

TALK FOR SUNDAY 21 JUNE 2026: GENESIS 21.8-21 - MATTHEW 10.24-39

Previously when I have stood here I have tended to tell you a bit about myself and my background and then related that to the Gospel reading. I've used images, analogies and metaphors to draw out elements of the Readings we have had or themes of the Church calendar. Today's talk is more theoretic. In a book I recently read by a preacher called David Day, he calls this "Swallowing the scripture" and this morning I am going to tell you what I've been digesting. I'm going to tell you about the Creed course that is running in our Benefice fortnightly called "Celebrating Nicea". If you are interested in joining the course it's on Tuesday mornings or Thursday evenings and you can find more information about it in the notice sheet. When I've said a little about that, I'm going to turn to our Gospel reading and hopefully bring these two different ingredients together in a Gospel/Creed Father's Day take-away!

In the Creed course we are exploring the foundation of our belief in the Holy Trinity - God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I'm reading through the materials and it is definitely making me think much more deeply about the words I learnt as a kid in the 1970s standing, sitting and kneeling between my mum and my dad in Church and later saying them simply because I knew them by heart. And now learning why those specific words were chosen, I re-read them and I am delving into their meaning. Like most studying, it is making me ask lots of questions, but it is also helping me to *understand* more about how and why we express our faith in this way.

In the course we have considered the nature and identity of Jesus Christ; how He is both divine *and* human. Last week Wendy spoke about the Council of Nicea, all the way back in 325, and how at that Council they decreed Jesus to be "*from the substance of the Father*" and "*of the same essence of God*". Those aren't the words we say in our Creed now though.

At the Council of Constantinople, 50 years after Nicea, the words we still use in the Creed today were settled. Those words describe how Jesus is both the son of God and part of the Trinity by stating that Jesus is "*eternally begotten of the Father*". Begotten is a verb here – a doing or being word, which in this case describes Jesus *as being eternal*, with no end and no beginning.

Studying this Course I have begun to wonder whether the words I use to express my faith actually matter: I've been battling to keep in my head how "*being of the essence of God*" is different to being "*eternally begotten*" and whether either would diminish or enhance my belief or make me more or less likely to follow Jesus' teachings.

I have come to realise, that the answer I needed to resolve the cerebral sudoku is in the Creed itself. In the Creed we declare that as Christians, we believe in **one** God of all things. This isn't semantics or mental gymnastics, the Creed gives me the way to believe and to trust, it tells me 'how' to understand what Christianity means and gives me the words to do that.

I'll park that realisation for now, and not describe the clanging sounds as the penny dropped for me, and I had an 'awhoohhh' moment that revisiting the Creed in this way gave me...because I want to turn now to the Gospel reading we just had.

MATTHEW 10.24-39. Matthew's Gospel is not an easy read. It sounds at the first read like it's a call to battle. Jesus says He has come to bring a sword, which we probably associate with war and division. But, I don't read this passage in that way. I don't believe it is about conflict; I believe that with these words, Jesus is acknowledging that His teachings and His presence on earth are going to be revolutionary and that He himself is the tool that will be used to bring

about that change. He is the sword that will draw a line to divide people between His followers and others.

A few years ago we used to talk about “disruptors” in business and in technology; people who were turning what we knew about business and how we lived on its heads. Hotel companies that didn’t own hotels, like AirBnB, taxi companies that didn’t own cars, like Uber, music companies that didn’t sell records, like Spotify – the list seems endless now..... In the context of Matthew’s Gospel, I see Jesus as a disruptor. His sword is applied to turn the old ways on their head. That’s why He reminds the Disciples that they have to go beyond what is usual and expected. Go further and go faster, taking nothing with them. If someone isn’t welcoming or won’t listen, move on, and shake the dust off your feet (we heard in the Gospel reading last week), in the words of the tech co’s, Jesus tells the Disciples to ‘fail fast’ and be agile.

And in telling the Disciples **how** to bring about this disruption and this change, He acknowledges, *‘this isn’t going to be easy’*. Jesus knows that the change He has come to bring about will come at a cost – yes, a personal one to him – but also to His followers. In fact, earlier in this chapter, Jesus warns the Disciples that he is “*sending you out like sheep among wolves* ¹⁶” and tells them to be “*Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.*”¹

THEN, even more disruptive, Jesus tells the Disciples that in *His* teachings, in *this* new changed world, everyone is equal, “*The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master*”, which was a hugely radical idea for its time..... That statement *isn’t a call to radicalisation* though; Jesus *isn’t* asking them to take up an *actual* sword. He’s not incubating fanatics or creating soldiers. In fact, Jesus *isn’t* instructing the Disciples **what** to be at all, he is telling them – and by Matthew’s Gospel **we** are told **how** to be his followers and how to effect the change He has come to bring.

As we carry on through the verse and Jesus says, “*Whoever loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me*” – this might seem an odd line to draw out on Father’s Day! **But** it shows us again that Jesus is telling us **how** to follow His teachings. How do we do that? First, love God above all others!

And then Jesus says that if we don’t do this, we are not ‘worthy’ of him. That sounds a bit heavy-handed and reproachful perhaps. If we pause and don’t project our insecurities to read that word “*worthy*” as meaning we don’t deserve God in our lives and so we should give up, but interpret the word ‘worthy’ in a more arcane way that means ‘to have equivalency with’ or to ‘be like’, then I arrive at the position that what Jesus is saying here is that, if *we want to be more like Him*, we have to love him more than anything else, and that everything He has just said helps us to know **HOW** we can do that.

So I see this Gospel passage as a ‘HOW TO’ guide. Matthew is recounting *how* Jesus is giving us the map and marking the road we need to take to follow him. Like the analogy Wendy gave us last week, when she described the Creed as clearly marking the edges to a path across a field or gives us handrails on the deck of a boat we can hold rough weather.

And so we are back at the Creed, where I started The Creed reminds us that there is one God. As Christians, we don’t believe in a world where there are many gods who we can pray to and offer different types of worship to in order to get the best outcome at a particular time. This single focus of our faith in one God, means there is one standard of right and wrong that we **can** follow, with *one* set of teaching. In the Gospel reading today, Jesus not only tells us that it is the

right choice for us to do that, **how** we should do it. Love God and declare our faith. In our prayers, in our actions, in our community here and outside this building, and in acknowledging our belief in God that is set out in the Creed.

And what happens when we do this? Matthew's Gospel tells us if we follow this, *we will be worthy* and that when we do, Jesus will "*acknowledge [us] before [His] Father in heaven*".

In my view, that would be the ultimate Father's Day, wouldn't it?