit Disorder. This so-called "sermon" hops from subject to subject, just as the sentences I just read to you from my own sermons hop from subject to subject when presented out of individual context. In the total context of Jesus' life and teaching you can make connections, but in the limited context of this one lectionary reading, a unifying message is difficult to discern.

It is likely that the Gospel-writer Matthew has here gathered together sayings of Jesus that were not originally part of a single sermon. Scholars say Matthew assembled his material from various sources. Thus what appears to be a single sermon here in Chapter 10 of his Gospel may in fact have been compiled from a number of different sermons. This accounts for this passage's apparent discontinuity.

Having made this point, let me return to the subject of the unequal relationship: a relationship where one party is investing way more than the other party. I think this theme may be a way of seeing the connections between the seemingly disparate teachings in today's reading.

God is the one in a one-sided relationship with human beings. God gives way more into God's relationship with us human beings than we can reciprocate. God loves us, and the rest of creation so much, that a sparrow does not die without God's knowledge. God knows and loves us so intimately that God knows how many hairs we have on our scalps. In common parlance, God is into us.

Are we anywhere near that into God? Are we anywhere near into God as we are into our family relationships? The fact is that God has put and continues to put way more into God's relationship with us that we could possibly reciprocate. God has given us life. God has even given God's Son for us. God in Jesus Christ, has died for us. All our blessings come from God. God is the one who keeps promises and appointments and is always ready to forgive our broken appointments and promises.

How do we respond to that? If we love God, if we want to love God, the realization of how much God's love surpasses ours must not inspire hopelessness at never being able to make the relationship equal. That relationship will never be equal. The appropriate response is first gratitude, and then desire to mirror back, in whatever tiny way we can, the limitless love that God has shown us, knowing that God rejoices at such attempts in the same way parents rejoice at baby steps.

God is into us. This is Good news. Are we into God?