

*July 1 & 5, 2020 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, Wisconsin
The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost*

Matthew 10:24-33

²⁴“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor is a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

²⁶“So do not be afraid of them, because there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

²⁹“Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? ³⁰Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father. ³¹And even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³²So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

³³“Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. ³⁴But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.

The year 2020 will certainly be marked in history as a significant year for the United States of America and the whole world. You know well the reasons – pandemic, unemployment, a booming economy turned upside down that rebounds, civil unrest, riots, destruction of property, dramatic increase in violence and crime, an assault on the history of the United States, and on and on and on. How does all of this make you feel? Confused? A little scared? Very scared?

I would not be surprised if we soon seen more persecution on Christianity, on our faith, even on our churches and schools. Subtle persecution against Christianity and Biblical truth has been around for a long time. If you speak in favor of Biblical morals in the area of sexuality you can expect to be ridiculed and called hateful and unloving. If you point to creation as the origin of all that exists, in many circles you will be called naïve and stupid. I don't think adhering to Biblical truth will become an easier in the years to come.

Jesus knew that his disciples would have to face hardship and persecution as they carried out his commission to be fishers of men. Our Gospel reading today is the third from Matthew 9 and 10. Jesus looked out and saw that the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few. He sent out the twelve disciples to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near. Last week he told them they would face opposition and even violence as they fulfilled his commission. History tells us that only one of those twelve died a natural death. The others were all martyred – put to death because of their confession of Christ and their proclamation of the message of salvation.

So in the verses before us today he encourages them. Three times he says, “Do not be afraid.” He doesn't say, “Stop being afraid.” No he says don't even begin to be afraid. He urges the disciples and us to

CONFESS CHRIST CONFIDENTLY!

1. He says that as we confess Christ confidently we shouldn't be surprised by opposition. Jesus said: ²⁴“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor is a servant above his master. ²⁵It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!

As he faced persecution and finally violence and death, we should not be surprised to be treated like he was. His worst persecution was yet to come, but Jesus knew what was going to happen – both to himself as well as to the disciples and to us. He was called Beelzebul, Satan, so when we are slandered because of our faith in Jesus Christ and our confession of him, we aren't receiving any different treatment than he did.

But he says don't let it cause you fear in the end the truth will come out. It may not happen until Judgment Day, but it will happen. Believers will receive what Jesus earned for them -- the peace and everlasting joy of eternity in heaven. Those who persecuted, slandered and killed Christians and never repented will receive the unending pain of eternal separation from God in hell.

In fact he encourages us by reminding us that earthly enemies, even Satan and his followers can only cause us physical and temporal anguish. As Martin Luther said “we should fear and love God” – because he is the only way to heaven. And he is the one who will send unbelievers to the eternal suffering in hell. So what do you have to say about your own emotions and attitude and actions as you strive to confidently confess Christ? Sometimes successful? But, too often your voice was silent because you were afraid? Because you forgot Jesus’ encouragement to not be afraid? Dear friends look to the cross! There we see the height of opposition and violence and persecution. But we also see the love of Jesus and the forgiveness we so desperately need! There in his love and care for us we can also find the strength to Confidently Confess Christ even in the face of opposition.

2. Jesus further encourages his followers by reminding them that they can trust God’s promises of care. He said: ²⁹“Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin?²⁹ Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

I agree with Jesus that sparrows aren’t worth very much. I remember well the mess they made on the farm when I was a child. My brother and I got pretty good at shooting them with our BB gun. Maybe it wasn’t our accuracy, it was just that there were so many of them that it was hard to not hit them. Jesus tells us that our providing God knows when even just one sparrow falls to the ground. He is so watchful that he knows when we lose one of our hairs. He says that we are worth much more than the sparrows or one of our hairs. He has promised to make all things work together for the good of those who love him. That includes facing persecution and violence and ridicule. That’s what Jeremiah learned as he faced persecution. He couldn’t keep quiet. He knew that in the end the Lord’s vengeance would be poured out on those who persecuted and ridiculed his messengers.

3. Finally Jesus tells us that we can Confidently Confess Christ as we anticipate the joy of Judgment Day: ³²“Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven.

What a contrast! Our look at the present, just like the disciples view of what they would soon be facing, certainly can cause great anxiety. Pretty easy to wring our hands. The devil is whispering to us to keep silent – to shy away from confessing Christ. He says danger, trouble ahead. Avoid all of that by not speaking about the Redeemer. He wants us to focus on the present and the immediate future. But Jesus points us ahead beyond the present to eternity. Imagine the scene in heaven when you arrive there. (I know this is just my made up scene.) The righteous heavenly Father sees us and says” You can’t come in here. You are a sinner. I know everything about you! NO ADMITANCE!” But Jesus is also there and he intervenes: “Wait! Wait! Wait! You sent me to earth to live and die for this sinner. I was perfect in life. So now you have to see him as perfect through me! I poured out my blood and gave up my life to wash his sins away. You have to look at this sinner through my blood.” The Father says, “Come dear soul, redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Eternity in heaven is yours.

O, fellow believers, Confess Christ Confidently. It won’t be easy, but you won’t be alone. And a time better by far awaits you.