

Tell Fr. H stories

- Jesus is like the Boston Red Sox
- Story about 52 sermons in Seminary

For the record, I never figured out how Jesus is like the Boston Red Sox, and I don't pull old sermons out of the file that have no connection to the day's scripture or current events in the church or the world.

So, with that in mind, let's look at today's gospel.

The overarching theme of today's Gospel is God's call, illustrated in John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' disciples. The passage touches on that theme by drawing out three major threads that run through the Gospel narrative. They are obvious threads when you read the Gospel as a whole, but we only get a glimmer of each one today, and so I want to take a few minutes to unpack each of them.

The first thread is the conflicts that people of faith often have with the powers of the world. Matthew's story of Jesus birth includes a story of Herod the Great who attempts to track down the child messiah and kill him and in the process slaughters all boys in his kingdom under age 2. It continues in today's Gospel with news of John's imprisonment. In a few chapters we will hear about why John was imprisoned by King Herod – not the same Herod as Herod the Great – and how he was executed on a whim by Herod's wife. Saint Matthew concludes this thread in the Passion narrative when Pontius Pilate stands as judge over Jesus and condemns him to death to appease an unruly crowd.

The second thread is that the Hebrew Scriptures are the foundation upon which the story of Jesus must be told. Today's Gospel includes a direct quote from Isaiah. Saint Matthew weaves Scripture through the Gospel from start to finish illustrating how Jesus is the Messiah that has been foretold. Again, jumping back to the opening chapter of the Gospel, Matthew links Saint Joseph who dreams of angels to Joseph the dreamer who was sold into slavery in Egypt and whose offspring Joshua (the Hebrew form of the name Jesus) led the people into the Promised Land. Saint Matthew is a master at this sort of thing and over the course of this year we hear numerous references and citations of Holy Scripture that remind informed readers of the Old Testament and identify Jesus as God's chosen one. These references continue all the way to the end of the Gospel when Jesus dies praying the words of Psalm 22.

The third thread highlights the difficulty in maintaining cherished relationships while following God. Again, going back to the beginning of the Gospel Joseph is told in a dream to take Mary as his wife, he is told in a dream to flee to Egypt as a refugee, he is told in a dream to relocate his family to Nazareth – these are acts of faith that affected relationships, literally leaving everything and everyone else behind and setting out down an unknown road. The disciples do the same thing; they leave everything and follow Jesus. We learn later that Peter is married – we never learn what his wife thought about him leaving his business to follow an itinerant Holy Man, but I've heard several sermons imagining the things she might have said. James and John likewise leave their nets, but they also leave their father behind. Jesus' relationship with his own family is also called into question in Matthew's Gospel. At one point when his family is outside the door – Saint Mark tells us they were trying to stop him from continuing his ministry – but Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who

are my brothers?” And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

As I said, the overarching theme of this gospel passage is God’s call, illustrated in John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus’ disciples and embedded in three threads that that weave through the entire Gospel narrative.

- 1) Those whose call is to stand up to the powers of the world,
- 2) Those whose call is to immerse themselves into the foundation of Scripture upon which the story of Jesus is told, and
- 3) Those whose call to follow God brings about difficulty in cherished relationships.

Those are three types of calls, but there are many more, and most of us follow a call that mixes numerous threads together. There are a lot of ways to follow Jesus and be a person of deep faith. What ties every person of faith together is Jesus’ command to love.

If you are called to stand up to injustice –of civic authorities – never let go of love for those persecute you.

If you are called to a life prayer and study of Scripture – never forget that the summary of the law and the prophets is love.

If your call strains cherished relationships – find a way to ease that strain with love.

And in all you do, love those who are called to a different ministry than you are, and try to find ways to support their call.

As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Perfect is a high bar. Nobody ever said it was easy to be a Christian, but with faith in God’s call to us, it is possible.