



**THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JUNE 21, 2020
GETTING OUR PRIORITIES IN ORDER**

MATTHEW 10: 24-39

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it 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!

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

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

‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For 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;

And one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

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. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

SERMON

McGivney, a farmer, needed to plough his field before the dry spell set in, but his own plough had broken. "I know, I'll ask my neighbor, farmer murphy, to borrow his plough. He's a good man; I'm sure he'll have done his ploughing by now and he'll be glad to lend me his machine."

So minty began to walk the three or four fields to murphy's farm. After a field of walking, minty says to himself, "I hope that murphy has finished all his own ploughing or he'll not be able to lend me his machine..."

Then after a few more minutes of worrying and walking, minty says to himself, "and what if murphy's plough is old and on its last legs – he'll never be wanting to lend it to me will he?"

And after another field, minty says, "murphy was never a very helpful fellow, I reckon he won't be too keen to lend me his plough even if it's in perfect working order and he's finished all his own ploughing weeks ago...."

As minty arrives at murphy's farm, minty is thinking, "That old murphy can be a mean old fellow. I reckon even if he's got all his ploughing done, and his own machine is sitting there doing nothing, he'll not lend it to me just so watch me go to ruin..."

McGivney walks up murphy's front path, knocks on the door, and murphy answers. "Well good morning Mr. McGivney, what I can do for you?" says murphy.



And minty says, with eyes bulging, "you can take your bloody plough, and you can stick it where the sun don't shine!"

Unless we have done our spiritual and psychological work, we are all prone to what twelve-step groups call "stinking' thinkin'"

A few examples:

Like this old farmer, going into our heads by ourselves where we conjure up countless disasters, problems, and conflicts

All or nothing thinking that is, seeing life in terms of black-and-white

Regularly using "always" or "never," which is a sign of being in a childlike psychological frame of mind

Continually picking out the negative in our experience and filtering out the positive

We could always have done it better

Being in someone else's head so we are out of our mind

The old binocular trick where we magnify our shortcomings or problems and minimize our desirable qualities and victories

Buying into our emotional states as facts rather than seeing them as feelings passing through

Living with "oughts-shoulds-and have-tos"

Attaching negatives labels to ourselves, as if we are nothing but losers, idiots, fools, and jerks.

Taking the blame for everything because, well, we're responsible for everything that goes wrong.



Or taking no blame for everything because everyone else is a loser, idiot, loser or jerk

The notion of stinkin' thinkin' fits well with the biblical understanding of sin, which is missing the mark. Every example I gave are all ways we miss the mark in daily living.

One way out of stinkin' thinkin' is to follow the biblically-derived list of ordered priorities from twelve-step groups.

Again, because all of us can get our priorities turned around, it helps to have the wisdom of spiritually healthy traditions to guide us along the way.

So a healthy order of relational priorities looks like this:

God

Self

Spouse

Children

Family

Friends

In today's gospel, Jesus points out the necessity of surrendering our will to God.



Twelve-step groups call God our higher power, which acknowledges the need for our ego to be a lesser power. It doesn't matter who your higher power is, as long as it ain't you.

Carl Jung puts it this way: "to this day God is the name by which I designate all things which cross my willful path violently and recklessly, all things which upset my subjective views, plans and intentions and change the course of my life for better or worse."

God comes to us as our life. Every day we are faced with whether or not we surrender to life events which are greater than we are. This is why humility is viewed as a virtue by most religious traditions. In Christianity, humility is seen as a necessary step toward submission to God. The word Islam means "humbly submitting to God." In Buddhism, humility is viewed as a key element that people need to develop to achieve nirvana. If your spirituality is not making you humble, then there is something wrong.

In our text this morning, we hear a truth about God that may be hard to accept.

On the one hand, two sparrows, worth only a penny, do not fall to the ground without God being aware. And we are told by Jesus that we are so valuable to God that each of the hairs on our head are known to God.

But the sparrow falls to the ground, despite being valuable to God.

Magical thinking might lead us to think that, somehow, we are protected from suffering because we are valued.



But we must learn to hold both our value to God and the truth that we are all subject to the laws of the universe.

We are all valued by God, but nearly 120,000 people in our nation have died from covid-19.

God is flow, loving presence, the connective space between us, the life essence, the glue holding everything together.

The deepening of our soul more important than life itself, according to Jesus. And that may be a hard truth to swallow.

We all must surrender to life which comes to us in many forms, not all of them beautiful and pleasant, but life-giving, none the less.

In the same vein, Jesus tells us that the disciple is not above the master.

That is, we all need mentors to guide us in life. Again, a matter of surrendering to an older, wiser person who has our best interest in mind.

It is a mistake to view a parent as a mentor. Often, our parents have so much of their own hopes and dreams; their narcissistic investment and mistaken ideas about us that they cannot see us in our full potential.

The mentor is not invested in gaining anything from us. The mentor wants to help us be who God intends us to be....



In what is called one of Jesus' hard sayings, he tell us that he has not come for peace, but as a force that divides and separates members of a family. The sword is symbolic of a wound and the power to wound.

The order of priorities is significant because the family often mistakenly becomes number one on the list of priorities.

Men and women can be adults in their own right, but still subject to the authority of the parents. Parents can be overly invested in their children. Families of origin may not be able to let their married children create their own family.

The gospel sword cuts through misguided priorities and sets individuals in families free to pursue their own personal paths.

One day, someone approached Jesus and told him, "Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you."

But Jesus replied, "Who is my mother and who are my brothers? Pointing to the disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers."

As an aside, one of the psychological reasons for infant baptism is that when the pastor takes the baby from the parents in the act of baptism, the pastor symbolically indicates that, in baptism, the child and its destiny belongs first to God, not the family. Again, let's get our priorities straight.

Sometimes the family can be our greatest hindrance to the kingdom of God.



This is why this teaching can be so hard to accept.

After our own self, the priority is our spouse. This can be problematic because most marriages are founded on the hunter model.

That is, we temporarily suspend our lifestyle in order to hunt for a spouse. When we capture him or her, we bring the person back and place him or her on the mantle and then re-engage our life as it was before.

Marriage asks us to re-prioritize our relationships. We need to change our patterns so that most of our free time is spent with our spouse. Otherwise, our family of origin or friends remain more valued than our spouse. I am hearing of many couples who experience the pandemic as a blessing. They have grown closer and the family has been strengthened. Let's pray we don't lose these lovely connections as we open things up....

Good biblical interpretation relies on understanding the context of Jesus' teaching.

To whom is Jesus speaking?

He is teaching his disciples. Those who have been called and have chosen to follow Jesus.



Worshipping Jesus is relatively harmless. Following Jesus turns everything upside down as we are discovering this morning.

God—self—spouse—family—friends.

Tending to self does not mean some selfish, self-centered, narcissistic path.

As Disciples of Christ, we find our path within community.

The first disciples of Jesus were fishermen, a radical political activist, and an employee of the despised roman government. In the inner circle were women of various backgrounds, including prostitution, so that the personal path was found within a variety of voices and perspectives.

We find our personal path by surrounding ourselves with people of goodwill, good faith, loving hearts, deep souls, and soaring spirits.

If I think of our own faith community, we are finding our path in partnership with teachers of the Shaler school district, the progressive folks at New Sun Rising, 412 Food Rescue, Youth Empowerment Of Sharpsburg, Northway Christian Community Church, the Emma Munson Foundation, Triborough Ecodistrict, our online friends, Element Church, and countless individuals who have come alongside CLC.

When we get our priorities in order, we connect to the wisdom and love of God, we develop our own wisdom and capacity to love, we are in loving relationship



with our spouse, our family and friends and all are connected in their proper place.

In this re-ordering of priorities, we find ourselves involved in the ongoing dynamic of dying to ego. We find our life and its proper path by dying and letting go of how we thought life should be. Only those who know how to die know how to live.

Die before we die. Only those who know how to die know how to live

Our own unique path---after God, this is it and how can you be in touch with it without the divine, the purpose, and the “this is why I’m here”

Speaking to disciples—representative of different groups working together—we listen to Jesus, but forget to whom he is speaking

CLC, NSR, Shaler teachers, online people, 412 Food Rescue, Munson Foundation, Northway, Element, Youth Empowerment of Sharpsburg, Friday Group, Scott Baker, Pam Furbisher, Triborough Ecodistrict, Shaler

We follow our unique paths within community—community makes our paths possible—support, connectedness, presence, hearing other voices, ours being heard.