

Sunday: Third Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 21, 2020

Text: Matthew 10:21-33

Title: Fear Not

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

“Fear not.” There are some words we need to hear today aren’t they. There is so much to be fearful of. For months we have been inundated with tales of doom and gloom regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses ordered to close if they were not “essential.” Our churches were told we could not meet for in-person services. Millions of people were laid-off. Unemployment claims skyrocketed to levels unseen since the Great Depression. Our economy ravaged by shutdowns struggles to survive.

As we emerge from our isolation we are hammered with protests and riots as a result of the events in Minnesota involving the police and George Floyd. Events to raise awareness, turned to violence and destruction. Innocent businesses were looted by criminals who found a great opportunity for illicit gain. In Tacoma, homicides, domestic violence, and assaults are all far above average levels.

Now we hear the latest statistics on the Corona Virus indicate that infection levels and rates are increasing again. Man, there is a lot to be fearful of.

Many of our fears we can manage by avoiding various places and situations. Managing our fears is not what Jesus speaks to in our Gospel reading today. Today, Jesus talks of the effects our faith will have on those around us and those we come in contact with. His words “Fear Not” provide us comfort and are a place of refuge for us in a world that is far beyond our control.

To truly get the impact of our Gospel reading today, we need to pick up the verses before what you heard a few minutes ago. “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child” is certainly unsettling and can certainly cause some fear. This verse comes after Jesus speaks to the disciples regarding the world they live in and the people he is sending them out to proclaim the Gospel to. This section of Matthew’s Gospel is often captioned “Persecution will come.” Hear what Jesus says beginning in verse 16.

Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they delivery you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death and you will be hated for my name's sake. (Matthew 10:16-22).

This entire text drives us far beyond being unsettled. In our American cultural context, we have no experience with this type of hatred. We may say we are persecuted by the actions of our government in restricting our ability to worship exactly as we deem appropriate. We may bristle at the negativity directed at Christians by the pagan masses that continue to grow each day. However, we are blessed to be free from invitations to the coliseum in Rome to become entertainment for the crowd and lunch for unrestrained lions. We rarely have our house of worship invaded by marauders who destroy our building and the lives of the people who worship our risen Savior Jesus Christ. The protections we enjoy, however do not relieve us from feeling fear in our lives and in our walk as Christians.

Just as the disciples in Jesus' day were sent out to share the gospel with people who were hostile to the one true God, we too, face hostility and rejection for our faith. When confronted with challenges, we are often overcome with fear. We struggle with fear, not just when we are presented with opposition to the gospel, we struggle with fear as we encounter difficult situations in life.

“Fear not.” The relief of our fear is not something that we develop ourselves. As Jesus sends out the disciples and as he leads us into situations where the Gospel needs to be proclaimed, we cannot overcome the dread we feel on our own. Everyone wants to be liked. Everyone wants to be welcome in whatever situation they find themselves in. But Jesus is clear in his teachings that we will not be welcome everywhere. In fact, the message of Christ as Lord and Savior is offensive to human nature corrupted by the fall into sin that occurred in Eden. We encounter resistance to the Gospel because of human self-centeredness and

because Satan is active in the lives of people leading them to resist the Word of God proclaimed. Barriers are erected by mankind that cannot be overcome by us. Only the Holy Spirit can scale the walls built around the hearts of unrepentant sinners.

Jesus speaks of the world hating him repeatedly, and how hatred will be directed at his faithful followers as well. As we endeavor to bring light to a people sitting in darkness, Satan entices them to lash out and attempt to destroy the only thing that can bring them to salvation. The Gospel message of Christ for you and your salvation is offensive to people. The divisions created include divisions within our own families. Hence, Jesus tells us that “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and father his child ...”

Families have been and still are torn apart by the Gospel. In the waters of Holy Baptism, a dramatic change occurs in the heart of the baptized. The Holy Spirit implants the seeds of faith in our hearts and begins an on-going process of growing and strengthening our faith. This faith in Jesus and in the work he did for us, is in direct opposition to the ways of this world. Satan the champion of intolerance cannot abide the faith Christians hold in our Savior. He tries with all his might, aligning his demonic horde against us, to lure us away from our salvation. This includes convincing family and friends to challenge us and to attempt to lead us astray. Today, in the name of tolerance, Satan masks his hatred and intolerance. Christians are branded as opposed to tolerance because they know the joy of the salvation won for them by Christ Jesus on the cross. This joy is spoken of by Peter in 1 Peter 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. When Jesus returns and brings with him the new heaven and new earth, we will be free from sin, pain, illness, and death. We will live in peace and joy as we bask in the presence of God our Father and our redeemer Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3-5).

As adopted members of the family of God, Christians do not abandon their biological family but instead seek to bring them to a saving faith in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Your sin, my sin, the sins of our brothers and sisters, even the sins of the whole world. Christ's work as the incarnate Son of the Living God, is the good news for humans, yet it drives wedges between family members and the world around us.

While we lament the discord we face, we live in the love of Christ. He tells us "Fear Not." Do not be afraid he tells the disciples and us in our text today. In words of comfort he reminds us of the eternal gift given us through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a right relationship with God the Father, Our Father, is eternal. The struggles we encounter in this life do not compare with the unimaginable joys we will share in the new kingdom.

"Fear Not" our imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance is being guarded by God through faith in Jesus Christ our Redeemer. What happens to the body in this life is fleeting in comparison. It is for this reason that Paul can say in Philippians

For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account (Philippians 1:21-23).

While we remain on this earth, we are given opportunities to expand the kingdom of God. Just as Jesus is sending the disciples out into the world in our Gospel text today, he sends us out as well. Not necessarily as missionaries to carry the Gospel to far off places, but to instead walk in the love of God and share the hope that we have Christ who lived, died, and rose again for all people.

Jesus tells us to "Fear Not" as we encounter the opposition of this world. In the eyes of God our Father, we are loved and valued. God values us as the crown jewel of his creation. He points to the common sparrow which is valued at one-sixteenth of a denarius, one-sixteenth of a day's wage. Not much in the grand scheme of things but God knows and watches over them. He knows when one falls to the ground. If he tracks this lowly part of his creation, how much more will he watch over and protect man who he created in his own image.

God knows the trouble we will face, and he calls us to be faithful in the face of opposition. We will never be alone as we are confronted, attacked, insulted, hated, and abused for our faith. As we acknowledge God before men, Jesus promises to acknowledge us before the Father who is in heaven.

We know trouble will come. Jesus acknowledged it as he prayed for his disciples in John 17, as part of the High Priestly Prayer,

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (John 17:14-19).

Trouble is inevitable. Satan relentlessly attacked Jesus as he brought the kingdom of heaven to the lost sheep of Israel. He attacked the disciples as they carried the Gospel to the ends of the earth. And He continues to attack all who trust in Jesus for life everlasting and seek to share the joy of salvation in Christ with the world around them. When attacked, we rely on the promise of Jesus that he is with us as he said he would be in Matthew 28:20, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Living in this faith and under the protection of our God, Peter writes,

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to any one who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ maybe put to shame, for it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:13-17)

“Fear Not” dear brothers and sisters in Christ for in God’s eyes you are valuable, loved, and cherished. Pandemics, riots, or those who hate and seek to harm you for your faith cannot come between you and your salvation. God knows

those opposed to him will hate you and will turn against you, but he will never leave your side. In fact, when challenged for your faith, he will lead you to recall your teachings as the Holy Spirit gives you the words to say in response to the questions posed to you.

May God give you the strength, through the power of the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Jesus before men and receive the acknowledgement of Jesus before God. An acknowledgement that firmly places us in the kingdom of heaven.

Amen.