



Tuning Our Lives to Jesus  
Matthew 10:24-39  
June 21, 2026

Rev. Ann Palmerton  
Broad Street Presbyterian Church  
Columbus, Ohio

Before an orchestra performs, the musicians tune to a single note. An oboe sounds the pitch, and scattered tones rise across the hall. Violins adjust, clarinets search, cellos correct themselves. Some are sharp. Some are flat. They listen, adjust, and begin again.

Imagine an orchestra skipping that step. The violins decide A sounds better as B-flat. The trumpets go their own way. The cellos insist they're close enough. The conductor lifts the baton, and what follows is not a symphony but a cacophony. There's energy and sincerity, but without a shared center, there's no harmony.

The same might be said about discipleship. In today's reading from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus teaches his disciples what it means to live in alignment with him. He is preparing them for opposition. Following him may put them at odds with family and the expectations of society. Sometimes tuning our lives to Jesus means hearing a different note than the one our culture is playing. Jesus speaks plainly about where our deepest loyalty lies. His words challenge us. They invite us to wonder what it really means for Christ to be at the center of our lives.

Learning to tune an instrument takes time. Beginners often can't hear the difference between a note that is in tune and one that is just a little off. I remember playing the flute in elementary and middle school. I struggled with this. My peers would tell me, "You're sharp," or "You're flat," but I couldn't always hear it. My ears had to be trained. It takes time for the ear to learn what is in tune and what isn't. Tuning is not about perfection. It is about coming into alignment with a shared note.

Maybe discipleship works the same way. Following Jesus is a lifelong process of learning which note to follow and returning to it again and again.

Maybe you've had a moment like this. An email arrives. Something that raises your blood pressure. You know exactly what you want to say. The response practically writes itself. But before you hit send, you pause. You take a breath. You might pray. My prayer is often just one word, "Help." You remember who you want to be. Sometimes alignment with Jesus looks less like a grand act of courage and more like refusing to send the first draft. One impulse says, "Send it." Another impulse says, "Slow down. Listen. Call." In moments like that, we're deciding which note will set the pitch for what comes next.

Tuning our lives to Jesus can be as simple as discerning the difference between sending an email and making a phone call. For me, alignment feels like less defensiveness. More courage. More openness. It's the quiet sense that my actions and values are moving in the same direction.

Being aligned with Jesus doesn't ensure an easier life, but it does bring a certain steadiness. Like a well-aligned car on a rough road. Alignment doesn't remove difficulty, but it does help us move through life with greater balance and resilience.

Alignment isn't perfection. No orchestra tunes once and never adjusts again. Musicians constantly listen and recalibrate. We do too. Stress, conflict, grief and worry can knock us out of tune. The invitation of Jesus is not, "Be flawless." The invitation is, "Keep tuning your life toward me."

A parent snaps at their child during a long, exhausting day. Later that evening, the parent sits on the edge of the bed and says, "I'm sorry." That moment of repair, that's realignment.

We all long for lives that hold together. We want our actions, values, and commitments to point in the same direction. Jesus understands that longing. He doesn't stay confined to one corner of life. He keeps moving into every part of it. Jesus keeps asking, "What about this area of your life?" Over time, discipleship becomes less about adding Jesus to our lives and more about letting him shape everything.

That's what makes today's passage so unsettling to hear. Jesus says that whoever loves father or mother more than him is not worthy of him. Through the years these words have been used in harmful ways to shame people into breaking ties with family and loved ones. That is not what Jesus is doing here. These are not words about rejecting family. They are words about what comes first in our lives. Jesus is asking: What is the deepest note to which your life is tuned? When competing voices call for your allegiance, which note sets the pitch for your life? Often, we don't discover the answer in calm moments, but under pressure.

Misalignment tends to reveal itself when life gets hard. If your car's alignment is off, you may not notice it on a sunny day. Add snow, ice, or rain, and suddenly the car begins to pull to one side. We human beings are much the same. Under stress, our deepest habits emerge. We become more reactive. More fearful. More defensive. The road gets rough, and we begin to veer. In moments like this, we discover which note has been setting the pitch for everything else.

A son knows his mother shouldn't be driving anymore. But she still holds the keys. He reasons with her. He argues. He pleads. Nothing changes. Eventually he realizes what he has been avoiding: if the keys are going to be taken away, it will have to be done by him. Alignment doesn't always feel good. In that moment, it doesn't feel loving. It feels like betrayal. Sometimes love asks us to do the hard thing, not the easy thing. Sometimes faithfulness creates conflict.

Maybe this is what Jesus means when he says, "Those who find their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives because of me will find them." We hear those words and imagine dramatic acts of sacrifice. But sometimes losing our life means letting go of our need to be liked, our desire to avoid conflict, or our determination to make everyone happy. In taking away his mother's keys, the son loses something; the role of agreeable child. Yet in choosing what is loving over what is comfortable, he discovers a deeper kind of life. Again and again, Jesus invites us to release the smaller lives we cling to so that we can receive the larger life God is giving us.

Jesus knew that. That's why he warned his disciples that following him would not always bring peace. Sometimes it would bring division. Alignment with Jesus may mean speaking up when a racist joke would be easier to ignore. It may mean standing with immigrants when others would rather look away. It may mean disappointing a family member, challenging a friend, or telling a truth others would rather leave unsaid. The path of Jesus is not always the path of least resistance. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do also is the most costly.

Maybe that feels familiar. We sense that something in our lives is out of tune, yet we hesitate to make the adjustment because of what it may cost: a difficult conversation, a hard decision, or a truth we can't avoid any longer. We can feel the tension within us. Part of us wants to move forward; part of us wants to stay comfortable. Jesus invites us to trust that there is life on the other side of what we're afraid to lose.

Years ago, many Christians wore WWJD bracelets. "What Would Jesus Do?" The question was less about predicting Jesus' response and more about pausing, and asking, "What would love do here?" Like the oboe's note before a concert, those bracelets offered a reference point outside ourselves, a tuning fork helping us realign our lives with the way of Christ.

Jesus doesn't shame the disciples for needing adjustment. He teaches them. He forms them. He patiently draws them back into tune. That is discipleship: learning, again and again, to tune our lives toward Christ; not perfectly or instantly, but faithfully, by grace. Even when we have to stop and listen and start again.

Over time, something changes in us. We recognize sooner when we have drifted. We find courage we didn't know we had. The world is still noisy. The road is still difficult. But Christ keeps sounding the note, and by grace we are learning to live in tune. Amen.