

In the name of one God, Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, Amen.

Don't you hate it when Jesus breaks out of the mold we usually put Him in? Doesn't it really get to you when Jesus, the bastion of love, peace and justice, comes out with statements like we get today from Matthew?

- “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.”
- “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”
- “I have come to set a man against his father,”
- “a daughter against her mother,”
- “a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;”
- “one's foes will be members of one's own household.”

What has happened to the Gospel we know and love? You know, “blessed are the meek,” “Come to me, all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” Why can't Jesus just stick with the Good News? Well ... I would submit to you that what both St. Paul – from his letter to the Romans – and Jesus give us this morning is precisely that; GOOD News. Stay with me for a few minutes and let's see if we can find any news that is really good in here.

The section of Matthew that the Gospel readings have been coming from recently is called the “missionary discourse.” This is the part of the Matthew’s telling of the story where Jesus is talking strictly to the Disciples, before sending them out on their first missionary endeavors. He is trying to prepare them for the work that He’s given them. At the beginning of this chapter, Jesus gives the Disciples authority over unclean spirits and the power to heal diseases. After bestowing such power and authority upon this group of ordinary folks, Jesus knows that they are bound to think that this work will be a piece of cake, a regular walk in the park. That’s where we pick up the story this morning. Jesus is telling them that they are not above Him, and His work is very hard and very dangerous – so it will be both dangerous and difficult for the Disciples.

These “regular guys” to whom Jesus gave the same power and authority that God had given Him, were told how difficult the work would be, but it would be a few years before most would really learn the truth, first hand. James, the son of Zebedee was the first – he was martyred only 9 years after Jesus’ crucifixion. But like the Master and James, the others were killed, one at a time – as a direct result of doing the work given to them by our Lord. John, the author of the Fourth Gospel, is the only one of the original twelve, as well as the Gospel authors, who died of natural causes – and he did so on an island used as a prison. So, Jesus was preparing them for what was to come.

He tells the Disciples, “Your love of God and devotion to God’s work is the most important thing in your life. If you do this well, if you are completely committed to

this work, then you'll reap the benefits of being a disciple. If, however you put anything above your devotion to God and to the Gospel message, you'll begin to separate yourself from the source of all your power and comfort. And when that happens, you'll be lost – cut off and desolate.”

Are you beginning to get the Good News? Hang in there. We're rounding the corner.

So the message to the Disciples was that things **WILL** get difficult and dangerous. **BUT** there is power in God – the power to persevere and the comfort and peace that come from true discipleship. Jesus cannot take away the danger or hardship that face the Disciples – remember that He couldn't take away His *own* danger and suffering, as we see in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the hill of Golgotha – but Jesus tells them that they *will* make it through, and the Spirit will be there to give them strength and comfort.

And St. Paul, in his power-packed letter to the Church in Rome, tells us that all of the power and comfort that true disciples receive, comes because we have been baptized into the same death that Jesus was. Like the original Disciples, we have been baptized into the same resurrection Jesus was – this is the ultimate statement of hope. No matter what was happening to the Church in Rome – and there was full-scale persecution going on at the time – there was absolute hope in resurrection. And that hope was the basis for tapping into the power of discipleship.

Watch out. The Good News is creeping in.

There will always be tough things happening in the world. Bad things happen to both good and bad people. But the hope of the resurrection and the power that comes from true discipleship, allow us to overcome whatever tragedies may befall us – even if overcoming means recognizing that death can be a victory.

In the last week we've heard, over and over again, about the death of *Meet the Press* host, and renown journalist, Tim Russert. At the public memorial services, as well as during the week long remembrances colleagues shared about him, we heard repeatedly about the impact that Russert had on those who knew him. I heard, over and over about Tim Russert's love of life. He loved what he did and loved his family, but most importantly, he loved God and the traditions of his faith. There was not a negative part of his life. Russert seemed to love every aspect of God's creation. The result of his basic beliefs and the way they shaped his attitude is a life well-lived. And I'll guarantee you that the grace and strength showed by the Russert family over the last week are a direct result of having lived all these years with a true disciple of Jesus Christ. No one had a bad word to say, because disciples change the people around them, just by living out their lives in true discipleship.

Another Tim, this time McGraw, had a hit a while back with a song titled, *Live Like You Were Dying*. The song is about a man in his early forties who discovers that he has a terminal illness, and what he does with the rest of his life – and the effect that his

living has on other people. The chorus of the song talks about the man skydiving, mountain climbing and riding a bull. But the power of the song comes in what it says about the dying man's relationships. The lyrics go:

(I) was finally the husband
that most the time I wasn't
and I became a friend a friend would like to have
and all the sudden going fishin'
wasn't such an imposition
and I went three times that year I lost my dad
well I finally read the Good Book
and I took a good long hard look
at what I'd do if I could do it all again

Then the chorus ends with these lines ...”I loved deeper and I spoke sweeter and I gave forgiveness I'd been denying. And he said someday I hope you get the chance to live like you were dying.”

We who have been baptized into Christ's baptism, have died to sin with Christ and we have been raised with Christ into the hope of the resurrection. Once we have died to sin, we have taken away that fear that Jesus talked about, the fear of the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. When *that* fear is gone then we are free to live joyous and joy-filled lives. As St. Paul said in the 8th chapter of Romans, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Jesus wanted us to understand that things will inevitably go wrong and things will undoubtedly get tough, but if we trust in the love of God and in the power of the Spirit, we *will* make it through and come out on the other side with an opportunity to see new promise and beauty in all of God's good creation.

I recently read an excerpt from a book by Mark Nepo, called The Book of Awakening. Nepo relates this story about an aging Hindu master with a very tiresome and constantly complaining apprentice.

[One morning, the master sent the apprentice to get some salt. When he returned, grumbling as usual,] the master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink it.

‘How does it taste?’ the master asked.

‘Bitter,’ spit out the apprentice.

The master chuckled and then asked the young man to take the same handful of salt and put in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby shore, and once the apprentice swirled his handful of salt into the water, the old man said, ‘Now drink from the lake.’

As the water dripped down the young man’s chin, the master asked, ‘Now how does it taste?’

‘Fresh,’ remarked the apprentice.

‘Do you taste the salt?’ asked the master.

‘No.’ said the young man.

At this, the master sat beside this serious young man who so reminded him of himself, and took his hands, offering, ‘The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container we put the pain in. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is to enlarge your sense of things. ... Stop being a glass. Become a lake.’

OK. So here’s the Good News, as set out in this slightly obtuse and bombastic way by Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel; as illuminated by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans; as sung about by Tim McGraw; and as lived by Tim Russert. We have a choice, we can live every moment as disciples of Jesus, live in constant recognition of the

gifts God has given us, live *each* moment as if it were our last (we can drink from the fresh, clean, cool lake of life); or we can deny the power of hope given us in the resurrection. One way leads to a life well lived and a good – even if untimely – death. The other leads to a constant bitter taste in our mouths, to tiny deaths every minute of every day, to hopelessness that comes from separation from God. It's up to us which we choose.

Amen.