

Discipleship: Ministry of Persecution

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Pentecost Litany based on Psalm 8

Leader: When I look at your heavens,

All: the work of your fingers,

Leader: the moon and the stars,

All: which you have set in place,

Leader: what is man that you are mindful of him,

All: and the son of man that you care for him?

Leader: We worship you, Lord, In the name of the Father and The Son and The Holy Spirit.

Jeremiah 20:7-9 O Lord, you have deceived me,

and I was deceived;

you are stronger than I,

and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all the day;

everyone mocks me.

⁸For whenever I speak, I cry out,

I shout, "Violence and destruction!"

For the word of the Lord has become for me

a reproach and derision all day long.

⁹If I say, "I will not mention him,

or speak any more in his name,"

there is in my heart as it were a burning fire

shut up in my bones,

and I am weary with holding it in,

and I cannot.

Matthew 10:16-31 "Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of men,

for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. ¹⁹When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

²⁶“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. ²⁸And 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. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³²So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ...you will be hated by all for my name's sake. – Matthew 10:16&22

Wolves, sheep, serpents, doves, and sparrows... oh my. Jesus uses 5 different animals as images for how we ought to think of

ourselves. And the animals could not be more different. One for good reason. Jesus uses the image of wolves to describe others in our lives. Or ourselves from time to time. But the four others are a description of what it is like to be a Christian. Not, how to become a Christian, but the reality that comes when you side with Jesus. Sheep become gentle as Doves, but as wise as serpents. And finally, we are of more value to God than a Sparrow.

Have you seen the internet memes' where a group of people are given a topic or a thing and they have to line up based on whether they are for it or against it. It could be something as basic as, 'broccoli' or as existential as, 'AI.' And then the participants dart across the room to display their delight or disdain with that one word.

I have done the same thing in Head 2 Heart Confirmation class. I give the kids a would you rather question. *'Would you rather be famous or never have to worry about money?'* And then the kids have to choose one corner of the room or another.

It is not just a gut reaction game or meme. It has a social component. The undecided watching for clues from the rest of the group as to which side they should be on. Or someone shout out another word which makes what you originally thought of as delightful to be repugnant... and then the whole room shifts.

When Jesus describes the division and persecution that comes for His name's sake. He isn't asking us to pick a side. It is not a test of whether you are with him or not. He is describing the reality of Christian life. There will be times when you introduce the topic of God or prayer, or Jesus in a conversation ... and the whole room is going to shift. Someone

who has influence over you, a politician or friend, will choose a different side and you will be left feeling persecuted, divided from someone you love or respect.

This is not something you can avoid. Jesus says, ‘*you will be hated because of my name.*’ This isn’t something we can avoid. It is the nature of God’s presence, His Kingdom, His voice in your life.

When God and His Kingdom show up it will always split our reality. In any given moment, depending on what is being threatened, the presence of God divides things. And there will be times when you find yourself on the wrong side of the crowd who has attached themselves to worldly things. And at that moment it is not up to you to choose which camp to be in. You have already chosen in this scenario that Jesus is describing.

...you will be hated by all for my name's sake.

There will be many times in your life as a Christian when you side with Jesus and are persecuted for it.

Jesus is not asking us to choose a side. He is preparing us for what will happen when we choose His side, His Kingdom. He is preparing His disciple then and today.

Do not be surprised by persecution. It will happen. And Jesus want’s you to be aware of this. He is not promising you success or virtues or respect within your family and community. He is offering you Himself and His Kingdom ... and along with those come persecution.

Therefore, God gives the Christian the ability to be cunning, like a serpent, who is not caught unaware when danger is near. But lies in wait ready to take on the challenge.

Jesus says...When you are persecuted for my names sake, you will be able to set yourself and your emotions... and most importantly your fear aside... so that God can speak gently through the next words that come out of your mouth.

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. – Matthew 10:16

Let me ask you? What are you most afraid of? What is the worse thing that could happen to you?

Public embarrassment? It is going to happen. Being laughed at or thought unintelligent? It is going to happen. Being on the wrong side of a political argument?

It is going to happen. Because you have already sided with Jesus and His Kingdom.

What are you afraid of? What is your biggest fear? Hurting someone's feelings? It is going to happen. An argument with someone you love? It is going to happen. Division in the family?

It is going to happen. Because you have already sided with Jesus and His Kingdom.

And when it happens you will find that you are not surprised... you knew this was coming, you had been praying about it... hoping that your loved on might hear Jesus voice through you... When these moments come you will find yourself calm and cool, coiled up like a viper ready to strike... not with a

lethal blow but with the gentle and vulnerable words of passionate hope. You will see these moments coming and be prepared for whatever God has to say next through your thoughts and words.

This is your ministry. The Ministry of Persecution. You are not surprised to be hated, you are ready to give the person who shows hate for you whatever it is they need to find hope in this world. Just as someone did for you at an important point of surrender in your life. It is not about you, or their behavior, but the need being displayed by that person in that situation.

The ministry of persecution. For some of you this sounds exciting. You don't mind confrontation, especially if it is going to get at the root of the issue. You see frustration and disappointment, fear and hate not as a potential for division, but the place where the division that has been festering for far too long may finally get healed.

For you serving on the Evangelism team is your niche. Bumping into others and waiting to see what God does next. Public declarations and acts of kindness that force a lost and distracted world to acknowledge God's existence. A Pray Joliet walk downtown. Any sort of outreach which creates conversations about faith. We are right now organizing a steering committee asking the question of how we can welcome and host and engage with the families already meeting on our campus... NAMI, YMCA, Lil'loves and others. You aren't lacking in the ability to evangelize, you are simply lacking in the opportunities. The many and various ways you can bump into others and see what happens. Start the conversation, make the invitation.

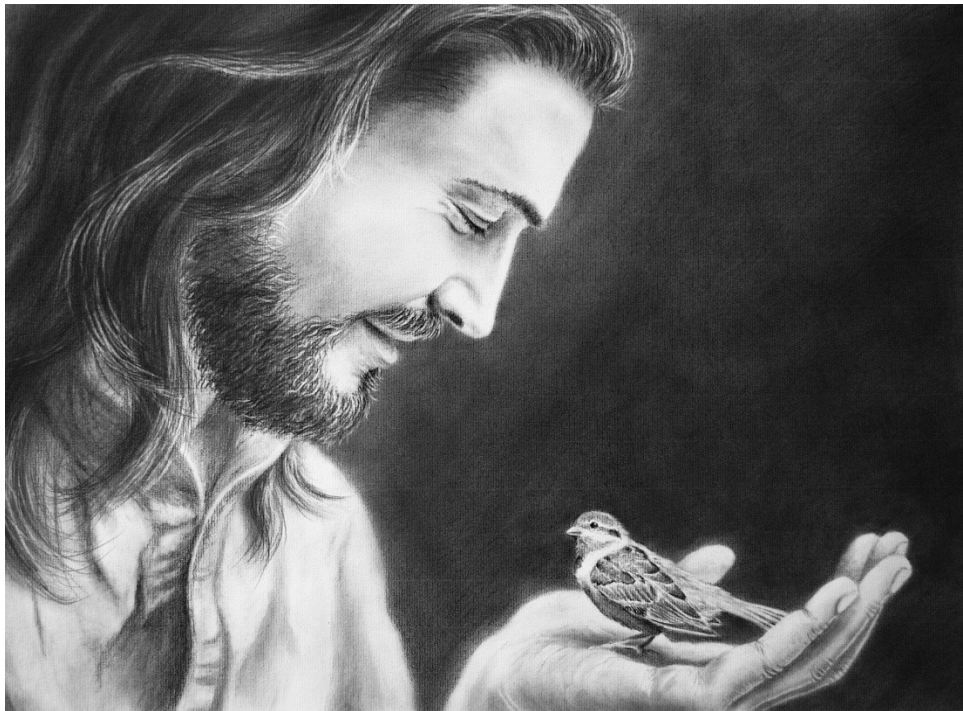
For others of us, the ministry of persecution is something that shows up from time to time when it is most needed. But make

no mistake, because you have already chosen Jesus there will come awkward conversations and life changing moments that begin in hate and end in love and reconciliation.

Wolves, sheep, serpents, doves and sparrows... oh my! God has sent you among wolves, prepared and wise as a serpent, selfless and gentle as doves. These moments are not about you, but what you have to offer. The very presence and words of God for His lost and distracted child.

You have chosen Jesus. You do not fear the hate of others. The only one who has any say over who you are and what you will do with your life is God. You are a wise, gentle and valued child of God!

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. -Matthew 10:29-31



*Iza from OniroGallery