

Matthew 14 Depart from Me / No need to depart

Jesus says the words three times in the Gospels and we shudder each time we hear them: “Depart from Me.” They are spoken in reference to the judgment when those he “never knew”, those whom he “knows not where they come from”, and those “cursed”, are sent to perdition.

We don’t like these words.

We don’t like them because we don’t like to talk about hell. How can something so final, yet so ongoing, be fair? Isn’t God merciful?

We don’t like them because we want justice on our terms. We say, “God don’t you see the evil out there? Aren’t you going to do something about it?!” And then when he tells us he will do something, we say, “Well don’t do it that way! That’s mean!”

We don’t like these words because they are a bit scary, “What if he were to say that to me? What if, when I get there, I say the wrong thing and off I go!?”

These words of Jesus, “Depart from me.” Came to mind this week as I was reading our Gospel lesson for today.

Jesus is in his grief over his relative and the last Old Testament prophet, John the Baptizer – Herod just chopped off his head and paraded it around his party. Jesus hears this and withdraws to grieve. And yet, he doesn’t get to, he is interrupted by the crowds.

And we in our grief, and bad moods, and “hangriness” how do we respond to those unfortunate enough to come across us in a bad mood? We will shout “leave me alone,” or snap: “what now?!”

Jesus in his grief, turns to the crowd who interrupted him while he wanted a bit of time alone to pray and to mourn, and he turns to them and has *compassion* on them. His insides go out to them. He is moved by their need for healing.

And so even when he wanted or needed some time alone, he turns to provide for the needs of the crowd, and he heals them and teaches them.

The day goes on, Jesus providing for the crowd, but then the day is far spent. So the disciples inform Jesus that the crowd will *need* to *depart* from him to go get food.

Jesus responds not with “yes, depart them from me.” He responds with, “They need not depart.”

How does the same Jesus look at some and say, “they need not depart,” then look at others and say, “depart from me forever”? Is he bipolar? Is he an angry capricious master, or is he a hippy who doesn’t care about right or wrong and just needs us to all relax about the doctrines and share “love”?

Or: is this Jesus the One who is both Just and Merciful? Who preaches Law, the truth, and Gospel, God’s plan of salvation for the needy? Yes this is our Jesus.

And this perhaps might give us comfort.

In Matthew 7 Jesus bids the false prophets who outwardly looked really nice, but spoke falsehoods, he bids them depart. He doesn’t care if they used his name, he didn’t know who those are who would speak such falsehoods in his name. “You clearly don’t know me, and I don’t know you. Depart.”

In Matthew 25, with the parallel passage in Luke, he bids those depart from him who rejected the message of the true prophets “the brothers” as Jesus calls them in Matthew. “You hate my

people, you hate me – and I don't know where that comes from, certainly not the Kingdom of God. Depart.”

So why are these two classes of people bid to depart, as opposed to the 5000 plus who have no need to depart from Jesus? Because one group NEEDS something, and the other groups THINK they do not.

The false prophets have it all figured out, they don't need God's Word. “No, no, I've got it all figured out and I will tell you what is socially acceptable and right and true. And those passages in the Bible that we don't like? Get rid of them, they were probably a mistranslation or some social stuff from a long time ago we don't need anymore...” Careful... making a Bible and a god in *your* image cannot save... Jesus does not know of any gods like that... you may be sent to depart and search for them and how they might save... that won't end well.

Likewise, the ones who reject the True message of Salvation in Jesus, who persecute it, who revile it, who make fun of it, who don't have time for any of that, who just want to be left alone – they clearly don't “need it” in their mind. “It's just some fairy tales,” or worse, “a fear based system to keep people compliant...” be careful... to wish to be apart from Jesus... he may give you what you want...

But this crowd in galilee... and this one gathered in Idaho today? Is there anyone sick? Any sinners? Anyone with needs? If so... Good! Yes, good! Because Jesus says there is then “no need for you to depart.” And he, like with that crowd, will give of his abundance more than you can imagine!

May we guard ourselves and our hearts then from sinful pride that says we are better than, that says we have it all figured out. May we guard our hearts against shallow needs. “Just help me

pay the bills and fill my belly God, I can take care of the rest..." No, our God is not a divine vending machine and our King is not a bread King... May we rather see that our need is deep. Beyond, the stomach, but to the heart, the mind, and soul. May we see our inability to overcome our sins or death. We can fight against them as hard as we can, but we can't win the battle.

May we then look to One who *already has* won the battle by his death and resurrection for us! In Christ this battle has been won, the victory is sure! Rejoice!

It is those then who do not want a share in it that are told to depart, because they wanted no share in it in the first place. If you have NEED, take heart, the Lord will not cast out any who come to him. If you have no need, and would rather feel the need to be contentious against the Lord and his word... Be careful...

But in this we find room for worry still don't we? "I have been angry with the Lord," or "I haven't come to him as often as I ought," maybe I'm not the Galilean crowd? But don't you see? Even your apathy, even your anger at the Lord for not doing things his way, *when offered to the Lord as a need* – is more reason to know you are a Galilean!

If you haven't been praying as much, if you are angry at the Lord, if you struggle with his teaching, "Why is it this way Lord?" Tell him that! And tell him you NEED his Spirit and Word to work in you! And what is that but to sit at his feet, and not be cast out at all!

Those cast out by the Lord, have already cast him out, "I know better than his word" or "I can save myself" or "I have something better than him for life." And if you struggle with those thoughts maybe it is time to talk with someone, time to dive into his Word even deeper and see what he might teach you.

And for those with no interest in that well, sadly, the Lord gives them what they want eventually. “The doors of hell are locked on the inside” CS Lewis writes. And as for the length of the sentence in hell, well, who is to say the rebellion and pride cease when someone gets there? Or perhaps, like a prisoner who starts riots and engages in all manner of evil, they don’t get let out on good behavior, do they? They get another term stuck on.

But here we are again with the teachings we don’t like. And you know what? It’s good we don’t like them – that doesn’t mean they aren’t true, but it’s good we don’t like them. Why? Because God doesn’t like it either!

Look at what cost he would pay to save the world from this evil we bring on ourselves! Look to the Cross and see the Son of God suffering an unthinkable torment for evil – Critics will say Jesus, “only suffered for a weekend.” Don’t dare to assume you know the weight of suffering from a Righteous Father who is beyond time! Yet the Son goes to that willingly that we might never taste a drop of it.

Would any of you parents give your child for another’s person’s benefit? A real evil person too! That’s a hard ask isn’t it? Paul, with great love, says he wishes he might be damned to perdition and hell to save his kinsfolk who have rejected the Messiah -they have no need of him in their mind...

But that’s not how it works, not even Paul can pay this price. How it *does* work is the Son of God is given to pay this price. That we might receive not condemnation, but instead, we might receive, like a crowd of galileans, *abundance*. Abundance that flows not from an ivory tower, but from a cross. His blood pours out a great abundance of forgiveness that covers sin the world over! And he has some for you, make no mistake. Do you need it? I do. Come take it.

These gifts are yours, yes even this crowds here, in Word, hear it! In a meal of broken bread, This is my Body, This is my Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. So if you've got sins from this week, and you believe the promise that the blood of Christ from the Cross washes them clean, if you have need this day... rejoice, you have no need to depart from Jesus, he will call you close to make you new.

And rejoice that even now, children lost, a half a world away, so needy... does God cast these out? No, he goes to them, revealing to the little infants, by his Spirit, by means of missionaries and the Word. And he continues to batter hearts and minds with the Word, with tribulations, to wake them up to see their need for a Savior. May God continue to work in this way, to save more and more, that ever more might be present at the Feast of abundance in his kingdom.

He's got a spot for you there. It's sealed in the blood. Take heart, needy sinners! Look to Christ, you have no need to depart, but in fact: he has promised he will be with you always, to the end of the age. God be praised. Amen.