

Sermon title: Just good advice?

Text: Matthew 10:21-39

Introduction

As a parent when my children were younger I found myself in the advice-giving business. I guess every parent or adult often feels the need to offer our pearls of advice, but especially, perhaps, when those we care about are about to go off on their own, on a journey.

But here's what some people have to say about the value of advice!

Agatha Christie: Good advice is always certain to be ignored, but that's no reason not to give it.

Perhaps she's been in conversation with fellow author Carolyn Wells who quips: Advice is one of those things it is far more blessed to give than to receive.

Erica Jong is very honest when she says of advice: Advice is what we ask for when we already know the answer but wish we didn't.

In typical form G. K. Chesterton agrees: I owe my success to having listened respectfully to the very best advice, and then going away and doing the exact opposite.

But perhaps US comedian George Burns comes up best with: Too bad that all the people who really know how to run the country are busy driving taxi cabs and cutting hair.

2. Advice before a journey - what would you expect from Jesus?

Well, you don't have to speculate.

In Matthew 10 we have it for real.

Only in this case it isn't just good, homesy advice.

READ 10:1, 5

The ones who have been with Him, He calls to Him and now sends out

What He has done, now they will do "in His name" – with His authority

And what He has experienced and will experience, so will they: this is not just good advice.

Jesus authority rings through these words, words we do well to heed as His followers as we seek to in anyway "go" in His name

What we have here probably isn't Matthew recalling a long piece of teaching.

Sure, it has a consistent theme – teaching for dps going for the Master.

But it has a very jerky feel, like pithy sayings, one-liners. This suggests that they are genuine recordings of words of Jesus, things that stuck in the dps minds, were then passed on to others.

They were probably parting words from Jesus as time and again they went off in His name or discussed what they had experienced afterwards.

Matthew gathers them together like a good editor.

They were parting words for dps who sometimes needed to remember that they weren't God's gift to their hearers – but that Jesus was

READ: vv24-25a;

So they are parting words about humility as opposed to pride or self-righteousness

They were parting words to encourage in bumpy times, when your words are manipulated and twisted, your character distorted

READ: v25b-ff

They are parting words for times of suffering, when it feels like everything you've ever stood for as a follower of Jesus lies in tatters

READ: v30-31, 32-33

They are also parting words for discerning the validity or not of reactions to what you humbly and prayerfully seek to do in Jesus name, when a bewildering reaction ensues

READ: v34-36

They are parting words that help explain why being a follower of Jesus isn't like a form of divine insurance policy, why bad things do happen to good people, words that offer a framework to begin to make sense of the seemingly sense-less

READ: vv37-38

The summary of these summaries comes in v39

READ: v39

It's recorded in a slightly different way in the other synoptics

As The Message Translation puts it:

39If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

At the end of the day it is all about orientation – to Him or to myself
It is all about what picture of reality we choose to shape our lives

A few years ago I was in St Peter's in Rome. Staying at a centre just 200m from the Basilica I was drawn back early in the morning again and again to Michelangelo's Pieta – Mary holding her son's dead body

Carved so exquisitely from marble, for me it is a sculpted parable of this going in Jesus name: let's call it faith

Mary sits with the dead weight, the reality of the dead Jesus on her lap

She holds out her free, left hand in a gesture.

It isn't one of grief, or of bewilderment, but of faith.

I see this reality. But He has promised me that my Redeemer will live. He has said: I am the resurrection and the life.

I see this reality. I hear that one. I do not know how this dead man can be raised. But believe I will.

Or, I do not know how all things can work together for good in this situation. But He has promised it. And He who has promised is faithful.

3. Application

Does that experience ring a bell?

As you seek to live out your faith, being a follower of Jesus, is it hard at present?

Then hear His word, His Word of encouragement: READ 10:29-31