

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost. The scripture text is taken from Matthew 10:26-32

What do you fear? Snakes, spiders? Especially if a snake or spider gets in your house. Do you fear storms, especially if lightning strikes near-by? A sudden flash followed by an ear splitting crash sends you running for cover?

Others fear heights and won't climb a ladder. Some people are afraid of water and won't go into a swimming pool, or set foot in the ocean. Some people are afraid of cats or dogs.

Some people are afraid of being a victim of a terrorist attack, others fear being alone, and most people are afraid of having to speak in public, and all of us fear rejection.

In our gospel narrative this morning, Jesus is saying, "Fear God and you will be fearless: fearless of bullies and fearless of the future.

Jesus spoke the words of our gospel text from Matthew, to prepare His disciples for missionary work, the work of telling others about their sin, and the need of a savior.

They would be well prepared for this effort because Jesus had given His disciples the power to heal the sick and drive out demons. In Matthew's Gospel chapter 10, verse 1: "Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness."

Still, their task would not be easy. Jesus said (this is in chapter 10, verse 24) "A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master."

Jesus warned His disciples that since He had been harassed, the disciples could expect to be harassed too, and this should not surprise them.

That is a good reminder for us, isn't it? Although we would love it, if the news about Jesus, the life, hope and salvation He brings, was always as welcomed as a coupon for free ice-cream, or a free dinner would be.

Telling others about the good news of Jesus, doesn't always elicit a joyful response, not even from those who should know better, like some people who grew up in the church. But we should not become discouraged.

Jesus was often rejected, by those who should have not rejected Him, and so will we, if we are truly His followers, remember, that the world out there is hostile to Christians, and it's not going to get any better, anytime soon.

And that's a good question for us to ponder this morning, isn't it? Am I really a follower of Jesus? Do I walk in the path He has laid out for me in His Word, or do I press on in the direction I want to go chasing after the ways of the world?

Jesus has called me to be faithful. Jesus has called you to be faithful. Jesus has called on all of us to be faithful to Him, to deny our sinful flesh, take up our cross and follow Him in faith.

And that is never easy. The problem all too often is, that, we don't see Jesus as our savior, but we see Him as our maid, someone who is to follow behind us, and to clean up the messes that we make.

And when Jesus doesn't clean up after us, when He lets us suffer the consequences of our sin, we complain that He isn't there for us. But Jesus isn't our maid, He is our Savior, He is an example for all us to emulate, Jesus is our Lord and gives us good reasons to let Him do the leading.

He went on to say to His disciples, (this is in verse 28): "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."

There was no reason for the disciples to be bullied into silence by those (who are hostile to Jesus' words and the message He brings) for those, to whom they would encounter.

So when Jesus says that we should "fear God", Jesus is speaking about a respectful reverence, not an attitude of terror, as if God were some celestial bully or some celestial crime boss, we had better keep happy, or else face the consequences.

Jesus point is this: Stand in awe of God, not man. Stand in awe of the living God, who has given you the truth, through His Word made manifest in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Stand in awe, of what God has given you, His love, and His promises of daily bread and eternal life. This is what Jesus was getting at when He said (this is in verse 27): "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

When someone tells you a secret, it means that they trust you. Well, the Son of God has whispered into our ears the secret of eternal life.

What a privileged position we hold. Jesus has also whispered the reason, the world is the way it is, and how it's going to end.

Jesus has also whispered to us, how to be content, no matter what our station in life (in other words, our time, and place in the world), where we find ourselves.

Jesus has whispered all this to us, through His Word. Now Jesus wants us, to shout this from the rooftops, because these secrets aren't just for you, they are for everyone.

Will everyone be happy with what we have to say? No. They especially won't like the part about sin. They may even persecute us for that message. But fear God, more than man, because God's reach goes beyond the grave.

Fear God, and you will be fearless of those who oppose you. Fear God, and you will be fearless of whatever the future may hold.

Jesus assures us, when He went on to say (this is in verse 29) "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

It is not surprising to hear that we are worth more to God than sparrows. Perhaps what is surprising to learn is that not one of the billions of sparrows that fly around the world falls to the ground apart from God's will.

If God gives the sparrow this much attention, won't He also give you and I the care we need?

This does not mean that you will never fall to the ground. Jesus did not say, that the sparrows never fall to the ground because God watches them. They just don't fall to the ground apart from God's will.

Likewise, God hasn't promised to keep sickness, injury or even death from us. But God uses these difficulties for our good.

That's because God knows exactly what we need. He even knows the how many strands of hair we each have, or don't have. What I like about this, is that our God knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows those intimate details about each and everyone of us.

So why then, is there any need to be afraid of the future? When we fear God, standing in awe of His power to protect us, and to care for us, we know that God is in control, and that we should trust in Him all the more.

So is there anything we should be afraid of? Anything? Truthfully, "no", because the problems of this life, are so small, so tiny, that they are nothing before God.

However, because of our sinful human nature. We should fear, turning away from Christ. Jesus tells us in verse 32 that: "Everyone therefore who acknowledge me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven."

Don't worry about being afraid of spiders, snakes, creepy crawly things, water, heights, walking under ladders, cats and dogs, and whatever else, we as human-beings can dream up.

Fear denying Christ. But how do we deny Christ? I want you to think about this. As Christians, those who are baptized and profess in faith, that Jesus Christ is Lord of Lords and King of kings. That He died on that Roman cross for our sins, and on the third day, God raised Him from the dead thereby, defeating the power of sin, death and the devil, opening up the gates to eternal life with God our Father in Heaven. We are secure in our salvation. Heaven is our home, and we know that's where we are headed.

However, fellow Christians, the devil, our adversary, and the world out there, wants more than anything, to pull us away from our faith in Christ.

You see, the devil will try to convince you, that your faith in Christ is never enough, you can't just have faith, you have to work for it, you have to earn your way into heaven, believe more, work harder, and of course when the bad things happen in life, the devil will tell you, well, you just didn't have enough faith, so Christ has just forgotten you. So just give up and reject the faith, you don't need it!

And the sad thing is, a lot of people in this world fall for that non-sense.

As followers of Christ, we are to be more than just those who warm the pews on Sunday morning. This is important: We are to confess Jesus before others, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and that through faith in Him, sins are forgiven, and the promise unto eternal life is given to you, as a free gift of grace.

Understand, God is totally aware and can completely protect, so there is no excuse for hiding our faith (witnessing our faith) in this world, because we are afraid of what others may think or say.

Remember the world out there is not going to save you from sin and death, it is only through faith in Christ, by the merits of Christ, not your merits or my merits, it is by the grace of God.

For the only ones Jesus confesses before the Father are those that testify of Him before men, or other people, to those who do not know Christ.

The only thing, worthy of fear, is the fear of not confessing or testifying for Christ. Jesus is telling us in these verses, that confessing Him, is a "cause and effect" relationship. Christ will confess only to those who openly confess Him, who go forward with Him, undeterred by fear.

The result of openly acknowledging Jesus before others, that they belong to Christ, even before persecutors, Jesus will confess that person before His Father on judgment day. Remember, the world may take away our very life, but the world cannot take away our reward.

Our Lord Jesus Christ does not want us to sit in fear and be silent disciples. No, He encourages us and empowers us to tell others about His love and His grace.

As you and I live in faith, it is our calling to live out our faith in this broken world, in courage not in fear. Love the Lord as He has loved you.

I will close out the message this morning with these words from an author who last name is Fox. "I'll tell the world that I am a Christian. I am not ashamed His name to bear; I'll tell the world that I am a Christian. I'll take Him with me anywhere." Amen.

Let us pray:

Lord God, you have given us a spirit of courage not a spirit of fear. Help us in our daily living, not to fear anyone or this world, as we share the gospel, but to embrace it, to love it, to live it, and to reach out to those who live in spiritual darkness and do not know You as Lord and Savior. Empower us in our daily living and ministry, empower this church, this body of believers to boldly proclaim that Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords, and to live in that boldness. All these things we humbly pray: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.