

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

**MIRROR IMAGE: US CONFESSING CHRIST
CONFESSING US**

Matthew 10:24-39

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Analysis by Paul Jaster

24A 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 Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

26So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

32Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

34Do 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.

DIAGNOSIS: Faithless & Fearful

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Silent in the Court (of Public Opinion)*

Jesus taught his disciples many things in secret (in parables) not to provide them with a model to follow, or because he was afraid of people, but rather to gain time to preach the good news of the kingdom and allow Gospel seeds to germinate before the trying events of his death and resurrection would make all things clear. Unfortunately, all too many Christians act as though the death and resurrection of Jesus never happened, the Spirit was not given, and the time for bold, fearless, public witness has not yet come. They live on the bygone side of Pentecost, not on this side. We know the parables of Jesus well. We have "internalized" them. But we whisper these "secrets" only to "insiders" (our fellow Christians). We do not verbalize them boldly in daily life, that is, in the court of public opinion.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Afraid of People*
Reason: We are afraid that people might judge us and what we have to say. We don't want them to think that we are weird. Or, a bunch of "Jesus freaks." Or, closed-minded or pushy. Vibrant witness that insists on the necessity of Christ and his cross seems too intolerant, narrow, and intense in a pluralistic culture. Better to tone it down and be tolerant and non-confrontational of the theology of others. But, a non-

confessional “internalized faith” is not yet the faith that Jesus desires. What Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One, seeks are people who are willing to “declare publicly that they belong to me” precisely in the face of all the other options and alternatives on the market. Jesus died for us and rose for us. He “owns” us. That’s what Jesus wants us to say—verbally, publicly—in a way that “takes up the cross and follows.”

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Dis-owned by Jesus and Therefore God*

Not taking up the cross and confessing Jesus, the Crucified and Risen One, in the court of public opinion results in Jesus not confessing us before his Father in heaven. If we do not confess that we belong to Jesus, then Jesus will not confess that we belong to him. Un-owned by Jesus, we are “on our own” before a judge who can destroy both body and soul in hell...eternally. Without our response of faith, what Jesus “mirrors” to God is our rejection of him. And the corresponding mirror image of this (which Matthew 10 reflects back to us) is God’s rejection of us. We are dis-owned by God eternally because we refuse to be owned by Jesus in a cruciform way in our daily walk of life. There is no pluralistic “universalism” here. A Christ-confessing faith (or lack of it) makes a difference as far as God’s judgment of us is concerned.

PROGNOSIS: Fearless & Faithful

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Befriended by Christ*

Although we are often faithless and fearful servants/slaves/disciples/witnesses, what Jesus “mirrors” to us on the cross is the forgiving and unfailing love of God. This is the Gospel message of Easter. Jesus is crucified in the court of public opinion for loudly and publicly befriending sinners and elevating them from sinful slaves to the level of God’s own most

intimate family. In fact, he is crucified by the highest representatives of state and religion (Caesar & the high priest). But God raises Jesus from the dead to mirror back to us that Jesus' befriending is indeed God's own friendship. By this saving act of Jesus, a power is unleashed that is greater than family ties or any human court of law or the social pressure to conform. Even one's blood ties and obligations to one's closest family are superseded. Of this alternative family (those who catch what is going on and cling to Christ in faith), the risen and ascended Jesus says to his heavenly Father with a special twinkle in his eye, "they belong to me." And God looks down from the judgment seat at the obedient death of Jesus and twinkles back and says, "Son, you did everything I asked of you. You were faithful all the way to the cross. Your word is good enough for me. Any family friend of yours is a friend of mine."

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : Fearless

And, as we all know, it is good to have a friend in high places. Since those who cling to Jesus have a friend in the highest place of all (the judgment throne of heaven), they are fearless in their witness. They do not worry about what to say. Rather, they take Jesus at his word and trust that what they are to say will be given at that time. For in the end it, is not they who speak but rather the Spirit of the heavenly Father speaking through them. It is Pentecost. They are merely reflecting a Word and reality that is simultaneously being spoken. It is us confessing Jesus confessing us. And confessing Christians know that times of trial are some of the best opportunities to witness to the faith that is in us. Christ and the early Christians got a lot of mileage out of it, as have a lot of faithful, fearless confessors since.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Confessing Christ

And what is it we say? We confess Jesus confessing us. What we say on earth "mirrors" what Jesus says in heaven. And what Jesus

says in heaven “mirrors” what we say on earth. The first martyr after Jesus, Stephen, does precisely this in Acts 7:56: “Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.” Some preachers wryly claim that the “deacon” Stephen should have stuck with “distributing food to the widows” and leave the preaching to the professionals. But, he certainly got the “take up the cross and follow” part right when he said, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” In losing his life by publicly confessing Christ, he found Life; and he “mirrored” the forgiving and unfailing love of God even for those who crucify him. Bingo! The disciple is like the teacher, and the slave is like the master. Matthew 10 is the source of Robert Bertram’s confessional axiom: “How we confess Jesus depends upon how he confesses us. And how Jesus confesses us depends upon how we confess him.” Our confession and Christ’s confession go hand in hand. His faithful witness of us and our faithful witness of him may not make any difference in the court of public opinion, which generally opposes and rejects such a witness. But, Jesus wants us to know that it does make a difference as far as eternity is concerned with the only Judge that ultimately counts.