

Dialogue Sermon on Matthew 23:8-10

- {JESUS} (1) Call no one Father on earth, for you have one Father who is in heaven.
- (2) Call no one Father? What do you mean?
- (1) I don't mean your male parents. I mean father with a capital F, the highest authority, the Big Boss, El Supremo, Numero Uno, the Holy One.
- (2) Oh! We shouldn't regard any other person as the ultimate authority?
- (1) Right. You shouldn't call each other Master or Rabbi either. Rabbi, in case you have forgotten, means "my Great One." Call no one Master.
- (2) Not even Paul Tillich?
- (1) No.
- (2) Carter Heyward?
- (1) No.
- (2) Oral Roberts?
- (1) Oral who?
- (2) Just kidding. How about St. Francis?
- (1) You could do worse - but no, not him either.
- (2) Okay. How about St. Paul?
- (1) No, not him either.
- (2) St. Luke?
- (1) You're getting warmer. But no, not even St. Luke.
- (2) Dare I ask: What about you?
- (1) Yes, I am your Rabbi, but even I am not your Father; and I am among you as one that serves. I do not call you servants or slaves, but I have called you friends.
- (2) You want us to be friends? With you and with each other?
- (1) Yes.
- (2) And that means we shouldn't give anyone else too much authority over our thoughts and actions?
- (1) Right.

- (2) We should put your teaching and God's authority over everything and everyone else, including ourselves?
- (1) Yes. You should not be called Master or Rabbi, let alone Father.
- (2) If we take that attitude towards the authorities, aren't we likely to get into trouble?
- (1) Blessed are those who are reviled and persecuted and slandered on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for so were the prophets persecuted.
- (2) But if we do not acknowledge the authority of Paul Tillich or Carter Heyward or St. Paul or St. Luke, won't people accuse us of insufferable arrogance? Won't they say we think we're better than everyone else?
- (1) Not if you do what Micah suggested?
- (2) What was that?
- (1) Walk humbly with your God. That also implies walking humbly with your neighbours.
- (2) We can be humble with our neighbours and still not call them Master or Rabbi or Father or Mother?
- (1) Yes, if you remember that you are as good as anyone else and not one bit better. That's what it means to be friends.
- (2) It's all in the family, so to speak.
- (1) Yes.
- (2) And we are all freely invited to think for ourselves?
- (1) Yes, you mustn't let anyone else do your thinking for you.
- (2) Does that mean we can't get ideas from each other or share what we have learned with other people?
- (1) What do you think?
- (2) I guess it would be okay.
- (1) Have you ever had people treat you as an authority?
- (2) Yes. I went out on internship.
- (1) Any other times?
- (2) Yes, I worked in an office before I came to Seminary.
- (1) Was there a chicken pecking order there too?
- (2) You better believe it.

- (1) How did you feel about that?
- (2) I rather liked it--as long as I wasn't at the bottom of it.
- (1) What did you like about it?
- (2) It made me feel important; you know, like I was really somebody.
- (1) What about the people underneath you? How did they get to feel like somebody?
- (2) I dunno. Maybe they went home and kicked the cat.
- (1) Or maybe their wife or kids?
- (2) Heh! I'm not in favour of that kind of stuff!
- (1) But you do enjoy playing a little one-up-manship.
- (2) Yes, I guess I do.
- (1) You like the feeling of being a bit better than the average?
- (2) Yeah, but that doesn't mean I think I'm the greatest.
- (1) How do you feel about those who are better than you?
- (2) Sometimes I feel good about them. It's comforting to know that there is an authority around when you need one.
- (1) They take some responsibility off your shoulders?
- (2) Yes.
- (1) And they have intelligence or wisdom that you don't think you have as much of?
- (2) That's right!
- (1) Is there any chance you are selling yourself short?
- (2) I suppose so. But some people really are smarter than me.
- (1) And so you think you should defer to their greater wisdom or knowledge?
- (2) It certainly makes me feel more comfortable at times.
- (1) How do you know when to defer to them and when to go by your own understandings and feelings?
- (2) I suppose if most people agree with them you have to listen to that.
- (1) Fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong, is that it?

- (2) Something like that.
- (1) I should have talked to you before I went to Jerusalem.
- (2) Yeah, you could have avoided a bad scene.
- (1) My family and friends thought I was nuts.
- (2) I must confess I haven't always understood it myself.
- (1) I was trying to hear what the Holy One wanted.
- (2) Maybe you should have considered what your advisors were saying.
- (1) I did consider it, but I felt I had to listen to the Holy One.
- (2) And the Holy One said go to Jerusalem?
- (1) Yes.
- (2) And the Holy One said clean out the temple?
- (1) Yes.
- (2) And that made the authorities mad?
- (1) Yes, they arrested me and put me on trial.
- (2) And your friends and family were afraid of the authorities?
- (1) Yes.
- (2) So they ran away?
- (1) Yes. Until they discovered I was right.
- (2) You were right to follow the Holy One?
- (1) Yes. It turned out to be right.
- (2) So we should try and do the same?
- (1) Yes. Don't call anyone else Master.
- (2) And don't be afraid of the authorities?
- (1) No, and don't try to be the Great One yourself.
- (2) But seek first the way of the Holy One and it'll turn out to be all right in the end?
- (1) That's the way it happened for me.
- (2) I'll try and remember that.