SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, June 21, 2026 **Festal Eucharist**
The Fourth Sunday After Pentecost 11:00 am

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A Sermon by
The Rev. Canon Carl Turner
on
Romans 6:1b-11; Matthew 10:24-39

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Bearing witness to the Resurrection changes everything

"Your life is meant to bear witness to what you believe." Words of Fr. Schultz from his sermon last Sunday.

Today, we hear Jesus sharing disturbing words with his disciples. From now on, the disciples are called Apostles because that Greek word means *one who is sent off.* As we heard last week, the disciples were sent off to preach the nearness of the Kingdom and to demonstrate that nearness through signs and miracles. However, the apostles were not winging it – they were commissioned by Jesus and given strict instructions *"As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons."* (Matthew 10:7-8a). In order to prepare them for their mission, Jesus had already demonstrated how to do this. As we heard last week: *"Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness."*

Jesus did not ask his disciples to do anything that he would not do himself. In fact, he asked them to do *exactly* what he had done and he sent them off – made them *apostles* – to do what he had done. Or, as Fr. Schultz so aptly put it – *Your life is meant to bear witness to what you believe.* Next week, we will anticipate the Feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, two of the greatest apostles, and reflect on how their lives bore witness to what they believed. And remember, the word for bearing witness in the bible is *martyr.* So therefore, when we, the people of God in Saint Thomas Church are asked to bear witness to what *we* believe, we are being asked to be martyrs for Jesus Christ – to offer our lives in order to be his witnesses.

Before he sent the Twelve on their great mission, Jesus warned them that the consequence of proclaiming the Kingdom and performing signs and miracles would not necessarily bring them fame, and certainly not fortune. In the verses preceding today's Gospel reading that links it to last weeks, Jesus says, *"I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves....Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me..."*

I don't know about you, but that is hardly the kind of pep talk that you would expect a coach to give his or her team! (Go Knicks!) But Jesus knew that his followers would encounter distrust and outright opposition. Why? Because *he* had encountered it himself. The Pharisees and the Scribes had said that *his* signs and miracles were the works not of God, but of the Devil. He said to them, *"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!"* (Matthew 10:25b)

This section of Matthew is disturbing in that it seems to suggest that proclaiming the kingdom has the consequence of unleashing evil and the persecution of those who wish only to bear witness to God's goodness. Jesus knew that the breaking in of God's reign and God's kingdom would bring opposition, persecution, anger, and division, even amongst families:

> *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.*

I have to say that I have always found those words chilling. It is at this moment, therefore, that we need to remind ourselves that we are in the middle of Matthew's Gospel – his telling of the Good News – and that something significant is yet to happen in that Gospel, which is the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So that we do not become morose on hearing these disturbing words of Jesus, we now need to turn to our Epistle reading for a sense of perspective. If you like, we need to look back through the lens of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul, one who had persecuted those first apostles and who then, in bearing witness to Christ, became an apostle himself, makes it very plain to us:

> *We have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

and, more importantly, and as a consequence of Christ's saving death and resurrection:

> *if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him...So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.*

Now we understand the power of those words of Jesus we heard today, *"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."* For the one who harrowed hell in his own death and burial, has conquered death and taken away the sting of death and the fear of the grave. Everything has changed, my friends! Which is why Fr. Schultz was so right when he said "*Your life is meant to bear witness to what you believe."* And what we believe we will affirm in just a few moments time:

> *And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures,*
> *and ascended into heaven,*
> *and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;*
> *and he shall come again, with glory,*
> *to judge both the quick and the dead;*
> *whose kingdom shall have no end.*

Whose kingdom shall have no end. We may face persecution; we may face ridicule; but even more concerning, we may face indifference from others, but we are still called to bear witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ that has changed everything.

As C.S. Lewis once said, *"I believe that Jesus rose from the dead in the same way as I believe that the sun rose this morning: not only because I can see it, but because I can now see everything else in the light of it."* [1]

References

1 C.S. Lewis – from his 1944 essay titled *'Is Theology Poetry'* in his book, *The Weight of Glory.*