

Sermon 22 June 2014 Girls Brigade Area Parade Sunday
Matthew 10:24-39 “God Hears, God Cares”

Prayer: Jesus, you call us to live our faith, travelling beside you, in the world. You know how hard it can be following you, seeking to live in your spirit and complete your work on earth. May we be reminded constantly that you love us enough to be always waiting and watching over us. May we feel your presence as a reminder that we are heard, known, and loved, as your cherished children. Amen.

A young man was apprenticed to a master artist who produced the most beautiful stained glass windows anywhere. The apprentice could not approach the master's genius, so he borrowed his master's tools, thinking that was the answer. After several weeks, the young man said to his teacher, “I'm not doing any better with your tools than I did with mine.” The teacher replied: “So, it's not the *tools* of the master you need; it's the *spirit* of the master you need.” Discipleship p 21 Stories n P for P and P by Paul Wharton

In one place it's called apprenticeship, in the church we call it discipleship; **in both** it is following a master that we have researched and sought out; who we believe will teach us all we need to know about our chosen subject; – **as we implement** / exercise / copy / extend / **serve...**

Discipleship is a lifelong following of Jesus through the seeking of Spirit of our master so that we can complete the master's work. We do have an advantage that the Spirit of the master is readily available for us – poured out for / on us – so that we can complete the master's work. As followers we long for the day when that work will be completed – and until it arrives we commit ourselves to following Jesus and serving the world and all people, *like he did*.

To do that we do need tools of the trade – and GB is one place where those tools are handed out – really, really well, but it's only one place and it's for Girls ☺. Of course we have Boys Brigade, but we also have churches, youth groups and home groups, and...where ever God's people are found.

Wherever God's people are found – his tools are needed to be used by his disciples in the Spirit of the master Jesus. Learning how to use the tools of the spirit can be hard – and one lesson from today's Bible story is that we can ask questions – Jesus disciples did! We aren't expected to know everything – from the very beginning – questions are **good!**

What **we are expected** to do is to practice and use the tools of faith. The ‘tools of faith’ concept is complex because we must start with our own self – and always be working on our own self – and at the same time serving – ministering – doing Jesus work with other people and the world. It's not one **or** the other. What we learn from asking questions, from studying Jesus teachings, from listening to the wisdom of the church down through the ages, from mature Christians that surround us – from people living in discipleship under Jesus – what we learn we have to apply in our own lives **first**.

Let me tell a favourite modern parable: Stories and Parables for Preachers and Teachers p 61 It's called “Faith Must Be Lived.”

A Rabbi and a soap-maker went for a walk together. The soap-maker said: “What good is religion? Look at all the trouble and misery of the world after thousands of years of teachings about goodness, truth, and peace – after all the prayers, sermons and teachings. If religion is good and true, why should this be?”

The Rabbi said nothing. They continued walking until he noticed a child playing in the gutter. Then the rabbi said, “Look at that child. You say soap makes people clean, but see the dirt on that youngster. Of what good is soap? With all the soap in the world, the child is still filthy. I wonder how effective soap is after all.”

The soap-maker protested and said, “But Rabbi, soap can't be any good unless it's used.”

“Exactly,” replied the Rabbi. “So it is with Judaism or any other religion. It is ineffective unless it is applied and used.”

Unless we apply and use the tools of faith – they are worth-less and what’s worse is when we try to use them without applying them to our own self first! When we don’t live in the spirit of the master but tell everyone else they should we destroy any value our message might have, making it worthless.

So we have to begin in our own lives accepting Jesus message that God loves us. And being God, he can love each one of us ‘THE BEST’, *somehow!* **We are loved so much**; God can’t wait to be friends, to have us talk to him, for us to ask about how we can have His Spirit in our lives; to watch with us as we learn following in discipleship and when our lives are going well we can do all this easily!

BUT when something horrible or it gets hard – or trouble arrives remembering God loves us is really, really hard – even for mature disciples! It gets so hard for some people they give up, but for others they manage to keep going and discover the truth that God holds on to us better than we hold on to him! And in the Bible story we heard this morning some of the questions Jesus actual disciples were asking questions about – what happens when things get hard?

What happens when your friends make fun of you because you go to church and stand up for doing what right – when you stand beside someone being bullied – and you get picked on; what happens when you are at work and choose not to follow the rest because you feel it compromises your faith? What happens when someone you love gets hurt or sick or dies??? Having faith is one thing – applying or using the tools of faith is another especially when this brings us trouble!

And Jesus says – yep – that’s right. There are times when you will be troubled, should get into trouble because you follow me. We heard today how he warned his listeners that it will not always be easy to follow God or God’s teachings. It cost Jesus his life, and has continued to cost the lives of his disciples and we know it is still costing his followers their lives – and it certainly gives us trouble.

Sometimes we walk into trouble knowingly – and other times it simply sweeps over us. As if there are good sorts of trouble like helping people, standing up for the truth, like accepting you go to church even if someone is making fun of that, like being prepared to ask if someone would like a prayer; like putting God’s ways **always** first in our lives. And then there’s the **not good** that tie us up inside because it hurts and is full of sadness...

Having Jesus and the spirit of the master in our life does not give us a life that is ‘Trouble-Free’. Jesus warned us when he said: it will not always be easy to follow me, even when you are loved so much the hairs on your head are counted, you matter so much to God. When trouble finds its way to your path – **and it is when** not if! – When trouble messes up your life I found this parable as one way to see just what God can do that makes it enough to keep living with. Stories and Parables for P and P by Paul Wharton Suffering p 60

‘An artist went to visit a dear friend. When he arrived, she was weeping. When asked why, she showed him a handkerchief of exquisite beauty which had great sentimental value, but which has been ruined by a smudge of a permanent marker (~~drop of indelible ink~~). The artist asked her to let him have the handkerchief, which he returned to her a few days later. When she opened the package she could hardly believe her eyes. The artist, using the inkblot as a base, had drawn a design of great beauty with Indian ink. Now it was more beautiful than ever.’

God loves us enough to take the smudges that trouble makes and leaves in our lives and turn them into something beautiful because God cares, because God listens, because God loves us enough every day to fill us with His spirit so that we can follow Jesus. Amen.