

June 25, 2017

Matthew 10:21-33: ***“Have No Fear!”***

*Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 North Oakland Avenue
Decatur, Illinois 62526*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

There's the story of 5 year-old Johnny who was in the kitchen as his mother made supper. She asked him to go into the pantry and get her a can of soup but he didn't want to go in alone. "It's dark in there and I am scared." She asked again and he persisted. Finally she said, "It's OK. Jesus will be in there with you." Johnny walked hesitantly to the door and slowly opened it. He peeked inside, saw it was dark and started to leave when all of sudden he had an idea. He leaned in and said, "Jesus, if you're in there, would you hand me a can of soup?"

Fear is a powerful thing isn't it? And we are a lot like 5 year-old Johnny. Even with Jesus, it is hard not to be afraid of the "dark." We like to think that Jesus is some sort of a guarantee that if we reach into the dark pantry for the can of soup, all will be well. Perhaps we might even like to think that with Jesus, we won't have to reach in there at all - Life will always be fine!

It is an assumption held by many and often passed on to our children, that if we do what is good, good will come back to us. When we think about the good things that God wants us to pursue in this fallen world - especially bearing witness to the truth, we kind of assume that this is something that God will especially protect and bless, as if everything will go well for us because we are doing the right thing. Tell that to John the Baptist who was beheaded for just that!

In our Gospel lesson for this morning, we are struck by the fact that doing good does not mean that good will come back to you in this sinful world. We should already know this by the many Biblical examples of God's people who have done the right thing, only to reap a whirlwind of trouble; even death. Jesus warns in our text (Matt. 10:22-25):

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. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

Indeed! If the truth himself was crucified because he is the truth, then what do we expect when we hold to the truth and people don't want it? What they did to Jesus, they will similarly do to us. Not exactly a great selling point for becoming a Christian! Most would prefer what the false teachers say: "if you just believe in Jesus and do the right things, you will have health, wealth, success, and happiness - all will be well." And that is a big lie! Oh, it is true that Jesus promises in our text, "the one who endures to the end will be saved." However, what is forgotten is that there is stuff to be endured, and we endure it not to save ourselves, but rather we endure it all so that what has been given to us will not be lost.

The prophet Jeremiah was burdened with this exact thing as we hear in our Old Testament lesson for this morning (Jer. 20:7-8), "I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, 'Violence and destruction!' And the Word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long." Read the book of Jeremiah and Lamentation and it won't take long for you to see. This good prophet who did great good was tortured for his faith for a good chunk of his life. His life was miserable. He could have caved in, but he endured. One Lutheran pastor writes:

The temptation is always there for us to compromise God's teachings in order to get along with the world. If the world gets offended because the Bible says that all are sinners, we might be tempted to water down the message of sin – perhaps even skip it altogether. If the world is offended by the gruesome nature of the cross, we may want to push the cruel torture and the pain of the cross into the background. It is easy to talk about God's love and forget about His justice. It is easy to talk about Jesus as our buddy and forget about the day when He will come as the judge. We often want to water down the message of God's Word just a little bit so that the world around us would not give us such a hard time.

So this unbelieving world is against us. This is nothing new, or it shouldn't be. After all, Jesus told us that this would happen - hostility, opposition, rejection, ridicule, persecution, even martyrdom. But notice that Jesus also says in verses 26-27 of our text: "So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops." Really? "Have no fear of them?!" I mean, wouldn't it be better to keep quiet and not rock the boat? Our sinful flesh does not like the idea of any trouble coming to us on account of our faith does it? Verse 28 of our lesson says, "And 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."

And there you have it! The damage that this unbelieving world can do is only for the moment. The worst that they can possibly do is kill us. But, what is even worse than that is to be lost forever, if we fail to endure and allow the lie to have dominion over us so that faith is no longer there. Jesus is warning us not to fall away from him. He would greatly encourage us with his steadfast love for us, and his promise of heaven. He doesn't promise to take away the hatred of this unbelieving world as long as we are down here nor does he promise a mess free life. Rather, he would remind us that his life conquers death, and when it is all said and done, all unbelief will go to its place, and all will be made right. Jesus says:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven (verses 29-33).

God cares deeply about us, even every hair on our head. If we have any doubt about this, and we might from time to time, we are bid to look squarely at the cross of Calvary. I love what the prophet Isaiah says (Is. 63:9): "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Messenger of His presence saved them;

in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.” It may seem that God is uncaring or aloof to the sufferings we endure, but the truth is that he is not. In all of our affliction, he was afflicted. He sent his Son to save us, and if he has saved us, he will carry us through everything that we must endure for His sake. (Read Exodus 3:7-8)

The Gospel proclaims that Jesus is the only one who never compromised God’s Word. He is the only one who remained faithful to His calling. He remained faithful to His calling even when His calling led to the cross. He is the one who paid for our sins - even the sins of our weak knees - with his death on the cross. He faced not only the persecution of this world, but He also faced the combined guilt of all the sin of this world. Even then He remained faithful. With the victory He won with His death on the cross, He has purchased the forgiveness of all our sins, and he says (John 16:33): “I have said these things to you, that hin me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Have No Fear! “The one who endures to the end will be saved.” Not only that, but will be vindicated, elevated, and glorified in God’s kingdom along with Jesus, our dear Savior. So let us continue on with courage and fortitude, regardless of what we see coming our way. We know God’s love, His gracious mercy and forgiveness, His faithfulness and power, and His promises regarding our future. And the proof is in the cross of Christ, isn’t it? If God loved you that much, to send his own Son to die for you, surely he will see you through all the troubles of this life.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott