

Matthew 10.24-39

Sermon.

You may have noticed that there is a football competition happening at the moment. The 2026 World Cup has started and, whether you like or loathe it, it's been difficult to miss. Lots of people are showing their support by putting up flags and banners, wearing their team's kit, and sharing their passion through other creative means. Amidst it all, there have also been a number of high-profile footballers, such as the Belgian winger Jeremy Doku, declaring their faith and expressing what it means to them.¹

In our Good News Paper Eberechi Eze, the England player talks about how he was rejected as a youngster from some of the top clubs. He says 'I feel like the journey I've been on has forced me to grow up, improve and be better. I know so many people who got released from one club and that was it. They stopped playing. The fact that I am in this position I can only say God, thankyou. The one solid rock and foundation is Christ and having that allows me to deal with whatever circumstance I'm in'.

Football has the ability to simultaneously unite much of the world in the enjoyment of a competition, while also dividing people into tribal-like support of "their" team.

Today's passage highlights a similar dichotomy: Christianity, a faith that seeks to unite people, can sometimes find itself dividing them. Jesus came not to bring peace but a sword, yet elsewhere He is referred to as the Prince of Peace. As we consider from this passage what it means to live out our faith with "no compromise," perhaps we can take some inspiration from the football fever and show our Christian faith - not necessarily by using flags and banners but, like Jeremy Doku, using our words, our actions, and our platforms to bring God glory.

Elise has talked about the difference that her faith has made to her. How can you share your faith with others this week? Could you share an encouraging word with a friend, stand up for another person or a cause.

In our world, riven by tensions and conflict, our lectionary invites us to explore some unexpected sayings of Jesus. Jesus brings a sword, not peace, and we are told families are to be in internal conflict. Of course, there are some nicer sayings about the value of sparrows and the hairs on our heads. The words of Jesus in today's Gospel reading are very direct. But their very directness also seems shocking to us. Jesus talks about division and swords and not loving people... none of it sounds like the 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' that we might have been brought up with, or the Prince of Peace that we hear about at Christmas. What's going on here?

Well, imagine a household where two nationalities are represented – let's say an English wife and a Spanish husband. Imagine that both husband and wife love football. Imagine that both England and Spain reach the World Cup final. Is there no division in that

house? What about the children? Are they on Mum's side or Dad's? Maybe they don't sit together on the sofa like they used to? Perhaps they have to watch the match in separate rooms! Discussing who's going to win might cause arguments at the breakfast table. You could say that football has caused the division. It hasn't really... but this is what Jesus was getting at here. Putting him first above everyone and everything else will not always be popular.

In many countries, it can lead to imprisonment or death. But still, he urges us not to compromise. Why not? Because, if we do, we won't be happy. We will not give ourselves wholeheartedly to anything. We won't be focused and determined.

But this is all so counter-cultural. Our world these days invites us to embrace a bit of this and a bit of that. Being 50/50 is OK. It's encouraged because it seems to demonstrate acceptance of everything and everybody. But it's not the Jesus way. To be faithful followers of Jesus, there must be no compromise. He wants us to give him our 100% because he gave his 100% for us. What would have happened if he'd changed his mind halfway to the cross? What would have happened if God hadn't raised him from the dead, or decided not to send the Spirit to live in us? We wouldn't have the opportunity for life in all its fullness. We wouldn't have God as our heavenly Father. We wouldn't have the promise of eternal life. God didn't compromise. And so he asks that we don't compromise either. He knows it won't be easy. But he never promises that following him will be.

And it's not so much saying you are a Christian that divides people as following Jesus is the thing that may put you in opposition to those around you. Those counter cultural attitudes that go against the norm: Love your enemies. Forgive. Be generous – give to the needy; do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; do not judge; do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Just read the sermon on the mount – that is the Jesus manifesto. Arguably there is nothing more radical in this world. Following Jesus can get you in to trouble with others who don't share the same outlook on life:

No we're in it for ourselves, trust no one, love only those in your own family and friends, why be generous, think only of yourself, God – why do you need that crutch – grow up and live the life you want to do – no one tells you what to do.

There are still places where faith can divide families. Those from Islamic backgrounds who become Christians often have little choice but to leave their families behind quite literally. It is worth reminding ourselves that Jesus lived in a totalitarian state - the Roman Empire demanded absolute obedience from its subjects. At one level Jesus was doing no more than making an equally absolute demand on those who would follow him.

This is one of the most scorching sermons from Jesus, as he seems to say how impossibly dangerous the role of telling the Good News is and standing up for the gospel values.

²⁶ *“So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.*

Jesus is talking about the call to speak up for the gospel – to speak out and not be afraid.

There is always plenty hidden in the news and under the cover of the football– for us to speak out on and call for justice, at risk of being got at or being slandered or denounced – as Jesus warns in this passage.

Then to further up the ante, Jesus seems to demolish the relationships that might support us and constitute the fabric of society namely our families:

³⁴ *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn*

*“a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—*

³⁶ *a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.*

This is a tricky passage for Father’s Day!

But we must hear the heartbreak in Jesus’ voice, coming out as angry irony. He knows people will bear the cost of following him, sharing in the rejection he will soon go through. He encourages his disciples not to fear ‘them’, meaning the ‘wolves’ among whom he candidly sends them (10.16). These may include the authorities, but also those who drag people before the authorities, wanting them to get into trouble (10.17). With rhetorical force he tries to break the power of the culture over people’s lives. We can read it like this: ‘Don’t fear those who say you should be cast on the rubbish heap for all eternity. Fear the one who could and *doesn’t*. HA! What’s Rome, what’s the dominant culture got over you now?’

Loyalty to Jesus is more important than the culturally important claims of blood relatives. Following Jesus is the primary call in life; whoever is not prepared to set aside anything else in life that interrupts the claim of Christ will not be worthy of the kingdom.

Loving God comes first – God then sends you back to love neighbour (including family) and even love your enemy. But put first things first.

As for not being ‘worthy,’

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

It’s a shock to hear, until we remember we aren’t called to be worthy. Jesus provides the worthiness.

No, that twist is there to shine a light on the church as a new place for anchorage if your family is tragically broken. He is predicting the suffering of the church and offering hope. By the time Matthew records this, he is describing what the Church has indeed experienced, so if anyone is at worship hearing his Gospel, having lost their family because of their commitment to Christ, it is indeed an encouragement, not a criticism. And for those whose family is factitious or even abusive – church can be a new family – and a place of healing. But even that is not guaranteed – because churches are still made up of sinners – flawed human beings.

Jesus says in this passage:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Elise’s words were inspiring in the short testimony we saw earlier:

We live in a confused and competitive world where people strive to find meaning but many are lonely and wonder what is the point of it all. The Christian faith says there is a point. There is a Creator – we are not here by chance. Even the hairs on our head are numbered. WE do not need to be afraid. We carry great worth.

Was the world a fluke accident or was there an intelligent mind behind it all? Is there God to explain why there is something and not nothing? Life’s big question. And if there is God, what kind of God. Different people, different cultures, different faiths try to answer that in different ways. Thousands gather at Stonehenge to sense something spiritual with Mother Earth or the Divine Spirit or whatever.

The Christian faith says that God showed up in history taking on flesh. Jesus shows us a God of love. What God would be like if God was one of us. A God who serves others, challenges injustice, who loves us so much he would die for us, but whose death is not the end and does not have the victory. God is life and love.

God is not an old man in the sky looking down on us. When people have that mental construct – no wonder they think that faith in God is a childish nonsense. Talk about God as Father is problematic because of that association. But God as a divine parent – the Creator, the presence of love with us, the mysterious guide and empower of life – that’s different. If you have their childish ideas about God - put them aside and explore

the possibility of real faith, the historical evidence for the life and resurrection of Jesus, the witness of others to the experience of God in their lives. What have you got to lose?

Well, you have your old life to lose. But a new life to gain. Symbolized today in the baptism of Elise.

Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

ⁱ <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2026/143-may-june-2026-a/proper-7/the-week-in-focus>