

A-Proper 7, 2008
St. Luke's, Renton, WA
Kevin Pearson, Preacher

Matthew 10.24-39

Our gospel lesson from Matthew begins with the words, "Jesus said to the twelve disciples ..."

There are some things you can say among a familiar group that you wouldn't say in public. While this story is being told after the fact to a larger audience and while it has been proclaimed to congregations of people ever since, the initial conversation is between Jesus and his faithful followers—the disciples. We can assume Jesus had a relationship of trust with these twelve and therefore they could hear him speak a more "unvarnished" truth than what might be communicated to larger audiences. And in addition to "speaking his truth", Jesus is teaching these followers, these pilgrims in faith, as they travel the path of discipleship. In classical teaching methods, a teacher pushes his students beyond the familiar, provokes them, goes out on a limb with them so that their minds grow and consider new possibilities, new angles, and see new visions from different perspectives. Jesus' catechesis—his training, of his disciples involves a process of helping them to see beyond the worlds with which they were raised. He urges them beyond the perspectives of their cultural vision. He helps them to see beyond the perspective of their narrow religious upbringing so they may catch *his* vision and follow him into the abundant life of the kingdom of God.

How we see the world, how the world appears to us depends largely on our point of view. Back in the 90's I lived for a year in a penthouse apartment in Pioneer Square. And if I stood on my roof deck and looked SW, I could see two large mountains: Mt. Rainier and the Kingdome. And the Kingdome was the higher of the two.

There is a very different view from up here looking out at you, than there is out there looking up here. I know. This week I took a seat out there and looked up this way and I realized I have never participated from your perspective.

When we first completed our renovation we turned the pews to face inward so that, rather than you looking up here, we were all facing each other. Some of you didn't like that point of view. Others did. That point of view, quite frankly, represented a different perspective of our religion. Is the mystery of God revealed up here, in word and sacrament, or in our midst, in the faces and lives of God's people?

How we see the world depends largely on our point of view and each of us comes from different points of view. Each and every one of us has a different point of view.

One of the things that happens through education and prayer and discernment and conversation and socialization is that we share our points of view. And then, having seen from the perspective of others, we gain a new "seeing", a new perspective than we had previously. We tend to make some compromises in our individual perspectives in preference of a greater and more generalized vision. Once I had driven up to Paradise, half-way up Mt. Rainier, it would be silly for me to continue to assert that the Kingdome was higher. In the language of the bible, we "die" to our private vision in order to "live" in a more enlightened and shared vision.

Despite this possibility, we live in a world where there are differences in how groups of people see things: Israel or Palestine; Clay Bennett's vision for the Sonics or Seattle's home team



perspective; A contract for Boeing or Airbus; the Anglicans who will gather with the Archbishop of Canterbury at Lambeth next month or Conservative Anglican meeting this weekend in Jerusalem; McCain or Obama.

The popular resolve to differences is to put blinders around our way of seeing, assert an inalienable right to bear arms, and shoot it out. The one vision left standing wins. (Of course, that doesn't really work in the long run. Violence never ends a dispute, it merely pushes dispute underground until an opportune time.) Every day, at every turn, we are persuaded to take one side or another, mount campaigns against each other, take aim and shoot.

It may seem like our gospel lesson adds one more log on that fire when Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ... [to] Set a man against his father, daughter against her mother." It may seem like this is more of the same violent taking of sides.

I rather think that Jesus is emphatically talking to his inner circle and pressing pilgrims in faith to consider what distinguishes one perspective from another. The family is the first and primary place from which we gain our perspective on the world. Our nuclear family provides our first, and most ingrained, point of view. It depends on the family, but following Jesus, catching the greater vision of the kingdom of God, may demand we alter our private, familial perspective. The new vision of Jesus brings an enlightened point of view and a new basis on which to judge between points of view.

From this new vantage point, followers of the Christ, disciples, pilgrims on the journey of faith gain new eyes to see. And it may well be that even their closest affiliations have to change in order for them to embrace the vision of Jesus, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the good. It may "turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother."

With Jesus as our point of view, the sword may cut sharply between what once appeared to be the good from my private perspective and the good from this greater and more enlightened view. Life's struggle: the conversion of our lives, is the honest discernment and then aligning our lives with the Christ—patterning our lives by the life, the perspective of Jesus.

Which, by the way, is not the same as trying to aligning Jesus with our own point of view. Creating God in our own image is something we church folk have been doing since the dawn of time. Nor is this an opportunity to load Jesus into your chamber to shoot him at others; that always backfires.

Of course, the wonderful discovery for us is that the good of the kingdom of God is what is truly good for our own lives. The alignment of our lives with Jesus *is* the truly joy-filled world of the enlightened life. Even when seeking him feels like losing, perhaps what is happening is that we are losing our life (our private perspective) in order truly to find life. And that, as the apostle Paul said, such "sufferings ... are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." (Romans 8.18)

Our prayer might be that of that great hymn with the lines:

O let me hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will.

Jesus comes offering us a new vision for the whole world. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

