

Matthew 10:24-39

A sermon preached on 25th June by Rev Nick Sharp

"A 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 ...

³⁴"Do 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.

Are you quivering in your boots after hearing that reading from the gospel?

Are you?

If not, I think you should be! But not as much as I've been quivering, trying to preach on it. I come to church to feel better, don't you? Then you get hit between the eyes by a bit of Bible like this!

Putting it in context, Jesus is preparing his disciples before sending them out, so that they can do everything that he is doing: preaching, healing, casting out demons, preparing the way for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Basically he's warning them this is going to cause bother. It's going to ruin their reputations, it's going to make them fall out with their families, and if you read all of Matthew Ch. 10, you'll find that Jesus had more to say which is a whole lot worse!



It's one of those speeches that makes you stand tall. But what has it got to do with us? It's all a lot humbler and more ordinary, isn't it?

Let me ask you a question, - think about the answer, but don't say anything out loud. "Is my church a welcoming church or an inviting church?" But if you call this "my church," then this question is for you. You have to choose.

Raise a hand if you chose inviting...

And if you chose welcoming...

We find it easier to be **welcoming** to someone who arrives at our door on Sundays, than we do to **invite** new people to come & give us a try.

It's quite rare these days for someone to spontaneously decide to go to church. So even if we pride ourselves on being welcoming, unless we are also inviting, we are seldom going to be able to demonstrate just how welcoming we are.

Michael Harvey, who started 'Back to church Sunday' spent a long time asking the question, "Why don't we invite our friends to take a closer look at Christ and his church?"

His answer is, because we're scared to. We're scared they might reject us, that they might think church is weird. We're scared they might ask us a question about Christianity, and we wouldn't know the answer.

What would you do if you weren't afraid?

A particularly pointed and perceptive question, and one in particular which can bring great insight is: "What would you do if you weren't afraid?"

Let's suppose we bump into a friend we haven't seen for a while, and we ask how they're doing and they say "Not so good," and tell us all about their troubles. "I'm so sorry," we say, and go on our way.

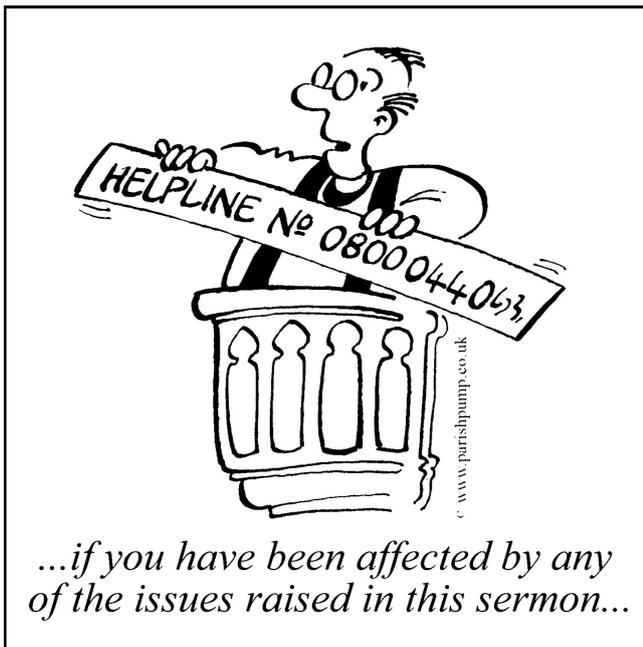
But – what would we do if we weren't afraid? Well we might offer to pray for our

needy friend. Maybe not right there in the supermarket queue, but when we're back home. Except that talking about prayer is embarrassing, scary even. So we don't pray, we don't bring God into the situation, and we and our friend miss out.

You could have Bible study groups, however there are many people who never come. Maybe they're too busy, but maybe sometimes its fear that keeps them away. "What if I'm asked a question about the Bible I can't answer? What if I look stupid, if I look like I haven't got much actual faith?"

But if they stopped and asked themselves, "What would I do if I wasn't afraid?" They might dare to turn up one evening and then they might discover not only is the Bible an incredibly rewarding and inspiring book, but also studying it with others is actually fun!

So we need courage too.



Back to the pep talk

I'd better come back to what Jesus did say in his pep talk in Ch 10. He said two things.

1 – you're loved, deeply, deeply loved.

2 - even though you're afraid, I still want you to tell people about me.

'2 sparrows, sold for a penny. Yet not one of them falls to the ground without your Father's consent. As for you he's counted the hairs on your head! So don't be afraid, you are worth more than many sparrows'.

There is an experiment, anyone can do in order to test whether or not God loves you. Shall we do it now? (*Ask people to close their eyes and breathe. Explain that it is God who gives us breath, and if he withdrew his loving, sustaining support from us, our breath would be taken away*)

God sees you, God knows you, God loves you, every moment of every day. And, Jesus tells us, I want you to tell others of this love, even if it's hard, even if you're afraid. Even if it means choosing between the nearest and dearest people to you, and the God who gives you breathe.

Now relax – it very seldom comes to such a point. But this is a hard passage, so I must finish with a hard question. If it actually did come to it, what would you do if you weren't afraid? Could you trust God enough, that he loves you and your family so much, to work things together for good?

Then be a disciple. Live God's love. Do it with generosity and joy, imagination and courage.



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