

# Sermon Text for May 26, 2024

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

## *Psalm 29, Matthew 10:32-39* **“God turns everything upside down”**

I've been thinking a lot lately about what do we consider normal in our lives and how not normal it is for the majority of the world. This weekend it is normal for us to have a Memorial Day parade and to honor those veterans who died in battle so that we are able to worship together this Sunday morning, and so that we can vote in November, so that we can say what we believe without the fear of going to prison. I have lived in so many places that what we do this weekend is completely foreign to them. The fact that we are able to walk in the parade and not have active troops and tanks and missiles walking alongside us, that's strange. Many countries, do that, we don't do that. It is just a quaint Monday afternoon giving candy out to children. Most people in the world would see that juxtaposition as strange. We don't, it's normal. We love our small town feel and wouldn't want to change that.

This Sunday it is, pretty much in name only, Trinity Sunday where we lift up and recognize that we worship a God who values relationships and is in a very personal, intimate relationship with us. Our first reading in Psalm 29 speaks to the majesty and the Providence of God from creation to even now. This may be all that we say about the Trinity today, but it is on the calendar as Trinity Sunday and churches all across the world make a much bigger deal of it. Like last Sunday when we all wore red, there are many churches around this area who don't even celebrate Pentecost, and certainly don't wear red to church.

There are things that take place in our life that we take for granted that if they are placed in a different culture even today, much more thousands of years ago, it just might look like someone turned the world upside down. Speaking of turning the world upside down, what were some of the strangest things that you did during Covid that you never imagined you would ever do? How about wiping down your mail, or your groceries. Remember doing that? We still have gallons of hand sanitizer stored away somewhere in the church from that time. Things were certainly upside down then, but do we even realize how different our lives are today than when Jesus speaks in Scripture and what he says may be completely foreign to us, but make perfect sense to his disciples?

Today's Scripture is one of those where Jesus describes what it takes to be a loyal disciple. I can guarantee you that what Jesus says in Scripture that we read today paints a very

different picture from what most of us think it means to be a disciple today. What was important in Jesus' day, even the loyalty that was demanded and required is at a very different level than what we preach or teach. As a result we see that a disciple has to be willing to let God turn things upside down in their life. Let's read.

## **READ**

So what is Jesus saying here? Let's remember that earlier in this chapter, and we have already seen most of this chapter in previous sermons, Jesus is sending out his disciples into the world and he gives them the bare necessities so that they can rely on God for all things because just like Psalm 29 states, God is the God who provides all things for us at all times. That's another thing we forget in our culture where we think of ourselves as self-made men and women. That is a lie, there is no such thing as a self-made person.

But the reality in Jesus' day to be a disciple was to be someone who had a target on your back and people were looking to persecute you. We don't live in that same reality. No one in this country can say that they are persecuted because of their Christian faith, no one. There are a handful of churches in every community, but that wasn't always the case. Many of our ancestors came to this land because of religious persecution and so had to flee their home countries and start over. Their world was turned completely upside down and so had no idea what the future would hold. But that is not where we are today as American Christians living in Strasburg where we have parades to celebrate our heroes and Christian prayers to open and end those celebrations.

There is a certain disconnect between Jesus' words in Matthew today and the reality that we face in our world today. Now, we can make things up and pretend that there is persecution of Christians in our country, but that is only delusional and not the truth as we know it. So when we read in vs.35-36 we know that this is not the case in our life. When we were pastors in Moscow we had a monthly gathering of YAS, Young Adult and Students, and there was a Bible Study and worship and a meal. And the Gospel was preached at this event. One evening a group of students introduced to me a young man who had given his life to Christ, but he was from Afghanistan and his parents were in Moscow as refugees. His family was looking for him to kill him. It wasn't that he wasn't just not welcomed back at home, but they were looking to kill him and so could we help and provide a place for him to stay and protect him. We did, and he got inserted into the community. But his life was turned upside down, nothing was the same as a result of the Holy Spirit grabbing his life.

For us, it is a decision that we make to follow Jesus or not. I wonder how much does our life change as a result of that decision or do we continue along as if nothing has really changed. When we follow Jesus, it ought to turn our world upside down, it is meant to do that, because it rearranges in our life what is the most important thing. There are three things that we are going to look at that this Scripture addresses in relationship to turning our lives upside down.

1. Clearly, Jesus states that a walk with Jesus can mean division within a household. A decision for Jesus may rend and tear family ties. We read in vs.34 that Jesus came not to bring peace but a sword. We read also in Hebrews 4:12 of this sword which is the Word of God that divides soul from spirit. So this sword of God, the Word of God, provides loyalty to Jesus and has the potential to divide families.

I have always prided myself as the guy who focused on unity and peace. But sometimes they can become idols. If unity and peace is all that you are after, then you don't need Jesus to be a part of that. Conversely, if you are pursuing Jesus with all of your heart mind and strength, it is going to rub up against people the wrong way sometimes, even people, or especially people in your own family. Believing the Word of God has authority takes us to a place where our world might be turned upside down. Hey, congratulations, by the way, on completing the Read Through the Bible. We did it, we finished it on Saturday.

Jesus describes this walk with him as taking up the cross. Again, this is something that might be difficult for us to understand since the cross was a symbol of torture and agony, and someone who was a traitor to the nation which Jesus was found guilty of. On this Memorial Day we worship someone who was guilty of treason against his country and as a result died on a cross because of it. Jesus expect loyalty from his followers similar to those who were going to the cross who were political revolutionaries. That's why he uses this example. He wants people who are willing to die for him. You see, God doesn't protect us from suffering. But God will bring us through the suffering, that is a promise.

2. Secondly, loyalty to Jesus means more than family loyalty. Loyalty to Jesus means more than loyalty to your country as well. Look at vs.37. What does loving your family more than Jesus look like? I honestly don't have an answer for that? Maybe we can see it in Matthew 19:27ff where we are willing to turn our lives upside down by leaving everything to follow Jesus. But again, the degree to which we are willing to be a disciple has changed over the centuries, and we would rather be a normal disciple, which according to this Scripture doesn't exist. Loyalty to Jesus has to supersede all other loyalty, including family, including country.

But I don't want to be that kind of disciple, you say, and I say that this is the only kind. Or we are no disciples.

3. So first of all a walk with Jesus can cause division within the household, loyalty to Jesus means more than family loyalty, and lastly, we must be willing to die for ourselves. In vs.39 we read those who find their life...But the literal Greek is those who seek for their soul, will lose it, but those who lose their soul for my sake, will find it. Once our soul is aligned with Christ then everything else follows. This is the same Jesus who tells us that the peacemakers are blessed, the same one who tells us to love our enemies. When we make a decision for Jesus people are going to be aligned for or against the Gospel and we will rub up against that.

Jesus tells us to not try to cling to our way of life. It is not worth it. Let it go, lose it so that you can follow Jesus more closely, and you will find a life that is very different from the one you currently are living. The harder we work to try and save our lives, the more we lose it. Those who give highest priority to the task of protecting themselves will find that there is nothing left to protect. Think about that.

Loyalty is complicated, especially on this Memorial Day. Are we willing to love God more than country? Jesus calls us to an upside down world in which our devotion is one that many may think is unnecessary and extreme. Look forward to living your life in a way that is upside down for those around you. Amen.