

## **Fifth Sunday after Pentecost**

July 5, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Farmington, New Mexico

**Matthew 10:24-33** “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 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. **28** 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.

**29** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care.[a] **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.

**32** “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.

### **“From Frightened Fear to Courageous Confession”**

I hate snakes. There I said it. Even when the kids were playing with a plastic snake in the preschool classroom for a while, it freaked me out. I probably screamed like a little girl a couple times walking in and seeing it on the floor. Kind of like when my little girls are playing nicely and spot a spider. Or even a gnat. Maybe you laugh at my girls or me. Instead, you fear heights or dogs or airplanes. Or something not as specific. Pandemics or politics. Not knowing what we are really facing or the best way to take charge and handle things. Losing respect or losing control. Constantly on edge about how people see you or not being able to handle mini-crises or major disasters and be dependable for your loved ones. Fear of failure. Fear of not being about to live up to everyone else’s expectations. Fear of not being good enough.

In 1933, while the United States was sinking into the depths of the Great Depression, Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered his first inaugural address. In his opening paragraph he told the nation: “So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” Well, yes and no. Being afraid of everything and nothing in particular isn’t a healthy way to go through life. But if there are murder hornets in your backyard or a mountain lion on the loose in your neighborhood, it would be foolish not to take the proper precautions. Some fears are real. And what is a wise way to deal with those fears. We don’t want to let those fears dominate our lives and rob us from joy and freedom.

In Matthew chapter 10 Jesus sends disciples out to join him on his mission. He wants them to be prepared. He wants all disciples of all ages to be aware of dangers. But the right ones. Or to give the correct fears the proper place in our lives. Jesus teaches his disciples not to fear the people and the kinds of things we are naturally inclined to fear. #1: Don’t fear because the Gospel overcomes. #2: Don’t fear those who can’t do any real, lasting damage.

#3: Don't fear because you have a loving heavenly Father who cares intimately for you. And when we take Jesus' words to heart, he moves us from frightened fear to courageous confessors.

### **1) Expect adversity. But keep it in perspective.**

Jesus begins this part of his address to disciples with sobering, realistic instructions. One Bible scholar comments that Jesus moves from travel instructions to trouble instructions and then trust instructions. These verses begin with the troubles and move to the trust. Since there will be troubles in your life of faith, your best weapon is to cherish your connection to Jesus. And then to have proper expectations. Understand the terrible way Jesus was treated. Jesus uses an actual example. Crowds all throughout Galilee were amazed at the teaching and miracles of Jesus. In the events recorded in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed and aggravated the religious leaders by forgiving the man's sins. He called Matthew, a tax collector to be his permanent disciple. He healed a sick woman and raised a dead girl from the dead. And before he sent out workers into the harvest fields, he cast a demon out of a man who had been deaf and unable to speak. That last miracle was met with a charge from Jesus' growing contingent of enemies that he was working by the power of the devil. (Matthew 9:34) So with that backdrop, Jesus want disciples to be aware hostility and absurd accusations. But just keep sharing the message of Jesus: **"proclaim from the roofs."** (Matthew 10:27) Make the message clear and obvious by boldly and courageously getting the word out.

### **2) Don't fear the ones who can't do real damage.**

One of the biggest threats to courageously confessing Christ isn't the most obvious. Temptation often comes in the form of a long, dull, monotonous war of attrition. Fear targeting God's people isn't usually as sudden and shocking as seeing a spider dangling in front of your face or almost stepping on a snake trying to get into the front door of your house. Fear wears you down by showing you the absurdity of public officials and their hypocrisy. People all around you act irresponsibly, failing to demonstrate common sense and even a hint of decency during a pandemic toward people all around them. Irritation turns into annoyance. Annoyance bubbles over into anger. Anger vented in frustration weakens your witness for Christ. Fear wears you down by showing how unrealistic God's standards for sexuality are. Two consenting adults can only resist their natural instincts for so long. After demonstrating super-human self control for so long, lust takes control. Giving in to lust becomes the rule instead of the exception. Putting off the blessings of companionship and sex of marriage for marriage feels unreasonable. When God's people pick and choose the most convenient definitions of adultery and sexual sin and ignore the ones that challenge us, we undermine the consistency of God's message in our lives. Fear wears you down in directly and opening confessing your faith. Over and over you talk about God. Time after time you extend invitations to church, to Bible studies to church events. Rejection after rejection, silence upon silence, apathy and indifference make you want to give up trying. And so you stop trying.

It's not the shock of a horror film slasher coming around the corner brandishing a long hunting knife. It's the long, dull work of wearing you down so you don't even realize it is actually fear that has taken over and captured your heart.

Fear isn't the problem. It is disproportionate fear. It's disordered fear. It's fearing the wrong things in the wrong amounts. Jesus says: **"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."** (Matthew 10:28) Essentially, we are choosing to fear losing a boyfriend over losing our relationship with God. Fear of looking foolish over fear of revealing our pride to God in confession. Fear of rocking the boat with family and friends over fear of carrying out God's Great Commission close to home. We fear losing status or stability, financial freedom or convenience, my sense of belonging or my sense of importance more than we fear what forsaking our God will mean for our eternal destiny.

Jesus wants you to understand your current struggles in the bigger context. You are personally battling with fear on an individual basis. But it's part of a larger, cosmic war raging.

They say the winners write the history. It's always easy to speculate what you would have done if you had lived in Nazi Germany. But in the middle of that pressure and while everyone around you was accepting an immoral status quo, it would not have been so easy. From our perspective now, people who were silent and did nothing were as bad as the collaborators and sympathizers. In the middle of the war, when the outcomes aren't clear, that's when it's hard to know which will be the winning side. But courage means doing what is right even if it will be personally disastrous for you. Jesus doesn't want you to waiver or play both sides the battle to fear fellow human beings or fear God. When God's history is written we don't want to be on the side of the conquistadors or confederates. So today don't let intimidation from other people prevent you from living in true awe and respect of God. Don't deny God's Word and become an enemy of Christ.

### **3) Live in amazement and awe of your Savior**

Don't be afraid when you understand how your heavenly Father sees you. He knows when a simple sparrow stops flying. A sparrow can't be hunted for food or trained to do tricks or tamed to become a pet. Yet your Father is aware of what is going on with them. Even the hairs on your head that have nothing to do with heart disease or diabetes or infection from the Coronavirus are all counted by your Father. He knows you. He cares about you. He is concerned about every aspect of your life.

With that assurance, God's children are ready to confess Jesus. What is in our hearts comes out in our lives. What we cherish deep down inside expresses itself in our words. That's just the nature of a disciple. Jesus circles back to what it means to be a disciple, a servant who is connected to Jesus. Don't wait until all your fears are eliminated. Start the habit of confessing Jesus even when you sense opposition. When enemies start to intimidate, don't back down. Get in the habit of doing the hard things of letting go of disappointment and anger and lust for the sake of a clear and consistent confession of Christ. Boldly and confidently acknowledge the one who is the most important part of your life.

Jesus knows fear. Jesus faced the worse persecution and hatred of humanity. Jesus suffered anger and jealousy unchecked and unrestrained by justice. Jesus suffered for your failures

to live out your relationship with him. Jesus faced the worst wrath of the one who throws body and soul into hell for all the times you were too intimidated to live out your faith. For your silence. For your compromising God's Word. For your reluctance to hold onto God's moral standards. Jesus faced real fear. And it cost him his life.

But because Jesus faced down your fear, you can live in awe and amazement of his love for you. You can look forward to the day when Jesus will claim you as his own. Jesus makes this promise: **"Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven."** (Matthew 10:32) Jesus will say your name. Jesus will call out your name as his dedicated disciple, his faithful servant. There will be no greater joy than to hear Jesus say "this one is mine!"

Martin Luther talked about the three lights we live by in this life. The first one is God's light in nature that shines on every human being. His light of grace is his special gift that helps believers see the unbelievable grace we have in Jesus. The third is the hardest. It is the light of hope as we wait for the end of all things. Right now, everything seems messed up. In the here and now it feels all wrong. But only in the end will we finally have that light bulb go off to see how God carried out his justice and acted reasonably in our world. It just means we have to trust him now that everything will make sense to us in the end. But that conviction gives us courage instead of fear for our lives of faith. (Bayer, p. 211)

Ok, I probably didn't have to mention all those fears at the beginning of this sermon. You were probably cringing, hoping I didn't mention one that would send you into a sudden panic attack. Or you were afraid you drifted off for a second and didn't catch a joke I may have thrown in there when you weren't paying attention. Like my fear of stepping a random Lego in my house. Ok, that's a real fear too. But the point is you probably don't need anyone to bring up all your fears or make you aware that fear is real. What you probably need more is a better strategy for dealing with fear. And that's exactly what Jesus gives us.

If the Rock was standing right behind me as I go through my day, I probably would be able to handle my fear of snakes. I have no idea if the Rock might actually be more afraid of snakes than me and might scream like a little girl at the sight of a garter snake. But I would feel better. And if the Rock shared his business success with me, it would probably help me deal with my fear of failure or my feel of not being good enough.

It's ok to recognize dangers out there. It's alright to admit you have weaknesses in here. And yet Jesus promises power. Jesus gives you his presence to move you from frightening fear to courageous confession. He doesn't do it motivating you by fear. Jesus doesn't make false promises or misleading claims you will find out too late are too good to be true. Jesus just gives you an awareness of your victorious God who conquers fears. Your merciful and loving Father who knows you with all your faults and failures and gives you grace. Your Father who helps you see your current and temporary troubles in light of eternal realities. Courage is not the absence of fear, but the conviction that God is greater than fear. Amen.