

June 25, 2023  
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33 (Jeremiah 20:7-13; Romans 6:12-33)

KEEP CALM, YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

What is it that you *fear* most? I do not mean your *phobias* of germs, spiders, or closed in spaces. What *fear* is it that keeps you awake at night? What *fear* invades your safe and secure happy place and causes you alarm? Is it the *fear* of rejection or abandonment? The *fear* of intimidation and persecution? Or maybe it is the *fear* of the next pandemic, death, or the death of a loved one?

*Fear* is the emotion you feel when your physical safety is being threatened, whether real or imagined. If you are unable to experience *fear*, you may not recognize danger and attempt to protect yourself. But there is also a different kind of *fear*. That is the *proper fear* of our Triune God which is a product of faith.

This *fear* of God is repeatedly taught throughout Holy Scripture. Unfortunately, in the original languages this type of *fear* does not translate well into any single word in English. (cf: Engelbrecht, The Lutheran Study Bible, 1001; TDNT Vol. 9, 208–209) Scripture teaches that this *proper fear* of God is the idea of standing in *awe and reverence* before our all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present God because of His rich loving mercy, forgiveness, and grace – while – at the same time, *fearing* and *respecting* His *righteous wrath* against sin.

A *proper fear* of God is a God given gift, a *fruit of faith*, whereas *misplaced fear* is the enemy of the Christian faith. *Misplaced fear* whittles away at and steals true faith and eventually gives birth to a complete lack of faith and trust in God. *Misplaced fear* begins with the crafty serpent's words in the Garden of Eden:

**“Did God actually say...?”** (Genesis 3:1)

Did God really mean it when He said he would never leave you nor forsake you? (cf: Hebrews 13:5) Did Jesus really mean it when He said He would be with you to the very end of the age? (cf: Matthew 28:20) Is God truly your refuge and your fortress in whom you may trust? (cf: Psalm 91:2)

The devil tempts you to doubt. He entices you to *fear* rejection and abandonment. He seduces you to *fear* intimidation and persecution. He deceives you into *fearing* the next pandemic, death, or the death of your loved one. He persuades you into trusting *misplaced fear* which undermines your faith and trust in God.

In our Gospel text this morning, Jesus teaches us about the *proper fear* of God. As we heard in last week's text, He is sending out His twelve disciples to the lost sheep of the house Israel to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand and to perform miracles. (cf: Matthew 10:6–8) Everything Jesus says in Matthew, chapter 10, through verse 23, pertains to those first twelve disciples. But starting in verse 24 and going forward to the end of the chapter, Jesus' words apply to those twelve disciples and to you and me and all Jesus' disciples throughout all time. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, Concordia Commentary, 528) And as we consider Jesus' words, you and I are challenged to face our greatest *fears* – and then – rejoice in confessing and proclaiming that Jesus is greater than our *fears*.

As He sends out His disciples, He knows that from a human point of view, there is much to *fear*. Just prior to our text this morning, Jesus warns the Twelve that He is sending them out as *“sheep in the midst of wolves.”* (cf: Matthew 10:16) And while that imagery does not paint a very positive picture, it is instructive to notice that Jesus never promises His disciples, including you and me, that He will remove us from suffering or even death for confessing Christ. No. Three times in our text Jesus exhorts His disciples and you and me to *have no fear*. (cf: Matthew 10: 26, 28, 31)

Jesus knows what it is to be rejected. And He knew that in sending out those first disciples to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom of God, that they too, in many places, would be rejected. No one likes to be rejected. At some point of your life you likely were rejected. Perhaps you still bear the scars from that rejection. But what about rejection for sharing the Gospel? Many today reject, not only the message of the Gospel, but they also reject and persecute the one who proclaims Jesus' Gospel. That is when the devil whispers into your ear: *“Did God actually say that you have to share His Gospel? Keep safe and let someone else do the sharing.”* He entices you to *fear* rejection and abandonment so that you hide the light of the Gospel under a basket where no one can see. (cf: Matthew 5:15) Jesus says to you: *“Have no fear.”*

Also prior to our text Jesus warns His disciples that they will be delivered over to courts and flogged in the synagogues, and be dragged before governors and kings on account of their relationship with Him. (cf: Matthew 10:17–18) Unbelievers and slaves to sin use intimidation tactics to silence the proclamation of the Gospel. And today is no different. Our current cancel culture uses threats and intimidation to silence those who openly confess the truth of God's Word. They threaten and intimidate those who proclaim that God alone has the *final word* on all issues of life and death from conception to natural death – and questions of sex and gender. Jesus says to you: *“Have no fear.”*

Jesus warns that:

***“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, <sup>22</sup> and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.”*** (Matthew 10:21–22)

He explicitly warns the Twelve that because of their confession and proclamation of Christ, they needed to be prepared to be put to death by those who opposed Him, who alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (cf: John 14:6) And eventually, most of them were put to death.

Martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel has been a reality throughout the history of the Christian Church, and it continues to be a reality in many parts of the world today. Up until now, most Christians in America have been spared this type of persecution. But that does not mean it will never come. You and I would be naïve to expect that it could never happen here. As a beloved child of God and disciple of Jesus, our Lord warns you that:

***“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.”*** (Matthew 10:24)

A disciple is essentially defined by the relationship he has with his teacher, and a slave by the connection with his master. Disciples and teachers, servants and masters will all suffer the same. If they blasphemed Jesus as a demon, how much more will they slander His followers? If you have no ***fear*** of this rejection, intimidation, persecution, even martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel, it is only by the grace of God. (cf: 1 Corinthians 15:10) It is He who has given you the courage and strength to persevere. A ***proper fear*** of God is a God given gift, a ***fruit of faith***, given to all who believe.

According to today’s text, all who are in Christ Jesus have absolutely nothing to ***fear***. Be it rejection, intimidation, persecution, or even martyrdom for the sake of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world has already born your griefs and carried your sorrows. (cf: Isaiah 53:4) Because Jesus has faced every enemy that causes you ***fear***, you can be sure that He understands your ***fears***. He can sympathize with all of your temptations to be ***afraid***. And He will provide mercy and grace to help you in your time of need. (cf. Hebrews 4:15–16)

Jesus’ suffering and death on Calvary’s cross was nothing else than your sin and mine. (cf: LW 17, 221) He has already overcome every enemy and peril that threatens to paralyze you with ***fear***. He has overcome suffering of every kind. While you and I cannot understand it, God is able to use and indeed, does use every pain, suffering, and human death for your ultimate good and for His glory. (Romans 5:3–5; 8:28) He came into the world to destroy and has destroyed the works and ways of the devil and the power of the grave. (cf: 1 John 3:8) The wages of sin is eternal death and damnation in hell, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (cf: Romans 6:23)

Prior to Christ you were a slave to sin, but thanks be to God, God in Christ Jesus has broken your chains. For the sake of Jesus’ precious blood shed and His innocent suffering and death, all on your behalf, you have been set free from sin and have become a slave of righteousness. (cf: Romans 6:17–18) Meaning that every aspect of the believer’s life is to be used in proper ***fear*** and service to God.

Jesus says:

***“... do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”*** (Matthew 10:28)

Like I said last week, your good health and safety is not your highest priority or good. Your highest priority and good is your faith and confession in Christ while ***fearing***, loving, and trusting in God above all things. Apart from faith and trust in Christ, you and I and all mankind are in danger of eternal death and damnation, unable to save ourselves. So God showed His love in that while you and I were still sinners, Christ died for us. (cf: Romans 5:8) He has given you

the gift of the Holy Spirit and loves you more than little sparrows – yet even the soulless unimportant sparrow does not fall to the ground apart from the Father’s will. (cf: Matthew 10:29) He even has the hair hairs on your head numbered. (cf: Matthew 10:30) Now, this does not mean that the disciple of Christ is immune from difficulties or persecutions. No. It means that when difficulties or persecution or even martyrdom does come, you are still under the Father’s loving care, and He is with you even in the midst of your tribulations. Jesus says to you: **“Have no fear.”**

In our Introit the Psalmist sings of the One in whom he trusts when he is **afraid**, singing:  
**“<sup>3</sup> When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. <sup>4</sup> In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me?”** (Psalm 56:3–4)  
**“<sup>11</sup> in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”** (Psalm 56:11)

In our Old Testament reading, God’s prophet Jeremiah saw violence and destruction all around him. (cf: Jeremiah 20:8) He complains to God about the opposition he faces as he delivers God’s message of repentance and faith. Yet, God gave Jeremiah the boldness to praise the Lord as if God had already delivered him. (cf: Jeremiah 20:13)

As poor miserable sinners, you and I will suffer human **fear** and weakness of faith; however, Jesus has the last word. He says:

**“... everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.”** (Matthew 10:32)

Therefore, you can joyfully, boldly, **fearlessly** bear witness to Christ and Him crucified until He comes again to deliver you from every cause of **fear**, proving once and for all that Jesus is greater than your **fears**.

From a human point of view there is much to **fear**: rejection, intimidation, even persecution that, in many cases throughout history, has led to martyrdom for Christ. But from God’s point of view, you have nothing to **fear**. Why? Because Jesus has faced and defeated the source of every **fear**. He has overcome every enemy that causes you **fear**. He has promised to be with you and watch over you in every **fearful** situation until He takes you safely to Himself in eternity where **fear** will be no more.

Amen.

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