



“Choices & Consequences”

Pastors Andy and Jim CastroLang

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Scripture (ERV):

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ “Students are not better than their teacher. Servants are not better than their master. ²⁵ Students should be happy to be treated the same as their teacher. And servants should be happy to be treated the same as their master. If those people call me ‘the ruler of demons,’ and I am the head of the family, then it is even more certain that they will insult you, the members of the family!

²⁶ “So don’t be afraid of those people. Everything that is hidden will be shown. Everything that is secret will be made known. ²⁷ I tell you all this secretly, but I want you to tell it publicly. Whatever I tell you privately, you should shout for everyone to hear.

²⁸ “Don’t be afraid of people. They can kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. The only one you should fear is God, the one who can send the body and the soul to be destroyed in hell. ²⁹ When birds are sold, two small birds cost only a penny. But not even one of those little birds can die without your Father knowing it. ³⁰ God even knows how many hairs are on your head. ³¹ So don’t be afraid. You are worth more than a whole flock of birds.

³² “If you stand before others and are willing to say you believe in me, then I will tell my Father in heaven that you belong to me. ³³ But if you stand before others and say you do not believe in me, then I will tell my Father in heaven that you do not belong to me.

³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace. I came to bring trouble. ³⁵ I have come to make this happen:

‘A son will turn against his father.

A daughter will turn against her mother.

A daughter-in-law will turn against her mother-in-law.

³⁶ Even members of your own family will be your enemies.’

³⁷ “Those who love their father or mother more than they love me are not worthy of me. And those who love their son or daughter more than they love me are not worthy of me. ³⁸ Those who will not accept the cross that is given to them when they follow me are not worthy of me. ³⁹ Those who try to keep the life they have will lose it. But those who give up their life for me will find true life.

Sermon:

Pastor Andy: Scripture has this way of punching you in the gut, shocking you, knocking the wind out of your sails.

Certainly, over the years, many a parent has heard this text and said, “What?! This can’t be right!” We don’t want our church life undermining our social life and family rules!

But in being a follower of Jesus, we have to admit, that it can truly unsettle the world we are comfortable in...I think those early folk who were reading this gospel from Matthew were already embroiled in the changes and unsettling messages of Jesus, and for them, these words were a comfort.

These folks had already received insult and scorn for choosing to follow the Rabbi, Jesus. The Jewish leadership were already kicking some of them out of the faith communities they had been born and raised in.

In calling Jesus Lord and Messiah, in calling Jesus the Savior of the world, they were already in trouble with the Roman imperial rule, that said Caesar was the savior of the world.

These folks already had experienced families torn asunder by religious argument and conflicting values. They were already up to their necks in the mire of social conflict! They already experienced families arguing about the rules of faith regarding Sabbath, purification, temple sacrifice, disease; they were already experiencing conflict over the roles of women and children in the Jesus community, of uncircumcised Gentiles and pagans in their midst.

We know something about this, too, in our own day; yes we do! I’ve had collegial relationships abruptly end after my church ordained a lesbian friend into ministry. She was ready, she was good, she was called and we rejoiced to ordain her! But these collegial pastors didn’t just let our friendship wither, no, they told me, in hard, clear language, that they would not continue to speak to me or my church people because we had done this heretical thing. That hurt for sure.

Pastor Jim: “That hurts for sure”.

I am sure all of us here have had some significant hurts in our life. And sometimes these hurts have come because of decisions we’ve made. I want to take you way back. Andy told a story of 2007. But our story goes back to 1981 when I was a Roman Catholic priest in Fort Collins, Colorado. This young woman walked into the church office with her friend Cindy on August 4th. She was getting ready to start her new position in organizing our campus ministry outreach program to Colorado State University across the street. Some of you have heard the lengthy and juicy parts of this story. There are many parts. (Around a campfire here at N-Sid-Sen would be a good place to lay out the whole story. Maybe we can do that some night.)

For our purposes today, let me tell you that that fateful meeting of Jim and Andy totally disrupted our lives. It was the first of many upsets in our journey that have brought us here today. This story led to long-term changes to our family relationships. It was not just that we fell in love quickly and irrevocably, as Andy stole me from the Catholic Church. It was the decisions we would make in the months and years ahead about our call to follow Jesus and to be in ministry in new ways.

The decisions I made were crushing to my Mom and Dad. There were periods of no communication. There were emotional arguments. There were significant celebrations within my family structure – starting with our wedding – where refusing to attend was used to communicate their disapproval of the path we had chosen. There were regrettable words spoken with intent to hurt.

As my sister grew in her conservative Catholic faith, we became estranged for a long time. Our decisions through the 1980's took us to the far reaches of progressive – not orthodox-Catholicism, and then out into ecumenical circles, and then to exploring other denominations, and that led us into the wonderful lap of the United Church of Christ when we joined a UCC church in 1990.

This is what Jesus is warning about in Matthew's Gospel today. This is not hero worship, to simply admire the ways of Jesus.

This is a path that can lead to serious relational tension, even within our most intimate family structures. The path of Jesus can lead us to restructuring all of our ways and open up more vistas to the very big promises of the God of this Love Creation.

As a disciple, what we have learned in our family systems and what has been embedded in our institutions will be seriously challenged. This will put us at odds with people in power, and people close to us who have a stake in our lives.

So, Andy...did I get it right...where do we go from here?

Pastor Andy: Except for that one lie (I never “stole” him from Roman Catholicism, we both walked away!) I suggest this possibility:

Jesus didn't really care too much about supporting the Roman structure of family, or the Jewish one either.

He knew that families were often oppressive, controlling, punitive and harsh. He wanted family to look like that one father and the two sons in the parable of the Prodigal.

Loving and ridiculously generous, forgiving, cherishing, celebrating!

For Jesus, I think family was meant to look like the wedding at Cana, with more than enough

wine to celebrate for days! In the “family” of Jesus there is no lack, no shame, no poverty...just party!

But if a biological family can't or won't be that big and generous, loving and celebrative...then we who are the siblings of Christ, the disciples of Jesus; we are to be that big hearted and celebrative!

- When someone walks into our churches, we need to reflect Jesus, not Caesar.
- When we step outside of our churches, when someone is lonely, or hungry, or frightened, oppressed, or outcast...then we should embrace them with the welcome of Jesus and the huge generous love of our Creator God.
- And being their ally will sometimes ruffle some feathers – cause relational tension either within our biological family or out there.
- Yet, we have our vocation from Jesus, not society. And we learn from him, how to be family. It requires nothing less than brave freedom, to love and to serve others.
- No matter what.

Pastor Jim: So now, as we each take a look at our own lives...

Can you recall times that you said or did something that ruffled feathers...where you experienced pushback, sometimes a lot?

Why did you do it? Was it a conscience thing or part of your faith commitment? What relational tension have you experienced because you held to your convictions, the deepest truth of your heart and your understanding, when something important was at stake?

Jesus wants us to be aware of what we are doing!
This choice to be a disciple has consequences.

Pastor Andy: We don't have to know every step ahead as we follow Jesus, as we live into the glorious promise of a Kingdom of God that is filled with peace and justice, joy and hope, welcome and inclusion.

We do need to recognize that the Kingdom of God that Jesus lived and shared is glory for us, but not for some others...there will be push back.

But we don't work for this future alone...every Sunday when we gather, some of us are strong and ready for the struggle, some of us need a hand to hold, a shoulder to lean on.

We are that other kind of family, the “family of Jesus, the children of God”, and this family transcends biology and cultural messages of oppression, fear and woe: we are here for one another, and for the healing of the world, some of us in Colville, some of us in Spokane. We are disciples, together!

Hallelujah, Amen!