

To Be in Relationship with Christ

KATHLEEN RUSHTON
interprets Matthew 10:26-42 in
light of our call to relationship
at this time.

American writer D L Mayfield was overwhelmed by her work with refugees until she discovered the books of Dorothy Day. She said in her introduction to *The Reckless Way of Love: Notes on Following Jesus* that she was impatient with Dorothy's writings. Where was Dorothy's work, her interaction with the poor, her countercultural lifestyle, her life at the frontline? What did Mayfield find? A woman bound to daily service in community and deeply committed to rhythms of prayer, reflection and solitude. Dorothy wanted to live for Christ by growing in awareness and understanding of the love of Jesus. Her "work" was her relationship with Jesus.

Mayfield still longs to be like Dorothy Day but not to be radical anymore. She desires "to carve out space in my life for Christ above all else . . . to be sustainable, to remain steadfast." Matthew 10 is about the same basic truth. The "work" of disciples is their relationship with Jesus.

We may be asking new questions about our relationship with Jesus in response to our COVID-19 journey. I will discuss Matthew 10 within its Gospel context and within the context of the 80s to show that our "work" in our time is our relationship with Christ.

God's Mission of Mercy

In Mt 10 Jesus speaks of mission as an expression of mercy which is at the heart of his alternative community, the new people of God. Before the twelve are named, Jesus gives them authority over unclean spirits and to heal every sickness (Mt 10:1-5). They are apprentices who learn from Jesus to lead others to embody God's mercy. They are not just static pillars on which to build the Church. They are to move into God's liberating mission.

"As you go, proclaim the good news" is an all-embracing mission, a way of life. Jesus prepares the disciples to take little with them and to respond whether they are accepted or rejected (Mt 10:7-15). And there is another side to mission. There are stay-at-home disciples like us who are on God's mission of hospitality and support. The community of Jesus is not to be naïve (Mt 10:16-23). God's mission of mercy to the poor and downtrodden disturbs the powerful, those set in their ways and the religious leaders.



Don't Be Afraid

God's protection surrounds each person in the hardships of mission (Mt 10:24-33). We have all been in Lockdown to prevent the coronavirus spreading and to protect the elderly and the vulnerable. We were literally standing apart from the crowd. Society's prevailing values focused on caring for one another rather than on self-interest. As life returns to "normal" we can be encouraged to continue to show kindness and compassion. Three times Jesus assures us not to be afraid because God is with us when we make choices to stand apart from the crowd (Mt 10:26, 28, 31).

The Bottom Line

The early Christians experienced family divisions and betrayals because they chose to follow Jesus wholeheartedly (Mt 10:34-42). This pathway of faith is required of us, too, in our call to family life. Jesus speaks of being "worthy" of him which in biblical terms is a willingness to receive God's mercy. It leads us to "take up the cross and follow" Jesus.



We often use the expression of “taking up a cross” to describe putting up with life’s usual burdens – a long wait in a supermarket queue, a difficult boss, sickness. However, this was a political image of shame, pain, social rejection, marginalisation, condemnation and death for first-century disciples. Crucifixion, as practised by the Roman Empire (*basileia*), was the cruel form of execution imposed on marginal people – foreigners, criminals and slaves.

Jesus’s call to “take up the cross” means choosing a way of life of marginalisation – to identify with nobodies and those who resisted Rome’s version of reality. The Gospel tells of Rome being thwarted. God raises Jesus from the dead and he returns to establish God’s *basileia* over all, including the *basileia* of Rome.

Signs of the Times

Jesus talks to the religious leaders about discerning “the signs of the times” (Mt 16:3). Vatican II reminds us that the Church has the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. We are to work at interpreting the *authentic signs of God’s*

presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires of our time. The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* insists that the mystery of the human person and of human history is disclosed in our relationship with the crucified and resurrected Jesus. In this time of the pandemic we may need to free God from “lockdown” as we live out the “work” of our relationship with Jesus.

Presence

During Lockdown we had no gathering, sacraments or Sunday Eucharist in the familiar way. The “virtual” experience of Church in online Masses and worship deprived us of presence. We are an incarnational Church where presence is expressed through our body – by touch, gesture and communal togetherness. Perhaps, in new ways, we’re including Monday to Saturday in the “work” of our relationship with Jesus. The insight of theologian Karl Rahner that the “Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all” flourishes among us.

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We find God is in the mundane, in presence, in choices we make to stay connected to our reality and what is going on in our world. We’re encountering God “lockdowned” in the sacred space of our homes and Earth our common home – in family life, in our bubble, in the aloneness of living alone, in Scripture, in silence, in beauty, in creativity and in walking or biking.

Home

We can learn from Jewish practice. Jesuit David Neuhaus, born of Jewish parents, explains that when the Easter liturgies were being livestreamed with priests celebrating alone, the Passover was being held in Jewish homes around a family table where a parent was celebrant and with the full participation of children. Home is a sacred place – a place of worship as well as the church. The ANZAC Day celebration this year, centred on home rather than the public space. ⌚

21 June: Matthew 10:26-33 RL 12th Sunday Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:24-39 RCL 3rd Sunday After Pentecost

28 June: Matthew 10:37-42 RL 13th Sunday Ordinary Time
Matthew 10:40-42 RCL 4th Sunday After Pentecost



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