

Introductory

This text has parallels in Mark (6: 7-13) and Luke (9: 1-16). None of those texts are appointed to be read in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, a reading similar to this reading from Matthew (10: 24 – 33) is appointed to be read on Pentecost 5A, and the Mark text is appointed for the Pentecost 8B. In LSB, the Mark reading is appointed for Proper 16B.

This pericope is a continuation of last week's reading, with a small overlap (5), and next week we will continue on to the end of the chapter. What we end up with is three weeks of Jesus spending an entire chapter (out of twenty-eight) on His instruction to the Twelve, and by extension to Christian pastors. It's a good time to review your job, and their expectations of that.

We've been talking a lot lately about "normal," as in "when are we going to get back to normal," and "it's going to be a new normal," and the like. I have made the point that what we have been living lately is actually the norm. Illness morphing into pandemic, civil unrest, peaceful protests often turning violent – mostly after dark, these things happen all the time now and historically.

What's not new is that the flu season comes and goes, tens of thousands of Americans die from it – mostly the elderly and the obese – and we barely notice. What's new is the scoreboard on the local news, the constant at one time 24/7 coverage on all TV, and the fear placed into us by those we trusted to be truthful with us. That's not normal, and America went a little bit crazy.

Peaceful protest is as American as apple pie, and it is guaranteed to us by the U.S. Constitution. From the earliest times, Americans have protested, and those protests have often turned violent – mostly after dark. Perhaps the new thing here as well is the 24/7 coverage, including endless commentary from different people saying the same thing – or something entirely opposite.

I have heard that a lot of preachers tried to guilt their people into joining BLM last Sunday. I didn't, but I did talk about how our religion is not racist, is against racism, and understands the Christian religion to be for "all nations," i.e. all ethnic groups. BLM is a political movement that has taken on a religious tone, and it's a tone that is in many ways antithetical to Christianity.

That information is out there, including at their web site, and I probably will never mention the group from the pulpit. My silence on that particular issue does not condemn me, no more than my silence on any of my other political beliefs condemn me, and I just don't talk politics from the pulpit. Once a preacher starts that, It's a long and slippery slope and you end up at the bottom.

Other things that are normal include Christians being persecuted and going to church on Sunday, neither of which have much of a footprint on any news media. Go to www.persecution.org to see what's up in the world of persecution of Christians, and there's a lot there. Probably American Christians don't think as much as we should about, mostly because it isn't happening to us.

A wise man once told a group of whining American pastors who were complaining about how rough things are – they are – that no matter what happens today, nobody is trying to kill us or even beat us up, we live in a great country, we get paid for our work, and we are all going to go home to eat a nice meal with our wives and children, then sleep peacefully through the night, repeat.

That's unusual, and it's something for which to be thankful. The norm is the life of Jeremiah and all the OT prophets. The norm is the life of the Twelve and other first Christians. The norm is places in Africa and Asia in particular where many of those things – see above – we take for granted are not granted them, and for many of them daily persecution is a fact of life.

What has that to do with preaching? American preachers need to make American Christians aware of their brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering, and we need to pray for them and be their voice. On some level we ought to understand how odd is our situation in America, and enjoy this freedom of religion while we have it because it may be going away. I don't know.

Textual Notes

5. Those specific men, “Τούτους τοὺς δώδεκα ἀπέστειλεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς παραγγέλλας αὐτοῖς – These Twelve Jesus sent out, commanding them.” The verb of sending *is* that word from which comes “apostle” (the verb ἀποστέλλω). Most translations have “charged” for the verb I rendered “commanding,” which is better, firstly because when people hear “charge” they think Visa.

The meaning of the word includes being given authority by a higher authority, and we have already seen that articulated in the preceding verses. The word also means that far from being thrown in to sink or swim, they have been thoroughly prepared, educated, and instructed for the task at hand. The Twelve have never been random, and they are not about to start being random now.

What we see here is eerily like what we do before we sent out missionaries and pastors. When He needed Apostles, Jesus personally chose some and likewise rejected others. There were always comers and goers during those three years, but these Twelve are always there, except for that time when He sent them out for a trial run. Far from being random, they are very knowingly sent.

The specific instruction begins with a pair of prohibitions, “λέγων Εἰς ὁδὸν ἐθνῶν μὴ ἀπέλθῃτε καὶ εἰς πόλιν Σαμαρειτῶν μὴ εἰσέλθῃτε – saying, ‘do not go off into the road of the Gentiles, and do not enter into any city of the Samaritans.’” These two are generally treated as two peas in a pod, but I don't think so. They are two separate commands to do two different things.

If you've been around Dr. Weinrich lately, then you know he has some ideas about "the way," especially as used by John. There is "the road" that is Christian (with OT roots), and the command to stay off the "road of the Gentiles" is simply that. Persecution and hardship will come, and some of it will be from Gentiles, the Greeks and Romans as well as every pagan people they went to.

If you want to know what it would look like for Christians to exit off the Christian Road and enter onto the Gentile Road, look around you. Look around and see all the poor and faithless shepherds. Have compassion on their charge because they are like sheep sans shepherds. Others have beaten me to the punch by decades; a lot of these churches can't even be called "Christian" anymore.

The second distinct command is to avoid going into any Samaritan city. The encounter with Well Woman (John 4) went well. She (15) wanted the living water, at the end of the day "Many Samaritans believed" (39), and He told His disciples that the fields of Samaria were "white for harvest" (35). But generally, they avoided Samaria for reasons familiar to you.

It is true that missionary work generally takes place across cultural lines; the Word in the form of a missionary comes to one group of people from an outside group of people, but that doesn't mean that every group should send missionaries to just any other group of people. In western Germany, the people were friendly and welcoming, and many of them spoke English without prompting.

In eastern Germany, we discerned that older Germans often disliked us when they discerned that we were Americans. In Wittenberg, we went to a restaurant, and a man who was clearly the owner said "no" as soon as he discerned. We protested to the hostess "but there's a lot of room," and he said "no," so we left. There's some baggage still between America and former GDR citizens.

Probably Americans would not be the best choice to do missionary work in the former GDR. We do; the LCMS has a presence in Wittenberg, and the youngearer eastern Germans are like western Germans, I'm just saying. The Italians don't like Americans (see World War II), and they don't care at all for German Lutherans, who invaded and did very bad things (see Thirty Years' War).

The Twelve would have carried a lot of baggage to Samaria, and there were plenty of other places – it's a big world, so maybe work up to that. Maybe He's telling them to stick to the country. At any rate, we read this in the light of the pre-Ascension command (Acts 1:8) to start in Jerusalem, then go to Judea, and *then* go ahead and make your way to Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

21. Following Him, Jesus says, may well place a strain on relationships. Those in the closest relationships with the Christian will be the very ones who will hand him over to the executioner. The first; "παραδώσει δὲ ἀδελφὸς ἀδελφὸν εἰς θάνατον – brother will turn over brother into death." I have three brothers and a sister. What must a brother have been thinking to do that to a brother?

The brother to brother bond is just one more thing that isn't what it used to be. To be sure, conflict between brothers goes back to Cain and Abel, the former murdering the latter, and who can forget

what the brothers of Joseph did to him. They wanted to kill him, but the cooler head of Rueben prevailed, and they limited it to selling him into slavery.

And the like. The thing about brothers is that they have and always will have the same parents, who often are seen as the common enemy. Brothers also live in the same place, often sleep in the same room or even – not so much these days – in the same bed. They share in things like chores and household tasks, they learn to work together, and they know each other well.

In addition to that, brothers tend strongly to share things like the same values, morals, and political views of their common parents. The Black Sheep of the family is notable because he doesn't. And then there's religion. For the same reason above – common parents – brothers generally share religion, and for one to depart from the family religion is a big deal.

The meaning of the verb “παράδιδωμι – to hand over” is very much dependent on context for meaning. The father hands over authority to the Son, and that's a good thing, and a man hands over his possessions to another, and that's a good thing. Here, it means that one brother is going to hand over another brother by way of betrayal, like Judas did with Jesus.

In the context of the 1st Century Christian world, probably you know the drill. The Christians kept it under their collective hat, but they had no legal status in the Roman Empire, and could be squealed on at any time by an enemy, a neighbor, or a family member, and it happened all the time. What happened next depended a great deal on time and place, and what does that mean?

When we talk about persecution of Christians in Africa, for example, it's a big continent. In Nigeria, Christians are slightly outnumbered by a religion that advocates violence. For Christians there, violence and persecution are common, and they don't get much help from the government. In Christian Ghana, for another example, not so much. It was like that for the Early Church.

The Roman Empire was a big empire, and in some times and places Christians could go for several generations without knowing persecution. We know about the Emperors who put the screws to the Christians, and most of them had bigger fish to fry – trying to keep from getting assassinated, for example. The same could be said for governors and other more local rulers.

It is probably even a bigger deal that “καὶ πατὴρ τέκνον, καὶ ἐπαναστήσονται τέκνα ἐπὶ γονεῖς καὶ θανατώσουσιν αὐτούς – (and the) father (will deliver his) child, and children will rise up against parents, and they will execute them.” The “father, child” is an ellipsis, a phrase or sentence that is not grammatically complete, but the meaning is clear, like RSV has it “the father his child”

The penultimate word, the verb θανατώω in the future indicative active, means that “they” will kill by executing. The relative is not doing the actual killing, but by his betrayal is guilty of it. In the same way, the Romans did the actual killing, but Stephan lays the guilt for His death “you murdered Him” on their own people, and for that and other things he got stoned.

Barnes sees such things as unusual, but nevertheless true,

The ties which bind brothers and sisters, and parents and children together, are so strong that it could scarcely be believed that division of sentiment on religious subjects would cause them to forget these tender relations. Yet history assures us that this has been often done. If this be so, then how inexpressibly awful must be the malignity of the human heart by nature against religion! Nothing else but this dreadful opposition to God and his gospel ever has induced or ever can induce people to violate the most tender relations, and consign the best friends to torture, racks, and flames. It adds to the horrors of this, that those who were put to death in persecution were tormented in the most awful modes that human ingenuity could devise. They were crucified; were thrown into boiling oil; were burned at the stake; were roasted slowly over coals; were compelled to drink melted lead; were torn in pieces by beasts of prey; were covered with pitch and set on fire. Yet, dreadful as this prediction was, it was fulfilled; and, incredible as it seems, parents and children, husbands and wives, were found wicked enough to deliver up each other to these cruel modes of death on account of attachment to the gospel. Such is the opposition of the heart of man to the gospel! That hostility which will overcome the strong ties of natural affection, and which will be satisfied with nothing else to show its power, can be no slight opposition to the gospel of God.

Christian persecution, sometimes unto death, has to be seen in the light of the life of Jesus, our leader, who never expects of us things He has not already done Himself. He too, was rejected by His family, and betrayed by the one He had told them was a “true brother” to Him, Judas. And He makes no bones about it here – prior to that – that persecution will be par for the course.

22. There’s a reason why even family members would do such a thing; “καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου – you will be being hated by all because of my name.” Like He said in the Sermon on the Mount, the genesis of murder – or betrayal to be executed – is the hatred found in the heart, only waiting for opportunity to actually cause the murder of the hated.

The construction is unusual; the future verb “to be” followed by the participial form of the verb “to hate” emphasizes both the severity and the continuity of the hatred that will be part and parcel of being a Christian. Bernie Sanders is wrong about many things, and he is wrong about the Christian religion being all the things he says it is. We are generally the hated, not the haters.

Luke relates much persecution in the Acts of the Apostle, and he also notes for us when we were first called “Christian.” It was at Antioch, present-day Antakya, Turkey, an early Christian stronghold, the second-most important city to Jerusalem. The Christian population has today shrunk to almost nothing, and the term “Christian” is again used in a derogatory manner there.

People can and do hate people for a lot of different reasons. The motive for the hatred spoken of here is that we bear the name of Christ; we are Christians. He has already told them not to take it

personally if they are rejected; they are not rejecting you, they are rejecting Me, Jesus says. We likewise ought not take it personally if we are hated because we are Christians.

Among other NT writers, Peter tells his readers not to be surprised when these things happen, but in fact rather rejoice in them. He also tells them that “if you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed” (1 P 4:14). He then mentions people who are reproached because they are bad people, concluding “if any one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.” (16).

When these things happen, keep in mind “ὁ δὲ ὑπομείνας εἰς τέλος, οὗτος σωθήσεται – but he who having endured into the end, he will be saved.” The word “ὑπομείνας – having endured” has the base meaning of remaining or being left behind. It is a good thing for the Christian to be left behind while The World chases its tail and hates the Christian for not doing the same.

But you’ll be saved, and there’s something to that. Indeed, as we watch our brothers and sisters who are suffering, in the Middle East as well as Africa and Asia, all over the world, we take comfort knowing that those who endure will be going to a better place. We would – and do – say the same thing about those closer to home who endure hatred and temptation and die in The Faith.

23. I think that it’s part of human nature that none of us want to be in a place where we’re not wanted. That nature plays well with the instruction here to “flee” one place for another when you face persecution. The verb “φεύγω – to flee” does not indicate cowardice or a giving up, and is something Joseph is told to do, Jesus does, and Jesus tells Christians to do in other places.

Beginning with the Twelve, we see this playing out, as they move about from place to place, some staying in pretty much the same place until martyred, others moving around quite a bit until martyred. We see it especially in the missionary journeys of Paul, where he goes to lots of places, and the reception is varied, and he often shakes the dust off his feet.

There is an application here to modern missionary work, and also to the pastoral office. When a Pastor receives a Call, one of the factors in accepting or returning the Call is whether people want him here or not. The calling congregation clearly does want him there, at least for now, and if the current congregation doesn’t – well, sometimes it’s a fairly easy call to make.

We note in the short history of recent Middle Eastern persecution of Christians – it seems to have died down – that there is a pattern; Christians living in relative peace – or at least not persecuted much, persecution being ramped up, finally some are martyred, and others “flee,” to return to their oft destroyed houses and churches, to live once again in relative peace with their neighbors.

We see this manner of facing hatred and persecution playing out in the Book of Acts (8:1), and in the Christians fleeing to the safety of Pella and other safe areas, sometimes relocating, other times moving back home. Throughout her history – particularly after the 7th Century – we have had to face these things and have acted in a similar fashion. Persecution continues to be mobile and fluid.

And it's not like you're going to run out of places to run to. Fields that once were inhospitable to the growing the Christian crop now appear to be very fertile. China, southeast Asia, and certain places in Africa come to mind. In most of Europe and increasingly in America, formerly fertile fields seem to have become spent, yielding much less per acre than in the past.

24 – 25. You may have to explain the concept to the Millennials; He is the teacher, we are the students, He is the master, we are the servants, “εἰ τὸν οἰκοδεσπότην Βεελζεβούλ ἐπεκάλεσαν, πόσῳ μᾶλλον τοὺς οἰκιακοὺς αὐτοῦ – if they called the Master of the House Beelzebub, how much more those house members of Him.” Rhetorical Question. The answer is obvious.

It ought to be “ἀρκετὸν τῷ μαθητῇ ἵνα γένηται ὡς – sufficient to the disciple to be like” the teacher or like the Master, and we are. There's a lot of hatred against Christians, and it manifests itself in many ways, and your hearers deal with it all the time, and nobody likes to be hated for any reason. Acknowledge to your hearers that such things exist, address it, and comfort with these words.

26. He continues, “μὴ οὖν φοβηθῆτε αὐτούς – therefore don't fear them.” The conjunction “οὖν – therefore” indicates that what He is about to say is predicated on what He has just said. The negative “μὴ” used with the aorist subjunctive “prohibits another from an action, especially when that action has not yet begun” (FGG 178). It was not there yet, but it is coming, and it did come.

Don't be afraid because in the end, all will be made known. Many of the bad things people – Christians included – do, they do without anybody ever knowing about them. The same can be said about the good works Christians do, including their perseverance in the face of trials and tribulations; nobody knows about them. But – see Matthew 25:31ff.

27 – 28. They should not forget their primary task, which is to proclaim the thing He has sent them to proclaim, knowing that doing that may well bring on them persecution and hatred; things that tend to make us afraid. They are already afraid, for He uses the present tense to tell them “καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποκτεννόντων τὸ σῶμα – stop fearing from those who are killing the body.

He points out the killers' utter inability to hurt them otherwise; “τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν μὴ δυναμένων ἀποκτεῖναι – but the soul they are unable to kill.” The word “ψυχὴν – soul” is not “πνεῦμα – spirit,” but rather the entirety of the non-physical person. The killers are not able to alter who you are as a person, and they are especially unable to take away your religion from you.

Not that there's nothing to fear in life. There is something to fear, quite a bit actually, “φοβεῖσθε δὲ μᾶλλον τὸν δυνάμενον καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γεέννῃ – fear rather the one who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell.” The command to fear God is in the present tense; fearing God and the possibility of hell is to be a part of whom a Christian is.

29. According to the Internet, the population of the House Sparrow worldwide is 540,000,000. That may sound like a lot, and it is, but sparrow populations have been on the decline, especially

in urban areas. Still, there are a lot of them, and I don't know anybody who would pay good money for a sparrow. The Sparrow's Feast Day since 2010 is March 20. You think I'm making this up.

They are worthless, but nevertheless “ἐν ἑξ αὐτῶν οὐ πεσεῖται ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἄνευ τοῦ Πατρὸς ὑμῶν – not one of them will fall to the earth without the knowledge of your Father.” I think this and the next verse might have at one time sounded like hyperbole, but with the advent of the computer chip, we can imagine a God who is actually able to keep track of those things.

30. We have noted before that not all hair is the same. The number of hairs on the average human head varies by the color of the hair on said head. The average blonde has about 150,000 strands, the average black head had about 110,000, and surprisingly, the average redhead has only 90,000, making him the lowest maintenance required of the group.

I know what you're thinking; why no mention of people with brown hair? It's because there is no such thing as brown hair. What we think of as brown is actually called “blonde,” in nature, and what we think of as blonde does not occur in nature, but only in a bottle. Just try to find the color Loreal 10 Ultimate Blonde in a photo taken of Scandinavians a hundred years ago.

31. Rhetorically “μὴ οὖν φοβεῖσθε· πολλῶν στρουθίων διαφέρετε ὑμεῖς – stop being afraid, therefore, how many sparrows are more important than you?” At this point, you may want to familiarize yourself with the Chain of Being, an idea that developed in Medieval times, a great articulation of how created beings rank in importance, according to God.

32 – 33. The two words here: “confess” and “deny” contain a lot of 1st Century meaning. Those were your two choices when you were accused of being a Christian; you could confess “Jesus is Lord” or you could deny, cursing Jesus and praising the Emperor as Lord. It's the language Paul uses in his second letter to the Church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 12:3).

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