

Scripture:

Matthew 10:24-39

“Things are not always as they seem!”

Things are not always as they seem.

In fact --- things are almost always quite a bit different than they appear to be.

God is so powerfully and mysterious working in His creation that what we see and experience is rarely a faithful understanding of what is actually happening.

Indeed God transformative power is at work to such a degree that what we see around us is often misleading even.

Behind the scenes ---- where we can't always see it ----- God is transforming lives and changing people and situations.

And it's not as though we don't necessarily pick up on it because we're distracted ---- or blinded ----- or pre-occupied.

Very often we don't pick up on it or notice it because we simply cannot --- because God has decided in His infinite wisdom that it's not for us to see or know just now.

Verse 24 from our gospel reading today ----- “The student is not above the teacher, nor the servant above the master.”

In other words ---- we but see in part --- we are far below God in terms of our ability and our capacity --- to not only understand things ---- but to even take them in --- to even know that they there to be taken in in the first place.

Yes --- as verse 26 today says ----- things will be disclosed --- and made known ---- but this happens in God's time.

Much of the disclosing and making known that Paul speaks of isn't something that is going to happen in our lifetime.

We only have a very short time here on earth ----- and knowing that in Christ we have an eternity in God's presence after death --- it only makes sense to come to terms with the fact that much of what will be disclosed and made known to us will happen in the eternal part of our existence in the heavenly places --- and not the earthly temporal part.

“Things are not always as they seem.” ----- is truly and understatement.

God is working in ways we can't even imagine let alone work at trying to come to terms with or understanding.

And for many this can be a difficult thing to deal with --- because as humans we like to think that we're pretty smart and perceptive and kind of in control things.

But in many respects nothing could be further from the truth ----- because in truth we are far from in control of things.

Sometimes I think we spend far too much time trying to become more aware of what's happening around us and try to control it --- than we do focusing on how we might become more profoundly connected to God.

Too often we want to know why and how God is using us --- instead of just asking God to use us.

Put another way ----- we pray something like ---- “God how and why are you planning on using me for your purposes.” ----- more often than we pray something like ---- “God just use me for your purposes.

Part of what Matthew 10:24-39 reminds us today --- is that as disciples of Christ things will be difficult from time to time.

Jesus' followers were beat up ----- arrested --- falsely accused ----- rejected - --- despised---- and persecuted ----- people didn't always like them --- people didn't always treat them well ---- they weren't very popular most of the time.

Despite their message of love they were hated.

Despite their transparent witness to God they were called evil.

Things were definitely not easy for the very first disciples of Jesus Christ --- they were persecuted --- despised ----- and looked down upon.

Things were not as they seemed for the disciples.

Accusations ---- rejection ---- imprisonment ----- perceived as evil ----- when in reality ---- life saving ---- life altering --- world changing life giving witness.

Despite the fact that they brought love --- compassion and grace --- the disciples were treated with hatred --- contempt ----- and punitively.

But if we think about it ----- how could they expect any less.

How could they expect any less than false accusations ----- rejection ---- persecution ---- contempt ----- when the one they followed got precisely this?

Listen to verse 25 from our gospel reading today ---- “It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the household!”

“It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the household!”

In other words if the teacher and master --- the head of the house -----has been called evil ----- how much more then will his --- or her --- followers also be called evil.

Beelzebul --- is the devil --- the prince of demons --- the fallen angel ---- the Shatan --- or Satan.

Just as Jesus was often referred to as evil --- from the demons ----- so too are His disciples.

If Jesus will be treated as though He were evil and then crucified ---- won't also those who follow Him be subject to such treatment and reception as well?

Part of what ----- "If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of the household!" ----- means ----- is that as disciples --- as those who have heard and responded to Christ --- we ought to expect a similar reception to the one Jesus received ---- persecution --- mocking --- contempt --- challenge.

Just as things were so often not exactly what they seemed with Jesus ----- so they are not always what they seem in our time as well.

Jesus was doing and living and initiating something far different than most of His contemporaries ever imagined ----- otherwise they wouldn't have killed Him and done away with Him as they did.

There is always and forever more going on than meets our eye in the world.

And there is more going on than meets the eye ---- precisely because God is at work ---- reconciling --- redeeming ---- saving ----- always present.

Eventually yes ----- there will be nothing concealed that will not be disclosed ---- nothing hidden that will not be made known --- as verse 26 says.

But in the mean time ---- we may not ever understand why or how what happens happens.

In the mean time we are called to surrender.

Surrender to God ----- surrender to Christ ----- surrender to God in and through Christ.

Surrender that we can't and don't always need to know why things happen as they do.

**Why do innocent people get killed ---- Moncton ----- we don't know ---
surrender.**

**Why do storms ravage and destroy and leave people homeless --- and
helpless in their wake ---- Nebraska ----- Angus Ontario ----- we don't
know --- surrender.**

**Why do innocent people suffer ----- why did hundreds of innocent girls
get kidnapped in Nigeria recently ----- and elsewhere that we don't ever
hear about --- we don't know ---- surrender.**

**How can innocent people suffer --- Malaysian Airline plane missing for
over 100 days and counting --- we don't know ---- surrender.**

**Why does a school teacher go for a run and never return ----- we don't
know --- surrender.**

**Why does and M.P. who retired so he could spend more time with his
family --- suddenly die immediately after retiring ----- we don't know ---
- surrender.**

**Armed conflict -----Iraq ----- Syria ----- persecution --- Ukraine --- Egypt
---- our very own neighbourhoods ----- inexplicable ---- and inexcusable
hatred and suffering ----- we don't know ---- surrender.**

Surrender ---- because only God knows.

If we don't surrender to God --- give up thinking we might figure it out -----
and give it over to God -- we can practically drive ourselves crazy --- or at
least drive ourselves to exhaustion and compassion fatigue ---- and increased
anxiety.

But ---- things are not as they seem.

When we give things over to God ---- they are never as bad as they seem.

In God's hands things are not as awful as they appear --- precisely because
we know that He can take the worst of the worst --- and make of it
something beautiful and awe inspiring.

As Christians we give things over to the fact that yes things may appear to be challenging and dire ----- but things really are not as they seem ---- there is more than meets the eye going on ---- there is God going on.

There is God going on.

When we become focused on all of the evil in life --- and see only the unfortunate and nasty manifesting itself in our world ---- we have lost focus.

And we've lost focus because we have begun to surrender ourselves to the less than faithful things.

Evil is always ---- always always --- at its root --- secretive ----- a bit concealed and hidden --- and it likes it that way.

Eventually ----- all will be brought to light ----- all evil and all good ---- and all attempts at both.

But for now we have to surrender --- we even have to surrender our desire to want to know everything now ----- Adam and Eve couldn't --- and look what happened ---- separation --- and distance from God --- embarrassment in His presence ----- a desire for secrecy and hiddenness.

They couldn't surrender their need to know --- they wanted to know ---- they wanted to have access to everything and they wanted it now ----- not a good --- or healthy --- or faithful desire.

The kind of surrender that God asks of us is total.

The most tight knit bond that we know as human beings is family.

A child needs a mother and a father like nothing else on earth ----- otherwise they wouldn't even make it a single day after birth.

To drive the point home that surrender to Christ is total and above every and any other bond on earth Jesus says things like:

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me --- anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of

me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

And to drive the point home that surrender to Christ is total and above every and any other bond on earth Jesus says things like:

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ---

“a man against his father
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter in law against her mother in law,
a man’s enemies will be members of his own household.”

Surrender to Christ means total surrender --- including possibly even our family.

If we put anything ahead of Christ in our lives --- even our family ----- we have our priorities a wee bit off.

Think of Abraham --- he was asked to sacrifice his very own Son rather than go against God ---Genesis 22 --- he didn’t have to ultimately but he was asked to.

We are to love Jesus more than anyone ----- including our family.

To love Jesus will not always be peaceful --- sometimes it will involve the action of a sword ----- cutting things off --- and cutting things out of our lives.

Jesus knows that the gospel will ask great things of those who follow Him.

Jesus knows that things will not always be easy ----- easy to understand ----- easy to do ---- easy in any way at all.

And He tells us this up front.

He doesn’t soft soap us or try to lead us to believe that following Him will always be easy ---- because it won’t be --- from time to time it will ask of us

to step up and act in ways that may seem a little crazy and bizarre to the world.

It may even be that the gospel will divide rather than unite a home and we must be prepared for this.

But we have to have faith --- we have to have faith in that great surrender to Christ that even though things may look ---- well --- less than ideal --- there is far more going on than meets the eye.

God is at work in ways that we can't understand ---- see ---- or ----- ever even manage in our limited capacities.

In Matthew 10 Jesus wants to be clear with His Disciples to say that there will be conflict for those who follow Him ----- there will be division --- and there will be pain.

His way is so radically different from that of the world --- that there is no way but for there to be some friction as His way of love --- and grace --- and mercy -- comes into contact with --- cheques and balances ----- power ---- posturing --- and mal-aligned allegiances.

It's something like this -----

There is this current of cold arctic air ----- moving south through Canada ---- - only to eventually meet the hot --- humid air from the Gulf of Mexico.

And so as they meet ---- along the edges a front forms ----- and this front is usually marked by storms and volatile weather --- a little conflict as the two collide and come together.

Jesus reminds us that there is no encounter between the coldness of the world ---- and the warmth of the reality of God's saving grace that will not at some level be fraught with friction.

And we have to remember that the friction is all about God reminding us that it is passing --- that behind the turmoil and challenges ---- there is His loving guiding hand of grace and mercy at work.

Behind the friction --- and turmoil ---- and conflict --- division --- and sometimes even pain ---- is the final clarity ----- that one day all will be disclosed and made known.

Evil always maintains a certain eternal hiddenness and secrecy --- it despises transparency and clarity.

God reminds us that one day all will be made known --- transparent --- and clear --- for all to see.

Evil desires enslavement.

God promises freedom ----- eternal freedom.

Part of what Matthew 10 reminds us is that God promises us He will be with us even through the very worst of the worst in life.

God's trustworthiness is celebrated in Matthew 10 and we are reminded that even though following Christ will sometimes put extremely high demands on us ----- God is with us --- and He has much more in store for us than just our years here on earth.

God knows us intimately ---- the very hairs on our heads are numbered even ---- as verse 30 from our gospel reading indicates.

And there isn't a single thing that passes him by --- or that He doesn't know about --- not even one sparrow will fall to the ground without Him knowing about it and caring about it ---- verse 29 says.

When we experience evil we mustn't always try to understand it.

When we are confronted with the reality of the Shatan --- evil --- challenges --- difficulties in life ---- we must remember that God is fully well aware of it all ----- and that it is all in His very capable hands ----- and that we are called to trust and surrender.

We do well to spend a whole lot less time trying to understand evil and conflict ---- and a whole lot more trying to figure out ways we can surrender more and more over to Him.

Just before our passage today Jesus tells His disciples to go out among the lost sheep and proclaim the goodness of the Kingdom of God.

And in our passage He tells them even though it will be difficult ---- God is there ---- caring for every sparrow --- knowing us intimately and in great detail --- even knowing how many hairs we each have on our heads.

There is great beauty and wonder and love and mystery in the world ----- and there always will be.

Don't ever let anyone take this way from you ---- no matter how bad things may appear or even be ---- God is on His throne ----- watching over and caring for us ----- orchestrating His great plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And all He is asking of us today is to surrender.

Surrender to Him through Christ.

In the bulb there is a flower ----- in cocoons a hidden promise ---- there's a dawn in every darkness ----- unrevealed until its season something God alone can see.

Things are not always as they seem ----- even when they're great ---- they're actually even greater.

God is for us ----- God is in us --- and God is forever leading His creation closer and closer to His desired intentions for it ----- and nothing can stop this from happening.

Amen.