

**Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 13, 2014  
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

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**Matthew 10:24-33**

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell...31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 32) "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.**

Fellow followers of our Lord,

Great leaders often have a knack for saying inspirational things to motivate others to action. For example: "When the going gets tough ... the tough get going. But great leaders don't just talk. They also lead by example. Jesus also had a knack for saying inspirational things and for leading by example. After washing his disciples' feet Jesus said, **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.** John 13:15 (NIV 84)

As we look at our text, Jesus once again is offering some words of encouragement to his disciples. He has told them to go in his name to announce that the kingdom of God is near. Now he warns them that this will be a tough mission but he doesn't ask them to do anything he hasn't already done. You can

**Theme:** Fearlessly Follow Jesus *because*

1. The opposition will not be victorious
2. God will not forget you
3. A Glorious future awaits you

It seems that most individuals who are in a position of leadership have more than their fair share of people who oppose them. That certainly was the case for Jesus. People rejected Jesus message. They attempted to kill him. The teachers of the Law spoke evil of him – accusing him of being demon possessed or working with the Devil. Even his own family members thought that he was out of his mind. (cf. Mark 3:21)

**Do not be afraid** – three times Jesus told his disciples this in our text. And with good reason! Immediately before Jesus spoke the words of our text he had been telling his disciples what it would like for them when they went out as his witnesses. Here's part of that job description:

**"Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues. On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ...All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another.** Matthew 10:17-24 (NIV 84)

You and I may not have to be afraid of being flogged. But it can be dangerous to be the Lord's witnesses. Last week's WELS connection pointed out some of the risks that confront our mission workers in Mexico. Mission workers in other parts of the world also face severe opposition to their work. That shouldn't surprise us when we understand that most of the world's population outside of our country is not Christian.

Here at home the risks to being a disciple of Jesus aren't quite as severe but it's not always easy to stand up for Jesus and his life giving Gospel. Those who teach like Jesus taught are frequently ridiculed and slandered. Why should we expect it to be otherwise?

**Jesus told his disciples, "The student is not above the teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25) It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household! 26) "So do not be afraid...**

Do not be afraid – rather consider it an honor when you are defamed or slandered or ridiculed for Christ’s sake. Now let’s not forget who Jesus is. He is true God who became one of us so that he could rescue the world from sin, death and the power of the devil. He is the one who gives us his righteousness so that we can stand forgiven in God’s site. The apostle Paul helps us put our witnessing in the face of opposition into perspective.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.... I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:31-39 (NIV 84)

We can follow Jesus fearlessly because the opposition will not be victorious. We are more than conquerors in Christ! **"So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27) What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs.**

As Jesus encourages us to fearlessly follow him in proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God he wants us to know that we do not need to fear our opposition because that opposition will ultimately be exposed for what it really is –opposition to the only Savior God. Therefore Jesus encourages us to openly share with the world “the hidden things of God” which he has revealed to us in his Gospel. It is this message of Christ the Crucified and risen Savior that we are to boldly shout from the roof tops for all to hear!

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

Again Jesus has spoken some inspirational words. It may be that his words were in the back of Martin Luther’s mind when he penned his hymn, A mighty Fortress is our God which includes the words: do what they will – hate, steal hurt or kill- though all may be gone our victory is won; the kingdoms ours forever.

Jesus wants us to bear in mind a truth he taught on another occasion about the value of our souls. **34) ... "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35) For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36) What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? 37) Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Mark 8:34-37 NIV)**

We live in a materialistic world in which many determine their value and worth by the value and worth of their possessions. Such a view of life ultimately concludes that as long as we have life we have something but if one loses his life; he’s lost everything. Such thinking focuses on the here and now and not the hereafter. What a joy it is for Christians to look ahead to the eternal joys of heaven where both our bodies and souls will dwell in perfect holiness and happiness forever. Because this blessing has been secured for us by Jesus our Savior we will not fear those who can only do worldly temporary harm to our bodies. Rather will give our awe and reverence to our Savior God and fearlessly follow him with the confidence that he will never forget us. Consider this Jesus says. **29) Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. 30) And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31) So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.**

At Jesus time two sparrows were sold for a penny. In fact on another occasion Jesus indicated that you could get five sparrows for the price of four – for two pennies. It's hard to imagine how anything could be worth less than a half a penny, isn't it? If you saw a penny on the ground would you stop to pick it up? You might if you subscribed to Ben Franklin's philosophy that a penny saved is a penny earned. But I suspect many people wouldn't trouble themselves to pick up a penny which was in their path. It just wouldn't be worth the trouble to many people.

God sees things so differently. Even the insignificant sparrows are precious to him - not one of them falls to ground without our heavenly Father's knowledge. How about this? Would you shed a tear over a strand of hair? We may not give much thought to the strands of hair that we wash down the drain – but our heavenly Father has counted them all – it's as if he knows them by name!

If our heavenly Father has such concern for the worthless sparrow and the seemingly insignificant strands of our hair – well can you even begin to imagine how precious our entire being body and soul is to him? We can if we recall that he gave his one and only son for us! If he was willing to make that sacrifice for us we can fearlessly proclaim that message even in the face of opposition with the confidence that our heavenly Father will never forget us. The Psalmist shared that very same truth with us when he wrote: **I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.** (Psalm 37:25 NIV)

You can Fearlessly Follow Jesus *because* the opposition will not be victorious, God will not forget you and a glorious future awaits you!

**"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33) But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.**

Once again Jesus sets up a contrast for us. He contrasts those who willingly take up their crosses to follow him and to confess him with those who reject him. Once again Jesus words are intended to inspire us to fearlessly follow and confess him. It's just this simple Jesus says. I will acknowledge those who acknowledge me. And I will disown those who disown me.

Consider my grace, my love, my forgiveness, and my eternal blessings. "Acknowledge me and I will speak to Father on your behalf," Jesus says. I will acknowledge you as my brothers, my sisters, my followers and my fellow heirs. I will acknowledge you as the ones for whom I laid down my life. I will acknowledge you as those who have been credited with your righteousness. A glorious future waits. Such promises inspire our bold confession and our fearless following.

These promises are strengthened by the warning Jesus speaks about those who reject him. He truly wants all to enjoy the blessings of a glorious future with him but anyone who disowns him will be disowned by Jesus. To disown Jesus is the same as rejecting him or denying what he has done for you. Such unbelief results in condemnation because there is no other way to salvation than through the righteousness of Christ. If some rejects Christ and his righteousness that means that he is seeking to gain admittance into a glorious future based on his own works. The Scriptures make it clear what God thinks of our works: **All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.** (Isaiah 64:6 NIV)

Let us gladly confess Jesus before the world as we look forward to the glorious future which is ours in Christ Jesus.

Fearlessly Follow Jesus *because*

1. The opposition will not be victorious 2. God will not forget you 3. A Glorious future awaits you Amen.