

Sermon Draft

Text: Matthew 10: 5, 21-33

Sermon: Do Not Be Afraid

With the exception of the Epistle, the Propers for this 3rd Sunday after Pentecost all follow the Gospel theme that disciples of Christ will be persecuted: ***“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. . . . 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 by all for my name’s sake”*** (Matthew 10:17–18a, 21–22a).

Jesus warns them that that not everyone will receive them hospitably or listen to their message. However, enemies of the Gospel can persecute believers only within limits set by our heavenly Father.

So, he says, "***Don't ever be afraid of your enemies and critics. Even though it's not obvious now, the truth will come out finally. So, speak up; shout it out; stand and deliver***"

(10:26-27). Don't be afraid, it's hard in this world we live in, filled with so much hate and violence not to be afraid sometimes.

As I was working on the message for today I once again thought of God's servants Jeremiah and Isaiah. God called them and sent them out into a hostile world, God told them that the people would not listen that they would not change their evil ways, but they still needed to go and share God's Word.

They went and trusted in the Lord to guide them and to be with them in those difficult times. Isaiah wasn't afraid of failing or being rejected. He was more interested in doing what God wanted him to do and he went willingly without hesitation.

Jeremiah was young when God called him into service but God was with him strengthening him to share God's Words with the disobedient people.

It's all some can do just to get to church on Sundays and yet God tells us we're supposed to be shouting the word of God from the housetops? That's scary! The world we live in today is getting scarier all the time maybe more so for Christians. The disciples were about to learn a lesson about being persecuted.

Jesus knows this and tells them to have no fear, "stop being afraid" not just once but always. **"Stop being afraid of people who can kill the body but not the soul."** The point is, people can hurt us only temporarily because life comes from God. Even if they kill us, God the author of life will raise us. **"Don't fear people; fear him who can kill both body and soul."**

Contrary to popular opinion, Jesus is saying that the voice of the people is not the voice of God. We worry way too much about what other people say or think of us and far too little about what God thinks of us.

"Stop worrying, don't be afraid." It's easier said than done. So, what's the solution? More advice? More instruction? Jesus the teacher, is also the Son of God and he reveals how much God loves us as he tells the disciples: **"Aren't sparrows the most common and cheapest bird around? Yet not one of them dies apart from God your Father"** (10:29). **"And what about you?" Jesus asks. "God even knows every hair on your head. So stop being afraid. You are of much more value than any sparrow"** (10:30-31).

God knows everything that we go through and nothing that happens to us escapes him. God is always with us in the midst of all our trials, illnesses and hard times. Nothing happens in our lives without God's knowledge. Even if we seem totally abandoned, even if our prayers don't seem to be answered, but they all are, even if everything seems hopeless, God knows, God cares, and God is in charge. So, we can stop being afraid but just not on our own.

Not being afraid isn't something that we can accomplish. This too, is a gift from God. As long as we think we can overcome fear on our own, we will be afraid, afraid of other people, of death, of circumstances (real or imagined). But as Jesus reveals, we can stop being afraid because of a promise -- a promise that God who watches over even the commonest of birds will take care of us.

It all goes wrong when we try to put that "logic" of "What do I have to do?" into our religious life. "What do I have to do to get God to care about me?" Stop being afraid? God already cares about us so we don't have to be afraid. God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to be our Savior. God knows every hair on our heads. God even cares about sparrows and we are of much more value than any sparrow. God will take care of us. That's a promise. We don't have to be afraid. Ever.

But as sinful creatures we are suspicious, we doubt we worry, even about God's promises. We are always hearing promises that aren't kept. Our life experience teaches us to be suspicious of promises, not because people who make promises don't have good intentions but because fallible, mortal, sinful human beings like us can't always keep our promises. We can't help it.

It has nothing to do with bad intentions. It is the way we are. We cannot make promises without conditions, without "ifs."

Yet Jesus made many incredibly far-reaching promises. Not only about God knowing every hair on our heads and promising to care for us, but also remember some of the others: "**Today, you will be with me in paradise.**" "**I go to prepare a place for you.**" "**Lo, I am with you always.**" "**I tell you, your sins are forgiven.**" And the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12): those who mourn will be comforted, the meek will inherit the earth, the pure in heart will see God, and so forth.

But when Jesus was crucified, these promises seemed to be all cancelled out. He had failed. He was just a dreamer, one more idealistic prophet making promises he couldn't keep. Even his disciples no longer followed.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke's account of the crucifixion where are Jesus' followers. **"All of them deserted him and fled"** (Mark 14:50). And Peter denied even knowing Jesus.

Empty promises they thought. They would have been if Jesus' death were the end of the story. But God raised Jesus. God made sure that Jesus could keep his promises. Even death (our death) will not keep Jesus from keeping the promises he makes to us in the Bible, because we die with him we will be raised with him. That's a promise. And it's the basis for our hope in all the other promises. Even the sparrows don't fall to the ground apart from God the Father and we are of greater value than many sparrows.

Jesus says, that **"Everyone who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven"**

(Matthew 10:32). That's a promise. Today that same crucified and risen Lord is in our midst, allowing us to stop being afraid because of the powerful love of God on which the promise is based:

"Even the hairs of your head are all counted; you are of more value than many sparrows."

The promise continues as we come to the Lord's Table and hear His Words; "this bread is my body, given for you, and "this wine is my blood, shed for you." As we receive the bread and wine Christ comes to us each personally. In this Sacrament, the promise is visible and touchable and feel-able and taste-able. "Take and eat; take and drink." As we do this in remembrance of him, we can stop being afraid. Amen