

PENTECOST 3

SERMON PREACHED BY REV'D GLENN MAYTUM

Here we are, after a little “diversion” into John’s gospel for a few weeks, working our way through Matthew’s gospel, again.

This is the year of Matthew’s gospel. This gospel was the most widely-read and highly appreciated of the gospels by the early church because it has the authority of being written by the apostle Matthew, one who had actually spent time with Jesus. The man called “Levi”, the tax collector who became a disciple of Jesus.

His name “Levi” in Hebrew means “gift of God”. The early church saw this gospel as a gift.

It is considered he probably wrote this gospel in Syria where he went to evangelize and teach the local population.

This is a teaching gospel. Where Luke’s gospel is written thematically; and John’s gospel stresses the King rather than the kingdom, and the coming of the Holy Spirit; and Mark’s gospel stresses action, the things Jesus did rather than what He said;

This gospel of Matthew is a teaching gospel, more interested in what Jesus said than what He did.

You have heard me say how fortunate I think we are at St James’ to have readers who proclaim the Word of God. And, when we as a congregation really listen to the Word being read to us, it’s like having Luke or Mark or Paul or, indeed, having Jesus standing there speaking to us, teaching US.

And in Matthew’s gospel we see what an amazing teacher Jesus was. Look at His techniques:

Ask Him a question- get a question in response; Ask Him a question- get a parable in response; He used paradox and radical reversals; He spoke of a foolish, broad way and a wise, narrow way; He used one-liners (aphorisms); and images; and He regularly subverted the conventional wisdom.

Why? To make people think. He invites His hearers to a different way of seeing, different ways of understanding.

For example... in this gospel (5:44) we have already seen how Jesus emphasised loving: God, neighbour, even one’s enemies, rather than seeking revenge. This is an important idea.

And then, today, we read Jesus making some astonishing statements (verse 34). (I have sometimes felt disappointed that the gospel writers have left out various crowd responses, and today is a good example:)

Were YOU astonished after Jesus had spoken about NOT bringing peace, but a sword? Or about taking up CROSS, the terrifying sign of a shameful death (v 38)?

(I think it would have been interesting to read... “And lo, their mouths dropped open, their faces showed astonishment, and together they said “WHAT???”)

Matthew collected the verbal instructions Jesus gave to the disciples and this Chapter 10 is called a “missionary discourse”.

After naming the twelve apostles (we read in verses 2-4) they move out empowered by the Spirit of Pentecost. Jesus sends them out with instructions, part of which we have in our reading today. Here Jesus is making His disciples think deeply about the hardships of discipleship. Jesus made the

strongest demands on those He called- They had to leave everything: family, home, farm (10:37), money and wealth, all economic security (8:20). But, following God's lead in their lives did not exempt them from suffering and persecution.

Jesus said hatred, suffering, persecution and death awaited His disciples (1:10-15). In verses 25 and 26 we read Jesus said following Him means sharing His destiny: "The disciple is not above the master". It is enough for the disciple that he be like his master (10:24-25).

So, what is Jesus teaching here?

I think He is inviting His disciples to transform their lives. Life in the world can be, and often is, grim. We can get nailed to the cross of dominant culture; nailed to the cross of limited vision and, in fact, blindness; nailed to the cross of judgement- of ourselves and others; nailed to the cross of anxious striving; and often: nailed to the cross of profound self-preoccupation and profound selfishness.

This can be life today, and it was in Jesus' time, also. But, we see in verse 38 that Jesus the teacher is providing an alternative.

Paradoxically, the cross, the image of shame and death, becomes an image of transformation, pointing to dying to the world's conventional wisdom and dying to self, as the centre of concern.

God calls people to use their gifts and skills in unexpected ways! A life focussed this way is rarely predictable. In other words, it is life in the Spirit of Pentecost and we know anything that is of the Spirit transcends the world.

It is the life Jesus knew and He is drawing His followers to a transformation that was His own spiritual experience.

A life of rebirth by the Holy Spirit. A new way of seeing and acting. From a life centred in culture and self to a life centred in God.

Today's scripture is not just meant for disciples in Jesus' time. Look around us: The challenge for us is to engage the world with courage, perseverance and grace as Jesus Himself, did.

Each week, as we listen to God's Word being proclaimed to us may we, each, take Jesus' message to heart and may we be challenged in the way we hear, think, see and act.