



Not Peace, But a Sword (Not Excalibur but Truth)

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Ordinary 12

Matthew 10:24-39

Sunday 21 June 2026

1. For a good few years I worked with people who had nowhere to live. I was part of a team that walked the streets both day and night, checked out remote reserves and park spaces and under bridges and in derelict buildings. We came to know this city not just as a place of shops and offices but as a place of sheltered corners and warm vents and safe posies where you wouldn't be moved on before dawn. We also came to know a lot of Streeties.

2. And here is what surprised people most when I told them: we knew who they were. In the CBD, at any given time, we could put a name to the vast majority of people sleeping rough. They weren't a faceless mass, nor just a number on a report - they were a community of particular people, with most recognised by us. Knowing the names, knowing the stories, noticing when someone hadn't been seen for a few days and going to look - that was the most important work we did.

3. Which is why, when someone died, we knew exactly who we had lost. We went to their funerals, more than I can count now - people who died before their time of things that are entirely treatable when you have a roof and a bed and a doctor who recognises your name. (The stats will show that if you sleep rough for a prolonged period of time you will probably die some 20-30 years before your primary school mates.) It often fell to us to be there, because by then the wider world had long since looked through them. A coffin, the team and perhaps a few streeties. A whole human life, and a church of nearly empty pews.

4. You learn something in a space like that - that a person can be perfectly well known to those who walk beside them, and still be utterly invisible to everyone else. That is the particular cruelty of the street: not that no one could know your name, we did, but that the city, with few exceptions has trained itself to look straight through you.

5. I think of one man whom we knew well; we were often greeted by him with a high five or a hongki. But the rest of the city looked

straight past him, and he had long stopped expecting otherwise. Then one morning the owner of a cafe began using his name and keeping a coffee aside for him. He could hardly believe it. "She remembered," he kept saying - astonished that someone who didn't have to, had bothered to remember him and his name.

6. I carried that memory into this week's gospel, because tucked inside this hard reading is at the very heart of what we were doing on those streets. "Even the hairs of your head are all counted." Not one sparrow falls without God knowing. We kept our list of names because every name mattered. And here is the gospel's astonishing claim: God keeps one too. You -you whom the world looks through, you who have been turned into scenery - you are counted. You are named. You were never, for one moment, invisible to the One who matters most.

7. There's an older story behind this. A rich man and a poor man at his gate. And you may not have noticed - the poor man has a name, Lazarus, while the rich man, for all his purple and fine robes is given none. Scripture quietly reverses the order we are so used to. The ones the world will not name are named by God, and the comfortable are the ones who go unremembered. Hold onto that, because the rest of the reading is hard, and we'll need it.

8. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

9. Hmm - not bad for the Prince of Peace! It sits so awkwardly we're tempted to slide past it. Let's not - let's set the scene instead. This whole chapter is about Jesus sending the twelve out. Travel light, he says, go to the lost - and then his tone darkens. You'll be sheep among wolves. You'll be hated. Even your own households may turn on you. It's in that setting - the cost of the mission - that today's hard words come.

10. We need though, to read them as Jesus describing what happens, not what he wants. He is not setting daughter against mother. He is telling the truth, he is telling the truth about what it costs to live as though the kingdom of God were real. When you stop looking through the person on the pavement and start standing beside them, you'll find not everyone follows. Some of the resistance comes from those closest to you. The sword is not a weapon Jesus swings. It is the division that opens in a world that would much prefer things stayed exactly as they are.

11. In this sense the sword, like all good swords in history, could be

named. Let it be called **Truth**.

12. Now let's go a little deeper, because homelessness tempts us into a comfortable lie. The lie is that it is a private misfortune - bad luck, bad choices, bad character - that befalls unlucky individuals, and that our part is to be kind when we pass. A blanket, a hot meal, a coin in a cup. All good - but none of it is sufficient.

13. Because here is what working with streeties teaches you. Trace almost any life back far enough and you find a child. A child in someone's care. A child failed by a system, or by a home, long before they ever made a single one of the "choices" we are so quick to judge. The person in the doorway did not fall from the sky. They came through our schools, our hospitals, our courts, our care homes, our mental health services - or rather through the gaps we left in them when we decided they cost too much. They are not an accident. They are a result. They are what our society produces, as surely as a factory produces what its built to manufacture.

14. And then, having produced them, we punish them for existing. "No fixed abode" - three words that quietly shame a person at the doctor, or bank, or when seeking a job. You cannot get housing without an income and you cannot get the income without an address. The team sat with people trapped in that circle for years, watching them be told, politely, at counter after counter, that they do not qualify, that they are not eligible, that they are somebody else's problem. We have built a system that asks the drowning to first prove they can swim.

15. That is the harder gospel. Jesus says, "Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered." The thing we most want to keep covered is that none of this is a mystery. We know the causes. We have known them for a long time. To acknowledge Christ is to refuse to keep them covered any longer.

16. I'll be honest about the cost to those who do this work too because Jesus is. As a member of the now defunct night shelter board I knew there were nights when there were not enough beds, and someone had to decide who came in from the cold and who did not. No one should have to make that choice, and making it leaves a mark. That is the sword. Standing on this line does not feel heroic. It feels like grief, and exhaustion, and falling out with people who'd rather you stopped making a fuss.

17. However I have seen what works, and it is nothing less than grace made practical. Give a person a home - not as a reward once

they've got clean, got sober, got sorted, but first, simply because they are a person - and watch what becomes possible.

We can call it Housing First. The gospel just calls it grace: the radical idea that you are worthy of a place to call your own before you have earned a thing. The man astonished to be remembered - give him a door he can lock, a bed that is his, a name on a tenancy, and you do not just shelter him. You hand him back his life.

18. "Those who lose their life for my sake will find it." The cross is not a metaphor for a bad week, as we shrink it down. It was the most violent death those listening could picture. To take it up is to accept this may cost us something real. But notice where it ends. Not in loss. In finding. Pour your life out, spend it on the ones the world won't name, and you find the only life worth having - and so, it turns out, do they.

19. When we acknowledge Jesus, we acknowledge with him that where there is no justice, there is no peace. A city is not at peace because its streets have been cleared and its doorways emptied and it all looks tidy again. That is only suffering moved out of sight. Peace is when its people have somewhere to belong.

20. So here is what I'd ask of you this week.

21. Somewhere quiet, bring to mind one face. Not "the homeless" - a face. Someone you have walked or driven past. Give them, in your mind, a name. And then ask, in this order:

"Where do I stand? With whom do I stand?"

And only when you've answered honestly where would Jesus stand?

22. Now I think I know what your answers might be. However if we were to apply the same questions to the deeper issues surrounding the "Definitions of Woman & Man" bill, yes, where would we stand. Marching on protests, disagreeing - albeit respectfully - with anti LGBTIQ statements and actions, writing to the editor under our own name, condemning colleagues and even friends anti LGBTQ statements - is that where we could stand.

A nation is not at peace because its streets have been cleared and its doorways emptied and it all looks tidy again. That is only suffering moved out of sight. Peace is when its people have somewhere to belong, when irrespective of sex or gender identification people are respected, when poverty is a distant *memory*.

Until justice comes then we as a society will be unable to enjoy the kind of peace that Jesus spoke of so often, and lived, and died for.

Amen.