

Faith and Fear

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

June 24-25, 2023

Year A: Pentecost 4: Matthew 10:24-39

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

What shall this sermon be about, Lord? What can I preach with integrity and with hopefulness? Not only for myself but others?

God’s grace and peace be with you this day, beloved of God. Amen.

We continue on through Matthew’s 10th chapter. Remember this is where Jesus has chosen the twelve disciples and is sending them out to proclaim the good news, and to cure the sick in their Lord’s name. First of all, there are at least 150,000 sermons that could be preached on these short seventeen verses! Oh my goodness!

For example, there is a whole sermon about a sparrow falling to the ground. The Greek word for 'fall' is to 'light or hop.' God doesn't only care when sparrows die, but also when they land and when they hop around! God does the same for us. Incredible!

Secondly, remember also, that particularly in Matthew's Gospel, the writer Matthew, is very concerned that people's walk match, their talk. When this Gospel was written the people were living under threat: both cultural and social persecution. There were insiders and outsiders. Therefore, Matthew worries about not being able to trust others, because one doesn't know if the neighbor is an imposter or not! Therefore, if the words sound to the point with not much wiggle room, that's Matthew. Matthew says it as it is and then we hear it like it is. "If you don't take up your cross, you're not worthy of me."

Also, as a follow up to my sermon from last weekend, I've printed out many ways that we can be the 'sent ones', Jesus' Apostles; inviting and encouraging people to hear about God's love. This list is at the small table by the church office.

We are the ones Jesus is sending out. That is true, so this sermon is part two to last week's sermon.

These are His instructions to the disciples. "You, now are going to do my work. Here's what you take, what you wear, how you interact with people." We can imagine the disciples are a bit nervous and excited about the mission. What will they actually say? What will be people's response?

There is something honorable about being part of a group effort. A couple weeks ago, when our Denver Nuggets won the NBA Championship, each player knew that all the sweat and hard work had paid off. It was a team effort and together they made it happen. As Jokic keeps saying, all the players made the win. Even if they were thinking about tired muscles or torn ligaments during the parade through downtown Denver, they could hold their heads high as a team.

Jesus is warning the disciples, their group effort was highly likely to encounter hardship. Perhaps they were nervous and excited. We can add fear to the list. He cautions them about governors and kings who won't like their message. He advises about upcoming persecutions. Three times in our text for today, Jesus directly addresses their fear. But at days end, they can hold their heads high, because as a group, they will have overcome...for God.

Several years ago, when Pastor Courtney and I had a class on equipping people to share about our faith, the number one emotion people had was fear. “What will people think of me? What should I say? What if someone gets mad?” Perhaps we are more like the disciples than we realize.

Let’s go to the text to answer these questions. Jesus says, “Have no fear of them; (non-religious people) for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered.” Jesus is saying that the truth will eventually come to light. We keep hearing reports that more and more Russians are figuring out what is actually happening in Ukraine. The truth is coming to light.

Even if someone doesn’t understand how important our faith is to us, it doesn’t matter now. Eventually, in God’s time, everyone will come to know God and the truth of the Good News. The truth of eternity will correct the ‘truths’ of our time. It truly doesn’t matter what they think, what matters is what God thinks.

Hugh Latimer was a Bishop during the Reformation, was later chaplain in the Church of England to King Edward VI and was burned at the stake under Catholic Queen Mary, 1555. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Latimer) Once he was preaching a message he knew King Henry wouldn’t like. He began to talk to himself. “Latimer! Be careful what you say, Latimer. Henry the king is here.” Then again, he began to say to himself. “Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of kings is here.” (The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1. William Barclay. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia, USA.1975. Pg.386.)

That’s just it...whenever we speak on God’s behalf we don’t speak alone. God is right there with us. Guiding our words, giving us courage, emboldening us so that we have the correct fear – the awe of God, not any human being. First antidote to fear...the King of Kings is with us.

I think many of us are fearful of what Jesus says about families being split apart – don’t talk about politics or faith. Here’s the context behind those verses. It was commonly understood in Jesus’ time, that when Messiah finally came, families would be divided. This is what Rabbis taught.

But love of God is what is to precede love of family members. I’ve heard it said that when parents have a new baby, the love they feel in their hearts grows larger and larger. Just when they think they cannot love any deeper, they have a new baby and love expands.

Our first love is for God. Properly placed, God's relationship with us and our relationship with God, is at the center. It's the First Commandment: to not have any other gods (small g). We are to fear, love, and trust God above all things.

Then our love for family and friends expands. Love is always an antidote for fear. If love and God are guiding our conversations, we'll know what to say, how to say it and when to stop pushing.

God's faith in us is stronger than our fears. We rest in the truth that Jesus sent out this rag-tag team of ordinary humans! They weren't trained theologians. They had their own life experiences and some amazing time with Jesus. Sounds like you and me, yes?

The point I want to make is that fear is normal. In these divisive times, we can have challenges talking to someone about the weather!

When we as Jesus' 'sent ones' don't say anything about our faith, we dishonor our Lord also. J.P. Mahaffy, a scholar and man of the world from Trinity College, Dublin, was asked if he was a Christian. He answered, "Yes, by not offensively so." ((The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1. William Barclay. The Westminster Press. Philadelphia, USA. 1975. Pg. 391)

Not wanting his life of high society and pleasure to be bothered too much, JP denied Christ by having no intention of being different. But here's the truth! We already are different. As it said in the Romans lesson, when we were baptized, we were baptized into Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection. Oh what power that gives us! When we give into fear of being offensive, then we might not take up Jesus' cross at all. We deny Christ with our silence, our inaction, our lack of words.

When Jesus sent the twelve out, He knew their words would be offensive. That's why He was warning them! But our offense, if any, is to God's glory! And remember, if someone gets offended that we invited them to church, their feelings are not our responsibility. Our invitation is our responsibility. God will take care of their feelings.

I want us to rest in the truth that Jesus buried deep in this text. "Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows." Beloved of God....we are beloved. That fact can give us courage and honesty. It gives us a base to stand on that will never go away. As we sang in the Children's sermon, "Yes, Jesus loves me." Amen

