

FOR AND AGAINST

Luke 9:50; 11:23

Jesus said: *“Do not stop him;
for whoever is not against you
is for you.”* (Luke 9:50)

Jesus also said: *“Whoever is not with me
is against me;
and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”* (Luke 11:23)

These two sayings of Jesus
seem on the surface incompatible, if not contradictory.

Jesus spoke the truth
and his truth is not full of confusion nor is it contradictory.

As that is the truth
then we must look more closely at these sayings of Jesus
to better understand their meaning
not only for our lives but for the Church as well.

The first saying: *“Do not stop him;
for whoever is not against you is for you.”*
seems to assert—if a person does not come out against you
he or she is to be regarded as a friend and a supporter.

The second saying: *“Whoever is not with me is against me;
and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”*
seems to assert—unless a person comes out for you
openly and positively
that person is to be regarded as an enemy.

Let it first be said
what appears to be contradictory is not so
as there is no real conflict between these two sayings of Jesus.
They are two sides of the same coin.

This sermon does not bear the title
“For **Or** Against” as one might expect
rather it states a paradox “For **And** Against”
a paradox found in these two sayings of Jesus.

We must understand this paradox
for these two sayings of Jesus
have typified for generations
two vastly different ways
the Church has viewed and interacted with the world.

The first saying: “*for whoever is not against you is for you*”
is best represented by the view of the **traditional church**.

The Roman Catholic Church is the best example.

The traditional church does not view the world as hostile
either to itself or its gospel.

The world may be indifferent to the call of Christ
to save the world from itself
and so restore the world back to God
but the world is not hostile to such a call.

But there is another view that is quite different
and reveals the strong meaning of Jesus’ other saying:
“*whoever is not with me is against me.*”

The **sectarian church** strongly holds this view.

The Pentecostal churches are the most extreme example
thought all Protestant churches like the United Methodists
have something of this tendency in themselves.

It is a tendency to see the world as hostile
to Christ and the gospel and so hostile to itself.

The traditional churches have tended
to seek an easy compromise with the world.

Whereas the more extreme sectarian churches see the world under
the ruler-ship of the devil and will have nothing to do with it.

On this issue, there is no compromise.

We will come back to this
but for the moment let us look
at the occasion and the circumstance of these sayings of Jesus.

In the first instance
a man was found healing the mentally sick
in the name of Christ.
The disciples stopped him
because he was not a member of the group of Jesus' disciples.

When this was reported to Jesus, he said:

"Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you."

True, the man did not belong to the inner circle
but he was seeking as they were
to bring relief to troubled minds
and apparently was getting good results.

This unknown person was not to be interfered with
in Jesus' estimate, on the contrary,
he was to be regarded as a co-worker.

Here Jesus gives a rebuke to all bigotry and pettiness
as he appeals for tolerance, mutual appreciation, and cooperation.

Jesus is not asking us to overlook differences
or even to rate these differences lightly.

We can differ from people and keep our honest convictions
believe in their importance—

and yet recognize the good that is being done
by persons and groups with whom we differ.

In the second instance
the matter in controversy was Jesus' attack
on the forces of evil and of unreason.

And what Jesus makes clear here is the impossibility of neutrality
toward Christ and his work for people.

Either we shall stand for the things Christ stands for
and do all we can to make them prevail in the world

or we shall be among those who endorse or consent to attitudes and policies that are immoral and ultimately disastrous.

Jesus said: *“The truth shall set you free.”* (John 8:32)

Truth has always been a problem for humans like ourselves.
The problem is **whose** truth **is** the truth?

In this world there are many claims to the truth.
It appears we are free with the truth
but not the truth that shall set us free.

The gospel shows that we have truth only as a gift
and that the truth is never our truth but God’s truth.

We have the truth as a gift
but since it is not our truth we cannot place final claim upon it.

The Christian Church knows the truth is “in Christ”
but then has gone on to claim that the Church
is the sole professor of such a truth.

Such a claim has led to intolerance.

Intolerance is the foul companion to religion
and has turned reasonable people away from the Church
and so they moved away from Christ.

Traditional churches, particularly Roman Catholicism
claimed to be the sole possessor of the truth.

Indeed, one cannot be saved apart
from the Church and her sacraments.

Many Catholics are individually humble and contrite
making no claim for themselves
who compare favorably with some Protestants
with their fanatic zeal for their interpretation of truth.

Yet, Catholicism collectively and officially is intolerant
for it will not recognize the truthfulness of other interpretations
or professions of Christian faith being equivalent to its truth.

This intolerance led to the Inquisition and its reign of terror
against the error of any person who differed with the Church's claim
of being the sole representor of Christ
and all his benefits upon the earth.

Galileo had to repent what he saw in his telescope
of the moons circling Jupiter was not true
that would lead the scientist to claim a truth of Copernicus
that the earth was not the center of the universe
as it rotated around the sun which the church believed was not true.

Sectarian churches forgot the Reformation doctrine of “justification”—
that all stand in need of God's grace
and only God justifies us...not our claims of truth.

Bibliotry is the great sin of Protestantism.
It is the conviction that the Bible gave the final truth
led to the arrogant claim that one's interpretation of the Bible
was the final say about God's truth.

Unlike the Catholic Church change of mind
that Galileo was right after all.
few Protestants have changed their mind
as being the sole arbitrator of truth revealed in the scriptures.

We fail to remember that Jacob's ladder
is a place for angels of grace right to descend and ascend
and not a place for mortals who believe
they can climb into heaven on their own terms.
Pride ascends where only grace descends.

People in the world who have forsaken Christianity
possess a healthy skepticism that is continually fed
by such spiritual and ecclesiastical arrogance—

to cry out “a plague on both your houses”
while silently concluding that all ladders to heaven are dangerous.

Sad to say, secularists, have not heeded their own wisdom
and have gone on to build their own ladders to heaven
creating new fanaticism that have swept the world
bringing the threat of global disaster to everyone.

Skepticism when it sits in the pew is given to utter clichés.
“One religion is as good as another.”

“You shouldn’t criticize another person’s religion.”

“It makes little difference what your religion is
so long as you live up to it.”

As a rule, people who talk in such a fashion
pride themselves on their tolerance
whereas they should apologize for their ignorance.
For them tolerance is an excuse for mental laziness.

Many American Christians acquiesce too readily
when it is said that it makes little difference
what your religion is so long as you live up to it.

It is one thing to recognize the right of others
to hold a faith different from your own—
so important in this hour when Muslims are under threat.

It is another thing to take the position—

What makes you a Jew?

What makes you a Muslim?

What makes you a Christian?

Such statements lack all conviction if you have not
Listen o a Jew or a Muslim as to what they believe.
The real trouble is that those speaking are not tolerant
as they are theological illiterate or worse, religiously indifferent!

It is the absence of strong conviction to know the other
that accounts for such compliant attitude
that is susceptible to suspicion of those that are different.

The spirit of intolerance feeds off a sense of superior spiritual commitment.

The spirit of intolerance leads to religious fear of the other.

The spirit of intolerance for Christians is not the Spirit of Christ.

Jesus gave us two sayings that form the foundation for any test of tolerance.

Jesus said, *“Whoever is not against you is for you.”*

and *“Whoever is not with me is against me.”*

makes the test of tolerance two-fold.

Tolerance includes both the ability to hold to strong convictions that lead to action as well as preserve the capacity to forgive those who offend us by holding to convictions which seem untrue to us.

Let us look at this spirit of tolerance by examining these two sayings of Jesus and what they mean for us today.

“Whoever is not against you is for you” still needs saying.

It is a truth which present-day Christians must lay to heart.

Christians must learn to work with people of other faiths as well as those who profess no faith

who are genuinely concerned for the welfare of the community.

In Taylors Falls that means to work with and understand that Roman Catholics in this community who still feel the sting of anti-Catholicism in its viral and hatred form.

Not to know this is not to know and care for your Catholic neighbor.

The clergy of Taylors Falls encourage our churches to come together in worship, fellowship, and cooperation.

It is our hope that churches agree on matters of importance and speak with one voice

when it touches the lives of people of the larger community.

We encourage the churches to unite in prayer

as well as pray for each other as well as our community.

We hold to tolerance as it is the Spirit of Christ
as he counseled his disciples—
*“Do not keep those who work for good
for they are not against you but for you.”*

Jesus did say-- *“Whoever is not with me is against me.”*
Jesus appealed for tolerance
for it best expressed a forgiving attitude.
But Jesus never asked people to be neutral regarding himself...
for love is never neutral.

There are some ideas and disputes
we do not have to decide.

We do not have to decide whether the Vikings
will ever win the Super Bowl in our lifetime.
But we must decide whether we can be neutral
about the discrimination against Muslims
or against African American or Native Americans
or the discrimination women face in the work place.

Some of us may have prayed for the Vikings
but some of have yet to prayer for Muslims and immigrants
who are being walled out and kept out of this nation
while their families suffer separation and despair.

We forget that Jesus was part of a refugee family
as Joseph took Mary and baby Jesus
to flee to Egypt as Herod sought to kill the children.

Christ stands for the belief that we must

“Strive first for the kingdom of God.”

Jesus’ view of what is first is a claim on us beyond
our own family to which our loyalty is due.

God has the first claim whose purpose is good for the entire world.

Jesus’ view is that there is something beyond the nation
to which our ultimately loyalty is due.

God and his purpose of good is for all people everywhere
has first claim and here there can be no neutrality.

*“Strive first for the kingdom of God and **all his righteousness**”* said Jesus.

Either we shall put the righteousness of God first
putting the welfare of others
before the advantage of our own family
or we shall not.

Either we shall put the righteousness of God first
putting the welfare of the world
before the advantage of our own nation
or we shall not.

Either we shall be with Christ
or we shall be against him.

If we be for Christ...if we be for God’s righteousness...
then the promise is given to us...*“and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

We will be given the full welfare of the family
as justice of the nation is restored
all in their rightful order before God.

This is Christ’s challenge in this hour!

It is the persistent challenge and undaunted effort demanded of us
for the relief of human suffering from injustice
as we engage in the fight for world peace and justice
seeking to save the earth itself from our greed.

It is the challenge to the greatness of the human spirit!