

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 28, 2020
Matthew 10:34-42

“Family Feud”

Anybody ever watch “Family Feud” on TV? We probably all have, but do you know when this family game show first debuted on TV? Try July 12, 1976! (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_Feud) That’s a very long run of more than forty years with different people hosting it over the years, including Steve Harvey who is the host today. “Family Feud” is all about members of two different families who compete against one another to win cash and prizes as they answer different survey questions. We see a different kind of family feud in today’s Gospel lesson. Jesus has some very sobering things to say about his coming to earth and what this means for individuals and families. We usually think of Jesus’ coming as the Prince of Peace whose message is redemption, forgiveness, mercy, and peace. Isn’t Jesus’ coming supposed to bring people together rather than drive them apart? The short answer is yes, but depending on our response to Jesus’ coming, all of this can be turned upside-down into hostility and strife, even with the same family as members of that family turn on one another. What is going on here? What is Jesus saying? All of this becomes grist for the mill in today’s sermon as we focus especially on that Scripture memory verse in today’s Gospel lesson: **“And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 10:38-39). Based on Jesus’ words, the theme for today’s message is “Family Feud.” May the Lord’s rich and abundant blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word for Jesus’ sake.

The context of Matthew 10 begins with what we hear in today’s Old Testament lesson (Jeremiah 28:5-9). The prophet Jeremiah is condemned by his fellow prophet, Hananiah, for speaking what God told him to speak. Following the Lord can come at a heavy price, sometimes even from within the ranks of fellow believers. That points us to Matthew 10, part of which we heard in last week’s Gospel lesson (Matthew 10:5a, 21-33), and continues today. Jesus maps out what those twelve apostles were to expect when they were sent out by Jesus (Matthew 10:1-4). It wasn’t going to be easy. Jesus empowered them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons (Matthew 10:8). They were to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matthew 10:7). But in doing so, Jesus told them not everyone would welcome them (Matthew 10:14), and that they would be dragged before courts, governors and kings for his sake (Matthew 10:17-18). Even more, Jesus told them that they would be hated by all for his name’s sake (Matthew 10:22). Nevertheless, Jesus reassured his followers that they were not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, they were to fear him who has the power to destroy both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28). All of this leads up to Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel lesson. These are hard words to hear. We know that in other parts of the world there can be a very real price that believers pay for following Jesus: imprisonment, torture, even death. It is true that in our own country we do not have public persecution of Christians seen in other parts of the world. But clearly there is a growing tide of hostility toward the institutional Christian Church here in this nation. The deference and respect given by previous generations toward the church has given way to apathy, suspicion, and resentment. Individual believers may find themselves ridiculed or mocked because of their faith. Things are changing in the world around us. We may find all of this unsettling and even scary, but the cost of discipleship is real. Jesus never promised that following him as his disciple would be easy. Clearly, he taught the exact opposite: **“And whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”** (Matthew 10:38-39). What happens when our faith in Jesus is met with opposition and conflict within our own family? How do we handle that? This isn’t just a theoretical “what if” exercise. It is a very real thing for many people. The cross that we may bear for Jesus’ sake may well be within our own home and among our own loved ones. That causes great heartache and pain, and we cry out to the Lord for his mercy and

help. The words of today's Psalm speak to our hearts: **"Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget your law. Plead my cause and redeem me; give me life according to your promise!"** (Psalm 119:153-154).

Even when there is a family feud because of our faith in Jesus, we take comfort knowing that we belong to another family – the family of faith. We have a heavenly Father who has made us in his own image. We have an elder Brother, Jesus, who has laid down his life for us. We are baptized into his death and resurrection, and nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39). Jesus speaks to this intimate connectedness when he told his apostles in today's Gospel lesson: **"Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me"** (Matthew 10:40). The message that the apostles and prophets brought to the world in their day is the same message that we bring to the world today: **"Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love"** (Joel 2:13). This turning from self and returning to the Lord in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) is called repentance – repentance that leads to life (Acts 11:18). This change of heart and mind is brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit, leading us to that full and abundant life that Jesus came to bring through his life, death, and resurrection (John 10:10). In Jesus, we begin to see life differently; through new lenses. We begin to see that life is not about getting and having and keeping and owning and controlling. In Jesus, it is not about holding onto life, but giving it away. Losing our life for Jesus' sake – letting go of my plan, my agenda, my way so that Jesus can work his plan, his agenda, his way in our life – this means that we have actually found what life is all about. In Jesus, we are set free to see beyond all of these things to a new way of living that is rooted in what Christ has done for us. And even when there is rejection by others for our faith and trust in Jesus, sometimes even within our own families, we hold fast to him who loves us and gave his life for us. We understand that even something as small as giving a cup of cold water to one of Jesus' little ones carries great significance because it is done in faith.

Taking up our cross and following Jesus means a life of discipleship which includes whatever we may be called upon to sacrifice or suffer for Jesus' sake. Whatever the cross is that each of us is called to take up for the sake of Christ, we can do so only because Christ has already taken up his cross for our sake, shedding his blood and giving his life on the cross for you and for me. That's where it begins for each one of us: at the cross. In response to all that God in Christ has done for us, emboldened by the Holy Spirit who calls us and keeps us in the one true faith, we now take up our cross each day, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, **"the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, scorning the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God"** (Hebrews 12:2). The hymn we are about to sing was written nearly 300 years ago by Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), closely affiliated with the Moravian Church. "Jesus, Lead Thou On" is really a prayer that the child of God, together with all the children of God, would be strengthened in following Jesus. "In composing his hymns, Zinzendorf's goal was to guide all people home to their Father's side in heaven, their true fatherland" (*Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymn, Vol. 1*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2019; p. 998). And so we sing – we pray:

*Jesus, lead Thou on Till our rest is won;
And although the way be cheerless,
We will follow calm and fearless.
Guide us by Thy hand To our fatherland. Amen.*