

“No Fear”

Matthew 10:24-33

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • June 23, 2013

What's your greatest fear? What is it that you are most afraid of? All of us have fears. It's human nature. Some people, however, have excessive fears. The things they're afraid of may be real or they may only be imagined. But their fears get in the way of being able to function normally. Psychologists call these fears “phobias” and there are hundreds, even thousands of these phobias.

For example, *acrophobia* is the fear of heights, *claustrophobia* is the fear of being trapped in an enclosed space, and *arachnophobia* is the fear of spiders. Some phobias can seem kind of silly. If you have *ergophobia* you are afraid of working and if you suffer from *octophobia* you are afraid of the figure 8. My favorite is *linonophobia*, which is a morbid fear of string.

What makes a fear a phobia is that it is irrational and excessive. But what about genuine fears? Fear is not necessarily a bad thing. It's what can keep us safe in the face of danger. Fear constrains our behavior. But politicians and marketers love to prey upon our fears. They use our fears to try to motivate us to think or act in a certain way. They exploit your fears for their own gain.

The biggest tragedy, though, is that too often fear prevents us from living the kind of life God wants us to live for Him. Fear prevents us from inviting people to learn about Jesus or it keeps us from getting involved. Fears about the future get in the way of being more generous or helping people who are not like us.

In this passage Jesus speaks to our fears. Last week we learned that Jesus sent his twelve disciples out to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Then he commissions them to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, and cast out demons. He tells them not to go on a big shopping trip to get ready but to trust that God will provide

what they need. Then he gives them the really good news – it's going to be a dangerous mission. They will face persecution.

In today's reading we find out why they will face persecution and why you and I face the same thing. He says, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.” Then he says, “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household?” In other words, the disciples can expect resistance and persecution because Jesus is resisted and persecuted. They are identified with Jesus.

The name Beelzebul refers to the ancient mythical god Baal that is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament. But there's a joke buried in here. Beelzebul is a play on words. The Jews distorted the original word, which meant lord of the heavens, so that it now means “lord of the flies” or “lord of the dung heap.” Either way here it is meant to refer to Satan. Jesus is saying that if the Pharisees have called him evil they will certainly call his disciples evil.

Jesus also says, “It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher.” This, of course, is the goal of discipleship. Our mission in this life is to become like the master, like Jesus. We are to imitate Christ. That doesn't mean we are supposed to dress like Jesus or learn to speak Aramaic. It means that Jesus wants us to imitate his way of obedience to God and to imitate his mission. Jesus started with his own people, Israel, and then enlisted help to change the world. We can do the same thing. We can start with the people closest to us and then enlist help to change the world.

After Jesus tells his disciples that they will be no better off than their teacher, he turns around and tells them not to be afraid. This is

one of the great recurring themes of the Bible. Over and over again God tells us in his Word not to fear. Here Jesus says, “have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” Ultimately the truth will come out. Those who are persecuting Christ’s followers will be exposed.

The reason that we are not to fear is because God is in control. Jesus makes it clear that nothing can happen to us that is not a part of God’s will. God is involved in the affairs of this world and is concerned with every detail, down to the sparrows and the hairs on your head. Have you ever tried to count your hair? It’s impossible! (Well, for most of us it’s impossible). But God has each one numbered and he knows each hair.

Similarly, sparrows are not very valuable commercially. In ancient times sparrows were what the poorest of the people ate. But God is concerned for them, also. The point is that if He is so concerned for sparrows, he is even more concerned about you who are created in God’s image.

That doesn’t mean that everything will be easy in this life. Jesus has already told us to expect persecution for following him. There are more people martyred for their faith in Jesus today than at any other time in history. But no matter how bad things look we know that somehow it’s part of God’s eternal plan.

What Jesus tells us is to put our fear into proper perspective. He 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.” These days many people are afraid of what other people will do to them. We’re afraid of terrorists and criminals. There are long lines and waiting lists to be able to purchase bullets. I’m not criticizing people for taking precautions and being prepared. But it seems to me that fear of other people moves people to action but not a fear of God.

There is not the same sense of awe and reverence for the God who has authority over both your body and your soul. Many people get so caught up in the concerns of this world but disregard the more important things of eternity. The point is that if you fear God you won’t have to fear people. As Psalm 111 says, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Fear of God doesn’t mean being afraid. Instead it means to have that deep respect and reverence, to be in awe and wonder of God, his Word, and the things he has done for you.

Having that kind of fear should move you to action also. Jesus says, “What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.” Jesus is likely referring to the work of the Apostles and the church after Easter. Before the resurrection could be considered the time of darkness but once Jesus is glorified the light has come. The job of all followers of Jesus is to tell others about him.

And Jesus is serious about this. He says, “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.” These may be some of the most startling words in the Bible. If we fail to tell others about Jesus then our very standing before God is in jeopardy. But why wouldn’t we invite people into the kingdom of heaven? Because we’re afraid? We should be more afraid NOT to.

So let me ask you this: if it were a crime to be a follower – a student - of Jesus, would there be enough evidence from your life to convict you? Think about that.

Amen