

***“Solidarity”**
(Matt 10:24-39)
June 21, 2020

*“A disciple is not above the teacher ... it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher.” Jesus was not trying to establish *some kind of hierarchy, like between masters and slaves, teachers and students, fathers and children, that must be respected and invite his disciples to conform to that power structure. He was inviting his followers *to enter into a space of discomfort and division. *A space that is not unfamiliar to people who are willing to make sacrifices. Jesus invited them to step away from their comfort zone, to expose themselves to individuals and groups that had different or even opposing agendas, to give up their private space so that they could become friends to the marginalized, and rivals to the privileged.

In today’s scripture, Jesus continued his conversation we have studied last week, let his followers know the probable consequences of following him. One day, the community that is formed under his name would face struggles in *leadership, *tradition, and *ritual practice.

**“They have called the master of the house Be’elzebul.” Jesus spent a lot of time with people who gathered around him, *sacrificed even his time for food and rest so that he could heal more people who were spiritually, mentally, and psychologically sick. But he was accused of using the power of demons. (Mark 3:20-22) Are the churches and missionaries in a better situation? *Educational, economic, and medical help were brought to

developing countries. They were facing the same criticism. If their motives were not named openly as demonic, they were called colonial, with the purpose to gain political control over those countries. Was that a fair criticism? Were there other alternatives to provide help? *Should all the foster families who adopted indigenous children be criticized as having the intention to cause them harm? It's always easy to judge after the fact. The role of leadership was not easy, and it will never be. That's the reason why we try to maintain the Gathering Place, the community meal provided every Thursday evening, as an ecumenical event. We hope that would minimize any criticism that might pop up, for whatever reason.

***“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” *It seems to be a universally accepted standard for people to take care of their parents and their children. *It seems to be right and important for religious people to honor their scriptures, places of worship, spiritual practices, and spiritual leaders. But Jesus brought with him a much deeper understanding. It's natural for us to take care of our own. However, *does 'natural' always mean 'good'? Naturally, all living beings will die. Why then do we seek for 'eternity'? Naturally, sickness would weaken or even kill us? Why then do we produce medications, antibiotics, and vaccines, and have medical practitioners trained to fight against nature? Jesus saw that our natural tendency to take care of our own might not be something God wants for us *if this natural tendency goes to an extreme. Traditions preserve certain values, just like

flower buds before blooming. “What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.” *Those values must be exposed for re-evaluation. Jesus wanted people to remember that *observing Sabbath is to give God’s creation a break. He wanted people to know that God is not like the other gods, *trapped in temples, and served only those who offered sacrifices, like customers. He also wanted people to know that spiritual practices like prayer *are not devices to get access to God in case God is being forgetful. He also wanted people to look for leadership that would lead and care about the needs of the needy and would take extreme actions if necessary, *just like the prodigal father.

***“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.” Jesus wanted his followers to learn *to see the value and reality hidden behind the physical world. The world is mythical. It takes time and effort to learn how to unlock them before we can see the meaning behind them. *Sparrows, *hair, *parents, children, *happiness, mourning, grief, *sickness, even birth, and death are all mythical. Unlock them and then we shall be at a deeper level, be closer to a better understanding of God’s purpose.

At this point, I would like to name two persons. The first one is *Steve Jobs. If you use Apple products, you should have heard of him. He was the chairman, CEO, and co-founder of Apple Inc., a successful person then. Well, he used marijuana and LSD while he was in college. He attended Reed College in 1972 and dropped out that same year. The world that we have

created and supported keeps trying to put a label on everyone. Achiever, loser, procrastinator, addicts, etc., etc. *We are more than that.

The second person I want to mention is *Bill Gates. I think you know him more than I do. He's one of the five richest people in the world. He is very smart since he was young. He enrolled at Harvard College in 1973 and left after two years. Should he be considered a loser? Of course not. He started his own computer software company that year. Here's his explanation of his leave: "If things hadn't worked out, I could always go back to school. I was officially on leave." *There are different options to identify who we are.

So, *who am I? what are we? Jesus has invited his followers, including us, *to take sides with the marginalized, the underprivileged, the least of the least. Yes, I know. Those are the labels being used on someone who didn't meet certain standards, standards that would get them labels like great, successful, competitive, excellent, or even greater, more successful, more competitive, or the best. However, those goals are not for everyone, and they might not be the best themselves. Do you think it'll be easier if people step back a bit, forget about the extreme approaches and *try a balanced one? Let's say to work with a balanced, sustainable budget? Just look at what our government is doing. A balanced budget is not easier. It might require an even more sophisticated skillset for that kind of work.

Last week I mentioned the emergence of the 'M-shaped society', a polarized society with the extremely rich and the extremely poor. Do you

think the M is shaped like *this? No, it's like *this, since the size of the middle class is shrinking and disappearing, and more and more middle class would fall into the low-income sector. Jesus models for us where to stand, *to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering. We should not just talk about it but to act on it. As disciples of Jesus, be prepared *to enter uncomfortable spaces that disrupt our relationships to power and our relationships with those closest to us. In doing so, *we make God's love and justice more fully present in the world. Amen.