

*24 "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25 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! 26 "So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27 What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28 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. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31 So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32 "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33 but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. 34 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 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; 36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household. 37 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; 38 and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Somewhere along the way I remember a professor's words: If you are going to follow Jesus then you better hope you look good on wood.

The cross.

Most of the twelve whom Jesus sent out that day long ago came to some sort of violent death. First James, fisherman, son of Zebedee, brother of John, beheaded by King Herod Agrippa. Later Peter, crucified upside down - John, exiled to Patmos, and so on. With the exception of Judas Iscariot the apostles followed Jesus not only in faith and witness, but in suffering. And Judas suffered like all the rest, but in his case not because he followed Jesus but because he despaired after betraying Jesus.

The seed of the church of Jesus Christ was watered by the blood of martyrs.

Jesus taught the twelve: "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."

Jesus' enemies called him Beelzebul, the prince of demons, Satan. The deeds and words of the only Son of God were for them only the works of darkness. Like Saul, they thought they

were serving God by opposing Jesus. Jesus is telling his apostles they will be treated in the same way.

The slave is not above the master. Yet I tell myself that if I can just be careful, plan well, work hard, that I will not end up like Jesus: disgraced, mocked, abandoned, dead on the cross. I figure the crosses are for robbers who get caught, no-goods, worthless. But for hard work, and faithfulness to God surely there will be no cross but a secure retirement party, a growing respected church, blue skies and fair weather sailing.

What would we think if we heard of a church that would open its doors to all sorts of misfits and cause the neighbors to become uncomfortable? What would we think if a church were to squander all of its resources on the hungry, or the mentally ill so that there was not enough left to take care of repairs and utilities? I know what I would think: they should have managed better, taken more care to not offend the neighbors, put more money aside for a rainy day.

Jesus said, "Have no fear of them for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing is secret that will not become known."

If all the neighbors would become upset because we took all this talk about God too seriously their opinion is not the last word. God will be doing the uncovering and the making known. God will have the last word. So don't be afraid to follow Jesus.

"What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Don't be afraid. Let Jesus invade the world once more in you, in us. The world will not like it any better this time, there'll be crosses, but don't be afraid.

"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."

James did not fear those who could kill the body, nor finally did Peter. Will we make gods of those whose power is but for a moment in this world? Or will we with all of our life worship the God whose power is from everlasting to everlasting? Which is it for you - the almighty God or public opinion?

Hear what Jesus says next: "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."

You are known by God, every single hair of your head is counted. Though you find yourself on a cross with the sky turned black, and the earth shaking, do not be afraid. Jesus your Lord has been there before you and told you to follow.

He speaks to you this promise: “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.”

Peter heard him speak these words, and James. And they were forgiven and you can be forgiven too. Begin again this day to follow.

Always it is in life a temptation to measure ourselves by a standard other than Jesus Christ. Growth, success, wealth, health, happiness, power and influence, the list goes on and on. But this day Jesus is calling you and calling us to not be afraid. Trust that Jesus Christ is the only true measure of your life.

Follow.