**The Holy Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 10, verses 24-39**

**24**“A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master;   
**25**it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!   
**26**“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.   
**27**What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.  
**28**Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew%2010&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-23446d)] **29**Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father.   
**30**And even the hairs of your head are all counted. **31**So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.   
**32**“Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven,   
**33**but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Hear what the spirit is saying to the church.

Please be seated.

**The Demands of Discipleship ... and the Courage to Meet Them**

Some scriptural texts are more difficult to handle than others. The teaching in this passage is related to mission, but it also concerns every aspect of discipleship. I began my research for this commentary by reading the whole of Matthew chapter 10. Jesus’ words related by Matthew are chilling, depicting the opposition that the disciples must face in their mission. Throughout the passage from Matthew up to this reading, the message from Jesus was quite clear. He never encouraged them to think that the way would be easy for them. Instead, he warned of a dire role for his followers which could include trials, sufferings, betrayals, and even death.

If they expected to share in his glory, they could also expect to inherit his sufferings. While his words of warning certainly have historical value in understanding how dangerous it must have been to follow Jesus in the first century, such a following can still be extremely dangerous in some middle eastern countries to this day, where, if one changes to Christianity, death may be the consequence.

By the time Jesus summoned his apostles to go out and preach in Galilee, they had already seen some marvellous and miraculous things done by him. But the scary thing was that they were about to have a glimpse of the opposition that Jesus faced, and later they themselves, would have to face. Matthew’s recollections documented Jesus laying down some extremely specific and alarming warnings and instructions for His rag-tag and bobtail band of followers. The directives for their evangelistic task took on a darker tone with the forewarning of opposition and persecution. Jesus had been realistic enough to recognize that fear could also cause the failure of their discipleship and he built the case for why they should not let this fear hinder their discipleship.

Is there any more powerful motivating force in human experience than fear? Yes, we know that is love, and the powerful of love of Christ can carry people through the darkest fears and trials. However, from our time as a small child, we learn to fear some aspects of the world around us, which can be taught, but also learned by bad experience. The threat of death may be the most powerful form of fear, and Roman political and Jewish religious leaders of the time had long recognized the power of fear in ensuring society’s conformity to the structures and the expectations of behaviour in their world. Nothing much has changed. Increasingly, fear is a useful controlling function in a non-democratic government’s political priorities, even when doing so does not serve best interests of the population but is simply in the interests of the preservation of power. I noticed this in Fiji. My Father spent the latter part of his life in a village there, and even in the church, the ministers certainly ruled the village with the fear and wrath of God.

However, at that time we see Jesus the teacher because in the middle of the instructions to these men Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master.

During former times, skills were handed down, mother to daughter, and father to son. As the field of knowledge expanded, skills were learned in the relationship of a master and his apprentice. The trades and various excellences in craft were passed down until the apprentice mastered the craft and could then in turn, take on his own apprentices.

In this modern automated, self-help world, the master-apprentice model might now seem rather quaint and antiquated. Nowadays the skills required by an apprentice are such that one is more likely to have trade training at a polytechnic, or the equivalent in America, in any institution that is not a university, they call College. The field of knowledge has advanced to such a dizzy height, that nowadays the qualifications necessary for professional occupations is so advanced that the training requires a university education, along with the expenses that go with it.

However, in this context the disciples were the apprentices of Jesus. What he was trying to say was that you guys need to understand, if you follow me, it is not at all going to be a bed of roses. Jesus recognized that fear could also cause the failure of discipleship. Jesus’ disciples courageously leave the security of their homes and families to follow him as they proclaim the advent of God’s reign, but they, too, will know and ultimately and ultimately face the power of fear.

Indeed, the history of the last two millennia testifies to the attempt, on the part of rulers or whole cultures, to silence the gospel’s proclamation among the faithful. During the cultural revolution in China for example, there was persistent concern among many of the world’s Christians about how the church could survive in such official hostility, although we know that not much was actually done about it.

This is where the gospel becomes quite interesting because in many ways there are paradoxes, or apparent contradictions in the teaching of Jesus. His message was a message of peace. Jesus had previously said blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God. Yet now Jesus told his disciples that they must be prepared to face opposition and persecution. It would appear at a glance, that what he brought by his very existence, was not peace, but a sword, that would carve out the non-believers. Not apparently the most desired way to bring the message of peace.

Also, we find here, another paradox in the teachings of Jesus about family. On one hand he had previously honoured and supported strong bonds of marriage and family, together with respect and loyalty between husbands and wives, children, and parents. But there is a clear warning that the gospel can divide, rather than unite a home. If that is so within families, that is sad. We all have probably experienced people deliberately attacking religion in our presence, knowing full well that we go to church on Sunday. We have found that it is best not to react, but usually just walk away.

Easy? Of course not, but the Lord promised that there will no test, trial, or temptation that his follower cannot overcome if he or she leaned on him for support.

It is human nature that when some great cause emerges, it is bound to divide people. There are bound to be those who answer and those who refuse the challenge. The world will always be divided into those who have accepted Jesus and those who do not. A person can be confronted with this choice and such opposition can be from within our own household, community or society, and the thought of rejection by our loved ones can sometimes prevent us from doing what we know God wants us to do. Without the support of our families, it can be exceedingly difficult.

But whatever our calling, always remember that we were baptised "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". They become our family too. The message here is to let them be our guiding hand. Yes, we will be challenged, and we must learn to put our trust in Jesus and have no fear. In doing so we will find genuine security in a worthwhile life in the love and presence of God.

Amen