

Date: 19/06/2005
Day: 3 + Pent [12]
Congregation: Anglican Church: Geoff Chadwick
Scripture reference: Matt 10:24-39
Topic: Surviving the Siege

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Today's Gospel reading is difficult. Taken out of historical context one could interpret it as a bit of war mongering. Certainly, it grates on us to hear Jesus saying things like:

Matthew 10:34-36

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

But the verses are there and we must come to terms with them.

Firstly, we must remember that this is the author of Matthew's Gospel's record of what Jesus said. Secondly, is a record for a particular church in a particular time and place. From what we can tell Matt's Gospel is written to a little Jewish Christian Church in about AD90. Once we know this we must ask what happened to these people in the intervening years between Jesus' death in AD30 and AD90.

Well our history books tell us much. In brief Rome obliterated Jerusalem, insurgent groups such as the *sicarii* continued to terrorise the Romans, until eventually, the Jewish nation was completely destroyed.

Sounds familiar doesn't it? In our world today we still have insurgent groups fighting invading forces. Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan... Without debating the right or wrong of these "minor" wars, the situation is remarkably like the one described by Jesus. Perhaps we need to realise just how realistic Jesus was about the political situation, not just of his time, but of humanity in general. So then, as now, we need to hear Jesus saying things like:

Matthew 10:19-20

When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; ²⁰for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

And

Matthew 10:29-31

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

These are words of encouragement to a community under stress. They are more than just lovely words of pious sentimentality. Matthew, who knows the extreme stress his church is under presents to it the words they need to hear. “Do not be afraid...” “Are you not worth more than two sparrows...”

In hearing these words Jesus continues to become Saviour. Jesus’ death and resurrection becomes not just a saving event “back then” but a continuing event. His words still bring comfort. His words still bring hope. His words bring change.

So where are you under stress at the moment? Have you been handed over to ruthless people? Have you been having imaginary conversations in your head regarding some difficult person or situation? Maybe your worth isn’t being valued and you wonder if two pennies is all they’ll pay you?

Sure this may not be the onslaught of the Romans, but it may be enough to feel that you are under siege. Maybe you really are having a war - son against his father, daughter against mother, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law; employees against employer...

Perhaps Jesus’ words are closer to the bone than we realize!

So in the midst of your stress (if you haven't got any then let me know the secret!) can we find Jesus words of hope? I trust we can! Words of wisdom that come from somewhere deeper than ourselves. People who love every hair on our head! Those who, in losing their lives for me help me find myself.

Matthew's church survived the siege it was under and so can we.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.