

STOP BEING AFRAID
Sermon for the 3rd Sunday after Pentecost, 2020
Matthew 10:24-33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is part of our Gospel reading today, Matthew 10:5a, 21-33: ⁵ **Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following Instructions: ...** ²¹ **“One brother will betray another to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death.** ²² **You will also be hated by all people because of My name. Nevertheless, he who endures to the end will be saved.** ²³ **When people persecute you in this city, flee to another! Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.** ²⁴ **A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master.** ²⁵ **It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul’, how much more the members of his household!** ²⁶ **Therefore do not be afraid of them! For there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known.** ²⁷ **Speak in the light what I tell you in the dark, and proclaim on the housetops what you hear in your ears!** ²⁸ **Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!** ²⁹ **Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father.** ³⁰ **As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered.** ³¹ **Therefore stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows.** ³² **I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others.** ³³ **I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are many things used by people to show themselves as disciples of Jesus. Like the wearing of a necklace with a cross, that most recognisable of all Christian symbols. Most of us have items in our homes that show that we believe in Jesus. Things like religious plaques with Bible passages hanging on our walls, or prints or paintings depicting the Saviour in various scenes from the Bible.

Of course, these are the least of the things that mark us as disciples of Jesus. Crosses, for example, can also be worn by people who don’t know much about Jesus or who don’t believe in Him or follow Him. No, it is our profession of faith in Jesus, both in what we say and in what we do, that truly marks us as disciples. It is our willingness to *profess* that we are disciples of Jesus, that we believe in Him as our Saviour and follow Him. It is also *what we do* that marks us as disciples. We want to hear and learn the Word. We want to go to church if at all possible, to partake of the Lord’s Supper, and we don’t do these things in a mechanical way. We show that we are the disciples of Jesus by our willingness to submit to His Word as it applies to our life. We let it guide our thinking, form our opinions, and determine our conduct.

While it is relatively easy to confess Jesus as our Saviour in church, at home, or among fellow believers, it is often hard to do so out in the world. There are times when we are tempted to hide our faith, to hope that people don’t notice that we are believers. There are times when we don’t want to say anything in support of Jesus and His Word, knowing that to do so will earn the disapproval, scorn, or even hostility of friends, neighbours, and co-workers. So, we need strength and courage to live as believers and to do so *openly* before the world. We need the encouragement that Jesus Himself provides when He tells us, **“Stop being afraid.”**

In last Sunday’s Gospel, we read of Jesus sending out His disciples into the world to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven was near. However, they were also warned that they would face heavy opposition. In fact, Jesus declared to them: *“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves”* (Matthew 10:16).

He continued to speak to them, saying, **“A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul’, how much more the members of his household!”** As it turned out, it was no

less than the Pharisees and Scribes who called Jesus “*Beelzebul*,” the “*lord of the flies*.”¹ And if those church leaders - who could do no wrong in the eyes of the people – called Jesus such, then they certainly would consider His follower’s gnats to be swatted. The disciples would face terrible intimidation for merely telling the Good News about Jesus.

But intimidation was no excuse for the disciples to remain silent. “...**do not be afraid of them**,” Jesus commands. Why? For one thing, because “**there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known**.” Those enemies of Jesus may look to have the strong hand; after all, what are a Teacher and twelve men against the world? However, the disciples knew the end of the story because Jesus had told it to them (even though they at times appeared to forget!). Jesus would be the Victor, and He would return in glory to judge all nations and condemn those who reject Him. Therefore, the disciples were not to be intimidated: In this battle of good versus evil, evil would appear to have the upper hand for some time to come, but the disciples knew the end of the story, and it would be foolish to side with those who would lose in the end. If they were intimidated, it was no excuse. They were not to remain silent, and neither did they have any right to change the message that had been given to them. They were to preach that the kingdom of heaven was near.²

Jesus was the Master, the Teacher, the Son of God – God Himself - come down from heaven. If He was treated poorly, then how could His disciples imagine that they would be treated any better? The same applies to us today. If Jesus the Saviour was reviled and mistreated, do we suppose that we shall be honoured for being His disciples?

“**Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!**” The disciples would indeed suffer at the hands of sinners, but those evildoers could only kill the body. God, the Father Almighty, wields a much bigger sword: He can “**destroy both soul and body in hell**.” Tell me, who is more to be feared?

For the Church today, it is the same proposition. The Lord calls His people to proclaim what He tells them: His Law in all of its severity and His Gospel in all of its sweetness. As individual Christians, we shall face such intimidation: When confronted with a crisis where the righteous decision means suffering, do we do what is right or take the easy way out? When a family member or close friend chooses a sinful way of life, do we lovingly speak the truth and risk hostility, or keep silent to maintain the family peace? As long as we are in this world, there will be constant attempts to turn us from what is good and pure and holy to what is wrong and impure and most unholy.

As individual Christians face such intimidation, so whole congregations are also confronted with the same. Does the Church wish to survive? Then it must alter its message, we are told. The change must come in order to bring more people into the pews and must sound more loving and less condemning of sin. The change must occur for economic reasons: people in the pew mean offerings; offerings mean paid bills, and paid bills mean that a congregation continues. The change must come because this is not our grandfather’s Australia; times change, and so must we. The change must come, we are told, though it is usually put in soft and attractive terms: We’re not supposed to abandon the Gospel, of course; we should still believe that Jesus is the Saviour, but we just need to soften up a bit on the Law. Instead of denouncing immorality as downright evil, just frown a bit upon it. Instead of disciplining manifest sinners, we ought lovingly to bear with them and their sin rather than risk offending them. Instead of preaching that the Law condemns all, we should preach it so that it sounds like a helpful tool for living, and nothing more. So goes the pressure on the Church today.

When we are being tempted to alter the message, make no mistake about it: We are being tempted to sin. And when we are tempted to sin, the Lord lashes us with His Law for our good. To show us our sin and the death that awaits, He demands that we proclaim His Word. And He asks this damning question: “*Why do you fear the world more than Me?*”

After all, from the Word of the Lord, we know the end of the story. There is only One who sits on the judgment seat and determines our fate forever. He wields the larger sword of eternal life or death. Why would we fear anyone else more than Him?

Now, let us pause here and be clear: So far, we are preaching the Law of God – His unrelenting, unforgiving Law. This is the Law that Jesus preaches in this Gospel lesson. Fear God and obey His commandments, even when opposed and intimidated by men, because He can “**destroy both soul and body in hell**.”

¹ Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15. See also 2 Kings 2:2

² Matthew 10:7

This is the Law of God, and it is perfectly true; however, we hasten to add that it is only half of the story. The purpose of this Law is to show us our sin, for we sin and break this Law every single day. Whenever we sin, our love of sin overcomes our fear of God and His punishment. Whenever we fail clearly to proclaim His Word, we fear something else besides His wrath.

God gives us His Law to show us our sin; however, He does so for our good. When we see our sin, we know we cannot save ourselves, and we are ready to hear of a Saviour. The Law is half the story; now we turn to the other half of the story: namely, the Gospel.

How sad it would be if the message of Christianity were only one of fear, of “*Obey God because He carries the biggest stick.*” But this is not the case. We do not trust our Lord because no one is more fearful. No, we trust in Him because *no one loves us more*.

Listen again to these words of our Lord, “**A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul’, how much more the members of his household!**”

Dwell on these words for a moment: When this Teacher sends out His disciples, He is not a spoiled ruler who demands that they suffer so that He doesn’t have to or demand their death so He can live. He tells them they will suffer just as He suffers. A slave is not above his Master; if the Master suffers, the slave will suffer, too. But the Master is greater - and so His suffering is greater as well - far greater.

For those disciples, for you and for me, this Master suffers. At the hands of supposedly righteous men, He is arrested and falsely accused of all sorts of sins that He is not guilty of - but you and I are. He accepts these accusations in silence and allows Himself to be beaten and scourged. He is hung on a cross, where supposedly good men mock Him and ridicule Him. But this is only a little bit of His suffering. The greater portion does not come from supposedly righteous men, but from His Father in heaven - His Father who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell**. The Son does not deserve this destruction, for He has not sinned. We deserve this punishment, for we constantly sin against God. But there at the cross, the Master takes the place of His servants - He is suffering hell on that cross for our sins. God the Father destroys His Son to fulfil the Law, to inflict the punishment our sins have merited. Here is our salvation: God destroys His Son, so that He may forgive us instead.

Consider, then, these words of Jesus, “**Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered. Therefore stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows.**”

God the Father keeps track of sparrows, purchased at a cent a pair; He knows when one of them falls to the ground. Here is our comfort: We have not been purchased cheaply for a cent. No, we have been redeemed - not with silver or gold, but His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death.³ He has purchased us in this way that we may be His own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness. This is most certainly true.⁴

And so, we have God’s Law and Gospel. We are to faithfully proclaim His Word. If we fail to do so, we sin and face His eternal, unforgiving wrath. However, as we proclaim His Word, we also hear this sweet sound: Our sins are forgiven because Jesus has suffered God’s wrath for us at the cross. Besides, Jesus “**shall confess before (His) Father in heaven whoever confesses (Him) before others.**” Jesus promises His disciples and us that if we fearlessly confess Him on earth, He will stand up for us before His heavenly Father at the last judgment and accept us into eternal life.

Do we fear God? Yes, we rightly fear the consequences of breaking His commands and suffering His wrath. This is a godly fear, which moves us to sorrow for our sins. But all the more, we love God because of our redemption. He has punished His Son, destroyed Him in our place - He has judged the Son, who has kept His commandments because of our failure to do the same. The price has been paid; a price far greater than that for sparrows. Because that price has been paid, we can be sure of this: We are forgiven for all our sins, and we now have the boldness to proclaim the saving grace of God to all mankind. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

³ 1 Peter 1:18

⁴ Luther’s explanation of the Second Article

PRAYER FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Let us never forget Your witness to Yourself in Your creation.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises that give us hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on our disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Your Son. By Your love for us, move us to love You and those about us with a love that isn't mere words, but that is real and active. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared salvation for all people, and that through the Gospel You invite all to Your kingdom. Give us opportunities to pass on Your invitation to salvation to people whom we meet in our lives, that they also may respond to Your mercy with thankful hearts. Send forth Your messengers into every corner of our world, so that the lost may rejoice in Your mercy.

Almighty Lord, guide all to whom You have given authority in our country. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience.

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. We pray especially for those in our congregation who are unwell. Comfort all who have suffered material loss, and the loss of dear ones. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children. Father, hear our prayers, and if there is anything else we should have asked for, grant it for the sake of Jesus Christ, who has saved us, and pleads for us. Amen.

The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 20:7-13

⁷ LORD, You have deceived me, and I have let myself be deceived. You have overpowered me and have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long. Everyone mocks me. ⁸ Each time I speak, I cry out and proclaim, "Violence and devastation!" The Word of the LORD has brought me disgrace and derision all day long. ⁹ However, when I think, "I shall not mention Him or speak in His name any longer," then His Word is like a burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones. I wear myself out trying to hold it in but cannot do it. ¹⁰ For I have heard many people reporting: "Terror is all around you. Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" All my closest friends are watching to see me stumble, saying: "Perhaps he will be deceived. Then we shall overpower him and take our revenge on him."

¹¹ Nevertheless, the LORD is with me like a powerful warrior. Therefore, those who are persecuting me will stumble and will not win. They will be greatly ashamed that they have not been successful. Their eternal disgrace will not be forgotten. ¹² However,

LORD of hosts, You test the righteous man. You see his inmost being and thoughts. Let me see Your revenge against them! For I have disclosed my case to You. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For He has rescued the life of a needy man from the hands of evildoers.

Romans 6:12-23

¹² Therefore, let sin not keep on reigning in your mortal bodies with the result that you obey their sinful desires! ¹³ Stop presenting the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons of unrighteousness! Rather, present yourselves to God, as people who are alive from the dead, and present the parts of your bodies to God as weapons of righteousness! ¹⁴ For sin will not be master over you. For you are not under Law but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under Law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that, when you present yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which results in death or of obedience, which results in righteousness? ¹⁷ However, thanks be to God that, although you used to be the slaves of sin, you have obeyed from the heart the pattern of teaching to which you were

entrusted! ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have been made the slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in a human way because your human nature is weak. For, as you presented the members of your bodies as slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now, present your members as slaves of righteousness, leading to holiness! ²⁰ For, when you were the slaves of sin, you were free concerning righteousness. ²¹ Therefore, what harvest did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? None, for the end of those things is death. ²² Rather, now, after you have been set free from sin and have been made the slaves of God, you have your harvest leading to holiness, and the end will be eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

⁵ Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following Instructions: ... ²¹ “One brother will betray another to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² You will also be hated by all people because of My name. Nevertheless, he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When people persecute you in this city, flee to another! Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household! ²⁶ “Therefore, do not be afraid of them! For there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ Speak in the light what I tell you in the dark and proclaim on the housetops what you hear in your ears! ²⁸ Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell! ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. ³⁰ As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered. ³¹ Therefore, stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows. ³² I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others. ³³ I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others.