



The Episcopal Diocese of Long Island

BROOKLYN • QUEENS • NASSAU • SUFFOLK

Proper 7A

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The gospel reading from Matthew this morning reveals to us the cost of discipleship.

It calls us to recognize one master who is the Triune God. Disciples, in general, attach themselves to one master. It is like a system of apprenticeship. A relationship like that between teacher and pupil, like rector and assistant. The assistant learns from the rector and in turn becomes a rector herself and trains other seminarians or assistants.

Placing oneself under the tutelage of the master demands fidelity, respect, and devotion to his teachings and way of life. When it comes to following Jesus, it is not time-limited, as in the examples I just mentioned. If Jesus is our master and we choose to be his follower, then we are to bind ourselves to him, and allow ourselves to be formed by his words and deeds. In the book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw people into Christ."

This is exemplified in the gospel by a rather disconcerting example: "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."

Jesus is not rejecting the family nor is he calling his disciples to dishonor father or mother, but he is clearly stating the cost of discipleship. Jesus is forming the new community, a community of believers. "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, Jesus said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

In John's gospel, at the time of the crucifixion, we read, "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple (John), 'Here is your mother.'" Again, we have the formation of a new community: "From that hour the disciple took her into his own home."

The new community is not through blood but through baptism: dying in Christ and rising with him in his resurrection. "Those who lose their life for my sake," says Jesus, "will find it."

We are dependent upon one another. I need your mask to protect my life. With you, I can move through my despair and discover hope. Your faith inspires my own, and my cross is bearable because I need not carry it alone.

To be a disciple of Jesus is to unite with those who also claim him as their master, and together bear witness to his message of salvation.

The essential challenge of Christian life is to progressively let go of all and anything that keeps us from living and following Jesus. It is a call to sacrificial living, of gathering up our wounds and sufferings and through them relieve the sickness and sufferings of others. It is an invitation to be grateful for what God has given to us and in a spirit of gratitude to contribute to the needs of others. Jesus knew that we could not do this alone, but with the support and mutual affection of companions on the way.

In this time and place I believe that Jesus is calling humanity to acknowledge the ways that we have constructed our lives and our societies, and especially those who claim to be his followers.

We are seeing more clearly that many of our actions have destroyed righteous, well-meaning, innocent, faithful people. It is as if we were following Beelzebub, a major demon sometimes called the devil. We have been tempted to judge others harshly, falsely, and too

quickly. We have been driven by the evils of insecurity, greed, and fear, and the idea that we are the arbiters of what is good and what is bad.

Just because I think it's right, doesn't make it so. I am not my own master. I am a follower of Jesus, the Christ, the one who saves.

I believe that Jesus is asking us now, his disciples, to acknowledge him before others in the midst of the current times, to speak his word and to do his deeds with conviction and without fear.

Jesus respected every human being: the woman at the well who had five husbands; the rich young man who followed his own path; the woman caught in adultery; the disciples who didn't recognize him; and the man crucified beside him, amongst many others.

As a nation we keep trying to deny and contain our systemic problems.

Through the courage of Darnella Frazier, the young woman who made a video of the horrific use of police force in Minneapolis, and the protests of thousands upon thousands who are still witnessing on the streets of our cities and towns, the work of the Evil One has been exposed, once again and must be denounced.

Racism is the work of Beelzebub, and it is up to us to eliminate evil from our systems: our systems of education, employment, housing, the telling of history, economics and how we mete out justice.

Now, let us turn our gaze to the coming of God's kingdom when all of God's creation is respected, nurtured and sustained, and where fear is no more. God is telling us that we must work to create his kingdom now. Not our kingdom—God's kingdom—here on earth. Day by day, week by week, we say the Lord's prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." That can only happen when we are willing to confront the very visible, poisonous weeds in ourselves and in our common life, and when we ask God to

reveal our hidden and unconscious thoughts that can be so devastating. This is the costly work in front of us.

The problem of evil in the world, on a cosmic scale, Jesus will deal with at the end of time, when evil will be vanquished forever. But the disciples of Jesus must root out evil now.

We see the posters, we hear the testimony, we've seen the videos. Marchers of all colors, creeds, and backgrounds are shining the light. "There is nothing that is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known." In our heart of hearts, in spite of some mishaps and some malicious malcontents, we know them to be speaking clearly of the imperative to change our race relations.

Recently someone asked me, "Are you optimistic that we are finally turning a corner on racism." I wouldn't use the word "optimistic," but I am hopeful.

The hard work begins when the marching ends and the media put away their cameras, and we think, falsely, that life might return to normal. It can't.

We are God's disciples on earth, and we need to make the changes that are necessary in our society. Jesus did not come to make peace with the Devil, but to take a sword to the injustices of disrespect and a sense of superiority.

In the book of Deuteronomy God said, "When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind....and return to the Lord your God...then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you...See I have set before you, life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord."

In Abraham Lincoln's second inaugural address he said these well-known words: "With malice towards none, in charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds."

This is our task today.