

Text Matthew 10:24-39; Romans 6:1b-11  
Theme Insisting on Change  
Subject Confessing Jesus challenges every institution  
Occasion 4<sup>th</sup> after Pentecost - June 25, 2023 – New Song ECUA, Coralville, IA

Today is the 493<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to Charles V, Emperor of Rome<sup>1</sup>. The document tells what matters the Reformers agreed with the Roman Catholic Church and what they disagreed.

Soon members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Episcopal Church USA will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Called to Common Mission<sup>2</sup>. With these large theological event anniversaries, I enthusiastically told Pastor Stewart I would be basing my sermon on the second reading from Romans 6.

Over these weeks I've intensified my study. I listened again to the closing of the Gospel reading from Matthew – the words I just read.

I could not let this vigorous teaching from Jesus hang without comment

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**Whoever 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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.**<sup>3</sup>

These two verses have my attention

I'll eventually show you how Jesus is insisting on change in this teaching

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The Good News according to Matthew IS good news – think of it as a letter

The Jesus story written with a point of view to a particular people

A common view is Matthew was written to first century Jewish Christians

As Matthew tells it, Jesus began teaching his disciples in chapter 5

And by the end of chapter 7 we're told crowds had been gathering and following too

We're taken on a tour thru Galilea beginning on the north shore of the Sea of Galilea<sup>4</sup>  
seems Matthew is showing us the landscape of what was happening

Jesus is welcoming and healing –

- A leper
- A Centurion's servant

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<sup>1</sup> June 25, 1530

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Called\\_to\\_Common\\_Mission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Called_to_Common_Mission)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 10:37-38

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 8:1-9:38

- Some are invited to come along but they have other commitments
- Jesus calms a storm and amazes the disciples who are with him in the boat
- Jesus met and healed 2 demon possessed men who had been living in a graveyard – Jesus sent the demonic spirit into a herd of pigs that then thru itself into the lake. (Note, the townspeople asked Jesus to leave their neighborhood. This wasn't a Jewish neighborhood – they farmed hogs.)
- So Jesus crossed to the other side: he was healing paralyzed people and forgiving people AND the Jewish lawyers were not happy - labeled Jesus a blasphemer
- Jesus called Matthew, a tax collector, to follow
- Jesus ate with other tax collectors and sinners – this time leaders of the Jews asked why he was doing this – **“I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”**<sup>5</sup>

Jesus is with people in deep need,  
people who are ignored or outcast by the religious

Jesus brought 12 disciples together and he sent them out to do what he'd been doing:  
**As you go, proclaim the good news, “The kingdom of heaven has come near.”  
Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.”**<sup>6</sup>

Curiously, Jesus sent them with a qualifier

**“Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**<sup>7</sup>

The new teaching of Jesus wasn't welcomed by Gentile hog farmers  
By the end of Matthew there IS a great sending: TELL EVERYBODY<sup>8</sup>

But who then are the “*lost sheep of the house of Israel*”?                      And why only them?

My hunch is that Jesus is insisting on change

What we've learned so far in Matthew's report while touring the Galilean landscape,  
Jesus was welcomed by the people

The Jewish authorities, scribes and leaders of synagogues, wanted nothing to  
do with Jesus

As if to say, “*Quit it Jesus; leave the people alone; get out.*”

Jewish culture was a mess – so steeped in tradition and custom with no room, for  
people

Not listening to the people: each one unique and wonderfully made  
Jesus teaches God does care

Cares for the sparrows                      Knows your hair count

**Don't be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows**<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 9:13

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 10:7-8

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 10:5b-6

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 28:19-20

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 10:21

Please sense in this telling the insistence on change Jesus is bringing  
 Ones in authority don't seem to care; God does

As Matthew tells it, Jesus confronted the failed Jewish culture of his times

Looking ahead 5 chapters, meet a Canaanite woman asking Jesus to heal her daughter,  
**Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.** ... he did not answer .... his disciples ... urged him, "Send her away, ... " He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."<sup>10</sup>

She pushed Jesus, even after Jesus implied, she was a dog  
**even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.' Jesus answered her, 'Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.' And her daughter was healed instantly.**<sup>11</sup>

The mission changed – Jesus continued to teach and heal, fed 5000 strangers on a hillside  
 The intense opposition from the Jewish leaders continued.

Jesus continued to insist on change

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 Back now directly to the reading from Matthew

**Whoever 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**<sup>12</sup>

Such a teaching flies in the face of basic obedience to the commandments

The opening commandments are about our relationship with God

No idols    God's name is Holy    Keep a sabbath day

Then, "**Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.**"<sup>13</sup>

This is basic stuff – respecting your parents

And it is an investment commandment

Why honor your parents?

**so that your days may be long**

How's that work?

Your children watch how you honor your parents

They then will follow your example and honor you

- When arthritis cripples your parents
- When a stroke left them bedridden
- When heart failure made them spectators
- When Dad died and Mom was left alone

Your turn is coming

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 15:22-24

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 152:27-28

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 10:37

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 20:12

Yet, as Matthew reports, the Jewish leaders are insisting on boundary obedience, purity obedience and *not the life-giving obedience intended within GOD'S LIFE-GIVING LAW*

Jesus is insisting on change *WITHIN THE LOST HOUSE OF ISRAEL*

And the culmination of this teaching is

**whoever does not take up the cross & follow me is not worthy of me.”<sup>14</sup>**

If you would suppose that this teaching is to carry a executioner's cross or wear it as a pendant around your neck or have it etched into your flesh,

Think otherwise.

The word translated **cross** here and often throughout the New Testament is from the Greek word **σταυρόν** (stauron)<sup>15</sup>

A more reasonable and meaningful translation is post or stake

Consider what a donkey or horse might be tethered to

A post or stake around which they would walk and wear a rut in the ground

Jesus, who is insisting on change, is asking, inviting, encouraging us to take up our post or stake – get free of your ruts

Welcome a new way of living – following Jesus

The reality in which Jesus began his ministry was a mindless religiosity

People stuck in ruts – oblivious to lives being lived

Demanding obedience without compassion

Jesus calls us to take up our stake (whatever holds us) and move into a new vision

insisting on change

This is painfully clear in our day too

What values were in operation when a boat filled with refugees from Libya hoping to reach Italy was sinking, and nautical regulations inhibited their rescue – 100s died

Just days later a submersible, Oceangate, carrying 5 wealthy explorers garnered international fleets and coast guard resources in a failed rescue?

Recognize the deviance giving priority to wealth and not life

Jesus is insisting on change

75 years earlier Jewish refugee children escaping the Holocaust sought safe harbor. The United States refused them entry. The ship went then to Italy where young Bishop Roncalli signed 3000 baptismal certificates for these Jewish children to arrive safely in Italy.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 10:38

<sup>15</sup> <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/36001/the-greek-word-stauros-does-it-mean-cross-or-stake>

Later this young bishop would become Pope John XXIII – he lived into the change  
Life is priority beyond the horrors of war

More recently some Christians in Iowa use are using Levitical laws related to secularity to condemn lives created by God<sup>16</sup>

Yet these same dominion minded Christians are unable to observe these same Levitical laws condemning the eating of pork (bacon).<sup>17</sup>

Jesus is insisted on change to see the people, welcome their life stories, serve them with love and kindness

As followers of Jesus, we too must insist on change that leads to life

As we are reminded by St. Paul in his letter to the Roman Christians,

**you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus<sup>18</sup>**

Pressing on to advocate for others and getting out of our ruts

Dead to thoughtless living

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<sup>16</sup> Leviticus 20:13

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 11:7

<sup>18</sup> Romans 6:11