

# Walking in the *Foot Prints* of Jesus

*A Discipleship Journey*



## **Sermon on the Mount**

Week 30

### **Wolves in Sheep's Clothing**

Matthew 7:15 - 20

#### Opening Prayer:

#### ***The Call***

The call to us at a time when great pieces of the future crumble in life is not so much to faith as it is to hope. Depression is the seedbed of hopelessness, the loss of surety that life must still somehow be full of good, however impossible it is to remember it, to see it, to trust it at this moment.

Hope does not tell us that soon life will be the same again as it was before the loss. No, hope tells us that the pieces are there for us to put together, if only we will give ourselves to the doing of it.

When Jesus dies on the cross something entirely different rises. And that something is the call to us to make the best in life live again.

The 12<sup>th</sup> station of the cross brings us face to face with the finality of defeat. Some things don't have a happy ending in life. They just grind on until loss becomes the new normal.

Sometimes we fail...

Sometimes we're beaten...

Sometimes we're lost...

Sometimes we're abandoned by the very people we love most in life and  
who we thought also loved us...

Sometimes we learn that there's no going back to things that once were,  
but are no more.

The question with which the 12<sup>th</sup> station confronts us is an awesome one. Am I able to accept the daily deaths of life, both the great ones and the small, knowing that death is not the end of life, only it's passing over to something new in me? Hopefully, I learn from Jesus who gave up himself, his mission, his life in ways that all seemed totally wrong, that the deaths I died may bring new life to the world around me as well.

When we take hold of life with all its deaths and all its resurrections, life becomes an eternal hotbed of creation given into the hands of the creature so that creation can go on creating.

## Reflection

Many of our previous reflections have emphasized the importance of a pure heart; that righteousness, or right relationship with God, is rooted in our innermost thoughts, beliefs, and values. When we are fully grounded in God and acting out of faith-filled beliefs and values, our actions will bring goodness into the world. Jesus, in this passage, applies that same principle to our religious leaders, or prophets.

*Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but underneath are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So, by their fruits you will know them.* Matthew 7:15 – 20

*Beware of false prophets.* Jesus cautions us to have a discerning heart when seeking out a spiritual leader or teacher. Our culture has become steeped in “grey areas”: blurred or manipulated lines of truth, mixed messages, and misinformation. Just as we need to protect our electronic devices from hackers and scammers, so too do we need to protect our spiritual lives from people who “talk the talk” but don’t “walk the walk” or don’t practice what they preach. These are the “blind leading the blind” – wolves hiding as harmless sheep, according to Jesus.

But how do we know? How do we discern between the true spiritual leaders and the fake ones? We only have to look to the next passages to find the answer: *by their fruits you will know them.* By their words and actions; and words and actions by Jesus’ standards are not the world’s standards. So worldly success, popularity, charisma, and fame don’t really apply. *By their fruits you will know them;* fruits such as love, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22 – 23). Do they practice the virtues of the Beatitudes: poor in spirit, mourns with our broken world, meek, hungers and thirsts for righteousness, is a peacemaker, is pure in heart, and so on? Does their life reflect these qualities? Do their words and actions align with their teaching?

To be fair, this “fruit” test is not altogether simple or straightforward. For fruit takes time to grow and ripen. We have to wait and watch patiently, but attentively. Jesus knows and understands how difficult it can be and wants us to rely on Him for guidance. He has sent His Holy Spirit to guide us in wisdom and discernment. We only need to turn to Him with an open heart and a listening Spirit.

*Reflection Question:* What tools help me discern which spiritual mentor to follow? What would be helpful for me in this discernment? How do I, as a spiritual member of the community, emulate these qualities in my life?

## Closing Prayer

Speak to Jesus about what is on your heart, then rest in silence for a few moments listening for His response.