

Matthew 10:24-39 (NRSV)

"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 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!

"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

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

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

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

I did a very brave but somewhat crazy thing a couple of weeks ago. You see, I have two nieces, aged 14 and 16 and I got

an email from one of them that mentioned her Facebook page. So I sent her a message asking to be her friend on Facebook.

Now, you need to understand a little bit about Facebook to see why this is so brave and so crazy for a 50-something-year old Lutheran pastor. Facebook is kind of like the secret clubhouse of the millennial generation. Teenagers up to college students put up pictures and sound-bytes and the equivalent of graffiti on their Facebooks. Some of it is in questionable taste, mostly it is very funny and some of it is quite touching. It is a place where young people construct the face they show the world, and because they are constantly changing, their Facebooks are constantly changing as well. It is a place where young people develop and keep in touch with the nomadic tribes of which they are a part, and since these tribes are fluid and changeable, their Facebooks are as well.

Now, most teenagers set their Facebooks so that they can only be seen with their permission, by someone whom they have accepted as a friend. So, asking to be my nieces' friend meant asking them to give me access to the process of their self-invention, to their innermost thoughts and secrets, their hopes and fears, their jokes and their convictions. Now, they are perfectly willing to share these things with another teenager whom they barely know, but to share this with an old guy, let alone an old guy relative, that is a lot to ask.

I think that every generation thinks that it invented, or at least revolutionized love and music, humor and politics and all of popular culture, and in the process every generation feels that they demolished all existing morality, religion and good taste. I know that's what we thought we were doing when we were teenagers, and by and large, in fact, that's what we did. The world was certainly a different place after the boomers reached adulthood – not necessarily better, mind you, but certainly different. And I'd bet that our current crop of millenials will do the same thing. One difference, though, is that we boomers are now on the other side of the barricades.

This came to mind for me as I walked with today's Gospel reading. In the second half of the reading, we hear about Jesus' family values and they are a little alarming. Don't think that I've come to bring peace to the earth, he says. I bring, instead, a sword to divide families, fathers against sons, mothers against daughters, mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law.

I found this last piece interesting – mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law. In my brief pastoral career to this point, I've noticed how very charged the relationships between mothers- and daughters-in-law are, frequently how very difficult, how very painful. This isn't surprising, of course. Even in this liberated age, wives and mothers are still the most likely anchors of family culture, so that as young couples separate themselves from the families of their parents, conflicts between mothers- and daughters-in-law seem almost inevitable.

And as I think about the reading, that seems to be the common thread. Not literal armed conflict between fathers and sons or mothers and daughters – at least we hope conflicts don't usually escalate to quite that point -- but rather conflicts of culture and belief and ways of living. If Christ is to be the center of our lives, then how we understand him, how we follow him, should be a part of how we live and should make a difference in how we live. And it's reasonable to suppose that how we understand and follow Christ might differ depending on who we are and how our lives have been shaped.

Pastor Wendy and I have been reading some things about young adults as we become intentional about including young adults in our ministry. One book that I'd recommend to anyone that wants to know more about ministering to this group is a book called "Tribal Church" by Carol Merritt. Carol is a Presbyterian pastor in her thirties. The book convinced me of several things. First, the economic situation of people in their twenties and thirties is very different from people in other age groups in ways that have spiritual consequences. Many of you are all too well aware that

college costs have risen pretty dramatically in the past 10 or 15 years, and government support for higher education has decreased. Similarly, housing costs have increased quite a lot – for those of us who own houses that is good news, but for those who don't, those costs make it very difficult to buy a house, and even renting an apartment is a lot more expensive than it used to be. And wages have been basically stagnant for the past 20 years. The result is that people in their 20s and 30s have bigger education debts, absolutely and proportionately bigger mortgage and rental payments and no bigger incomes than we boomers did at their ages.

This sense of impoverishment, of being behind and not being able to catch up is not just an economic issue, it's a spiritual one. No matter how we sugarcoat it, we older people certainly give the impression that we think people who can't match their needs and their incomes are bad or lazy or spendthrifts and even though we know better we give the impression that the blame for all this is individual and not systemic. And even though it's uncomfortable and painful, young people begin to believe it too, because we raised them well, to be responsible and self-reliant. I talk with our young people, our very best and brightest young people, even high schoolers, and they worry about money, about how they'll fund their college educations, about how they'll be able to live, and this worry only gets worse as they get older.

So the first issue is their economic situation. The second is community. Much of the technological innovation of the past couple of decades has been to help people keep in touch with each other, and this has led to the creation of virtual communities, virtual tribes, using not just cell phone talking and texting but also Facebook, Myspace and the like. It may seem a little ironic, but technology hasn't caused the alienation and estrangement that everyone expected, but rather durable and long-lived communities of young people who keep in touch with each other through moves and life cycle changes.

We can go on and on, but let me simply note one other thing – young adults are much less likely to attend church regularly than older people. I’m sure there are many reasons for this, but Pastor Merritt, the author of “Tribal Church” points out that our churches aren’t as welcoming to young adults as they might be. Many of the issues important to young adults, affordable housing, for example, are not as important for older people, while issues like sexual orientation, so important to older people, are not quite as important for young adults. This is one of the senses in which the Gospel that should unite us actually seems to divide us. And when we don’t make reconciliation an explicit value of the church community, this division can deepen and expand. We have been fortunate that many of our young people continue to be active at Saint Nicholas even after confirmation. When young people grow up unchurched, it seems unlikely that they will start coming to church when they have families of their own. In any case there is nothing inevitable about young adults falling away from church – the sense of community and connectedness in a Christian community of faith is one that appeals to young adult sensibilities.

Jesus tells us that the Gospel that he brings with Christ as its center can set daughters against mothers, sons against fathers, and indeed we know that this is true. It can also unite mothers and daughters and fathers and sons if we listen and pay attention to each others’ needs and hopes and dreams and recognize in them the journeys that we are on, that those journeys are both separate and together, that we can learn from and teach one another. Next Sunday, our young people will be coming back from their work camp experience with stories to tell, stories about people we’ve never met and places we’ve never been and things that they have never done before even if we have. And we should take the time to listen, the way our parents did or should have done, the way God always listens, with the heart. Because after all, we’re the same tribe, and for that we say, thanks be to God.

Amen.