

Sunday Update
21st June 2020

Matthew 10:24-39

24 A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

26 'So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

32 'Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

34 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law –

36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

37 'Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

My attitude to coronavirus from the start has been "it won't beat me!" I have tried to keep that attitude for most of the last 13 weeks, determined that life will not be defined by this virus, either as an individual, or as a church leader. I suppose that was why I was determined that the Church doors should be open on March 22nd at the very beginning of this pandemic, an act of defiance that we would not be beaten down by this, until it became obvious that the building was to be shut. That sense of determination has been with me most days, though there are times when I simply feel fed up and wish that it would go away so that we could move on to what the "new normal" looks like and what the future will be.

There are two attitudes to life when it is tough. (Well, there are probably more than two, but broadly speaking...!) One of these is that kind of determination I've outlined already, a determination not to be beaten down by the tough things we face, to stand up in their face and confront them head-on. "When the going gets tough, the tough get going!" The other broad way of facing tough times in life is to give in to them and let them overwhelm us, to be constantly afraid and anxious, and to be unable to function in the way that we used to function. One of these is not better than the other; they are different. To some extent, our response depends on the nature of the circumstances that we face and is also shaped by the kind of people that we are.

In our Bible passage today, Jesus is giving His disciples some insight into what life will be like for them as disciples in the days to come. You might think that Jesus would paint a rosy picture to encourage them to persevere as disciples, but He tells them like it is; surely they will all want to give up when they discover how hard it will be! As He tells them about their life, this insight is interspersed with

examples of Jesus' own life and what life is like for Him. The whole piece begins "*A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master*" (v.24) so His friends will understand that whatever Jesus says about Himself, will be true of them and they can't expect anything else. This passage is hugely challenging for us because there is something here about the reality of being a Christian in our world; maybe we wish it was different, but how much of this is true of our world!

We will be mis-called and mis-accused. Jesus was accused of being in league with Beelzebub, the devil! People misunderstood His miracles and His power to do extraordinary things. In our history, the Church and Christians have been accused of all sorts of things because the world has not understood or deliberately mis-accused the church to try to undermine our credibility and witness.

We have been afraid of people who accuse us, understandably so because they breathe venom and hatred in our direction. In the place of fear, Jesus reminds us that God knows us and our fears and that He cares for us. The sparrow was cheap food in Jesus' time, the cheapest of birds, but God cares for them; how much more will He care for you? Don't be afraid of other people but love God and hold Him in high esteem for His love for us.

Our witness creates division. That's not our intention; that was not Jesus' intention, but it was the inevitable consequence of His ministry. It happened because people reacted in two ways to Jesus, either they loved and believed Him or they hated and rejected Him; people were divided over His message. The same thing still happens in the world today: our witness creates the same kind of division when some believe and others reject. Then it becomes our fault in the eyes of some!

There is a conflict of loyalties. These are hard words on the surface: "*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me...*" (v.37) Jesus' family thought He was mad; they tried to get Him to stop, at times. Later they changed their minds – Mary watched at the cross and at least one of His brothers was a leader in the early church. How do we manage this conflict of loyalties when it arises? Who wins? Jesus talks about cross-bearing as the way for the disciple, just as one day it would be for Jesus. The disciple put Jesus at the centre of life and everything else fits in around Him and Jesus influences every other part of our life.

So much of this was Jesus' life; He faced all of these things. He faced these tough things with courage and determination and He promises these qualities to us too. We might think, looking at all of this, that it is a surprise that anyone would want to take this on; surely being a Christian is just too tough. However, the evidence suggests that the cost of being a Christian inspires in people a sense of "here is a cause worth fighting for" and telling people how hard it will be acts as an inspiration to embrace the decision to follow Jesus. It is a cause that engages us for our whole life; it requires determination, courage, loyalty and faith.

One last thing: there is a privilege and a reward. "*Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.*" (v.32) Solidarity! Jesus stands with us. Jesus understands what life is like for us; He knows what it means for life to be tough; He stands with us. He loves us and cares for us; He promises to be with us always and everywhere. Because He stands with us, we are inspired to stand with Him, to be loyal, to live life His way.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, that Jesus is our Lord, our Master; we thank You that He lived life with patience and courage, even in the face of many difficulties, even on the way to the cross. Thank You for Your endless love for us in which You stand with us always. Inspire us to follow Jesus; help us to overcome the tough things in life that we face; help us to be loyal witnesses to Jesus and His love for us.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Pray for:

- The mission of the Church: our local church, churches across Scotland, churches across the world, to be outward-looking churches, concerned for people we meet outside the building, concerned for the needs of our communities.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital and families who can't visit; pray for people you know by name.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- The opening up of lockdown, to be done carefully and not recklessly; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- For people working to find a right way for our schools: Head Teachers, Council leaders, the Scottish Government; help them to find a way that meets the needs of our children and young people as much as possible.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”, for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- Children and young people at home, missing friends from school, missing the contact with other people. Parents working, schooling children, trying to care for other family members.
- Those who are furloughed from work and those who have lost their jobs and have no prospect of a new job soon pray for a sense of purpose when they are away from paid employment.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- Other parts of the world, suffering as we are, in the same situation and with the same needs. The people of the USA, trying to come to terms with issues of racism, as in other places. Syria and Yemen still locked in civil war.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Immortal invisible God only wise

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA>

How deep the Father's Love for us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzQj7XvKFmA>

Blessed Assurance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuyf1YQvcwY>

Praise, I will praise you Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWuTvpiVEmY>

Stand up, Stand up for Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHE9VhSxvh4>

Heather's A-Z of videos: the latest is N <https://youtu.be/eHN3FeWzPYE>

Favourite Bible passage:

Do you have a favourite Bible passage? Why not tell us what it is. Here's what to do: pick your favourite Bible passage, then video yourself reading it and in a sentence explain why you picked it. E-mail the video to me and we'll collect them on the Youtube channel or the church website. Give it a go! You can see the latest of these at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtAet-tORqo&t=1s>

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#
- There will be a service on BBC1 at some time on Sunday morning.

When the going gets tough

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

Pray

Living God,
being a Christian can be hard.
Thank you for a safe space
to enjoy your presence
here and now. **Amen.**



Do something...

Spend some time in your garden or outside and take notice of the birds and wildlife you see around you. If you wish, you could count it all! Listen for the noise of nature. Remember that God knows all about the birds, but you are more treasured and cherished by Him.

Question...



Can you count the number of hairs on someone's head? Find a partner, set a timer for 60 seconds and see how many you can count before the time runs out. How amazing is it that God knows the number of hairs on everyone's head?!

Play together...

Take a walk around your house or garden, playing follow the leader. Imagine you are walking through different scenarios: mud, fog, blizzard, on hot sand. Change the setting each time you complete a circuit of your walk. How did it feel to walk through the harsh conditions? Today's story is about the journey of life being hard, but God is always with us to help us.

Or you could read or watch the story "*We're going on a bear hunt*" and talk about the same questions.

Read the Bible...

Use the actions (see italics) to tell this story from Matthew 10:26-33.

Jesus said, 'Don't be afraid! (*shake your head*)

It might be hard following me, but God cares for each one of you. (*hug yourself*)

God cares for every little sparrow, but you are more special to God than a whole flock of sparrows. (*lock your thumbs together and make a bird*)

You are so special that God knows how many hairs are on your head. (*run your fingers through your hair*)

Even when things are hard and tough, (*make a fist and bang it on the palm of the other hand*) don't be afraid.' (*shake your head*)



Talk together...



Jesus tells his disciples that being a disciple may involve suffering, but no matter how small, they are valued by God.

- Why do you think Jesus was warning his disciples about what was to come?
- Why do people find it difficult to tell others that they go to church and believe in God?
- Who would you like to tell about Jesus? How could you do that?
- 3 times Jesus tells his disciples not to be afraid, why do you think that was important? What promise does Jesus give us if we are afraid?
- How would you finish the sentence "When the going gets tough..."?

Praise together...



This song is a reminder that we should always lean on Jesus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2BqmkJc4Tt4&list=PLXJYj0dEY4WrE2NUpLE9s06WP3O2BllMz&index=20>

Pray together...

Jesus, help us to follow in your footsteps.
Jesus, catch us when we fall or fail, and walk beside us through this week.

Amen.

Make something...

Bird feeders: you'll need: pipe cleaners, wool, cheerios (or similar)

Fold one end of the pipe cleaner into a tick shape. Thread the cereal onto the pipe cleaner leaving a 2cm space at the end.

Twist the two ends of the pipe cleaner together, making a ring. Use a length of wool to attach the bird feeder to a branch.

