

Matthew 10:24-33

Pentecost 5, Supplement Series A, July 9, 2017

Theme: Do not be afraid of them
I. God gives the message
II. God defends his people

INJ The Scripture readings today showed us some of the hardships the prophets and messengers of God have faced in history. Jeremiah was thrown into the stocks for his preaching. The Apostle Paul was arrested and sent to trial in Rome. Jesus tells us in our Gospel that we should expect to be persecuted for the confession of faith we give.

In every age the enemies of Jesus flex their muscles and try to destroy those who trust in him – especially those who proclaim the saving message of a crucified and risen Christ! The methods of persecution and the details of the evil shift and change, but Satan still seeks to devour us. The world is still no friend of the Father. The sinful nature in us still wanders and falters at every step.

We could be afraid. These are supernatural enemies with very physical allies invading our lives and seeking the end of our faith. We call it relativism, materialism and postmodernism. We could be afraid of evolution and gender identity and media overload. Around us swirls a never ending drive for the acceptance of what is perverse. We have every reason to be afraid, except for one thing: Jesus defeated them all, and he tells us not to be afraid. God gives you the message and God defends his people. Yes, the battle is fierce and you are in the thick of it, but do not be afraid of them!

There are plenty of times that we open our big mouths and say something that gets us into trouble. Perhaps it was insensitive to others. Maybe it was funny to you, but not so much to them. We deserve the push back if our words are foolish or rash or bigoted or wrong. The backlash should teach us to be kinder or smarter. Or perhaps just silent-er.

The opposition Jesus prepares us for today is not because of our ill advised words, but because of his true and powerful words. When we speak what God says, then the opposition really gets into gear! Sinful hearts just don't want to hear what God has revealed.

I suppose we shouldn't be surprised. What God says is not palatable to any of us. He calls us sinners. He corrects us even when we try our hardest. He condemns all who have sinned – every person. There is no room for the best and the brightest to stand apart from everyone else.

Individual achievement dies before the Lord. No one is able to make a spiritual difference. None are better or worse. All are judged guilty.

Your sinful nature isn't happy with God about his law message, either. "I couldn't help it! I didn't know! Wait – you cannot tell me that I am as bad as that person." The resistance we feel is multiplied among those who are apart from Christ. The message of God outrages them. "How dare you disapprove of what I want to do!"

It doesn't get any better when we speak what God says about the Savior, either. God's gift is completely on his terms. He gave his Son. He paid our debt. He accomplished the victory. He gives the blessings. There is no room for our trying or our helping. Nothing we do makes forgiveness more certain or more powerful. None of our good living or helpful neighboring or regular kindness-ing gives us an advantage. Nothing we do assists in our salvation!

The opposition is especially vicious on this point. At every turn sinners want credit for what they have done. God does not allow them even one speck of achievement – and they rage against him.

Look at how it happened when Jesus himself was the preacher. He called sinners to repentance. He proclaimed the kingdom of God. They despised him and persecuted him. They falsely accused him and plotted against him. They killed him for what he said!

Jesus tells us that we are not above our teacher and master. What they did to him, they will do to us. "If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!" The accusations fly about our intolerance of what God calls sin. We feel the pressure when it is our family who wants to give in. We have to make a stand: do we follow the words our Jesus reveals and carry the burden – or will we forsake him, hoping that the "popular crowd" will tolerate us?

Jesus reminds us that the message of law and gospel is not our personal opinion. We aren't choosing sides or being prejudiced or allowing politics to invade where it shouldn't. We don't manufacture one message for some people and a different message for others. God has spoken to condemn sinners. God has worked salvation for sinners. "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. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops."

Sometimes we ourselves rage against our God. We feel hurt or trapped or unappreciated. Do we even disagree with God, sometimes? We are sinners. You feel the great shame and burden of your own guilt, don't

you? Then listen to what God your Savior says: "I forgive you all your sins." By his death on the cross. Jesus paid what you owe. By his resurrection he proclaims the victory over the Devil and the World and your Sinful Flesh. Jesus has rescued you from the cesspool of sin and has clothed you in his own righteousness.

Isn't it amazing? The message of God that we proclaim actually works! It turned you from your wicked ways. It works on others, too, convincing them that they cannot move closer to God, nor can they move God closer to themselves. The Word is the power of God for salvation that puts faith into a heart. In baptism, an unbeliever becomes a believer. By the gospel preached, we are snatched from hell and given heaven. God has given the message. His gift is free. It is for you. It is for all.

So that we don't conceal the awesome message of God's rescue in Christ and keep it for ourselves, God sends us out to speak in the daylight and to proclaim from the housetops. There, we meet firm opposition. "Do 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."

It is the First Commandment, isn't it? "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Think about it: Jesus gives eternal life. Even if our few days in this world are full of trouble and pain and sadness, God gives forever glory to us in Christ. Do not fear those who torture the body but cannot touch your salvation. It is God who has redeemed both your soul and your body. Entrust yourself to him when you are hard pressed!

Yet we don't see God when the battle is engaged and we are in danger. When they call us names and when we feel uncomfortable and the reality is dire, how can we stand firm? Remember, it is God who sends us out with his message. God will defend his people.

Look at the sparrows. There are so many of them they are uncountable! And they are so insignificant. If one dies, what difference does it make? Who notices? Your Father in heaven knows. He even numbers the hairs on your head. Nothing is too tiny that he isn't active and involved in it. "You are worth more than many sparrows." You have value because Jesus shed his blood for you. You have value because in Baptism, God made you an heir of heaven and a dearly loved child. God gave his Son for you, he will also give you all things! Do not be afraid of them.

But what if they sue me and take my home and my money? What if they smear me and destroy my reputation? What if they snub me and exclude me from what I enjoy? What if they make me feel responsible for their bad choices? What if they blame me? What if they leave and I lose my family? What if? Do not be afraid of them, for God defends his people.

Instead of dwelling on what might be lost, consider what you have been given. You have peace with God – the assurance of forgiveness. In the Lord's Supper God actually places his promise into your hands! "This is my body. This is my blood. It is for you. For the forgiveness of your sins. Go in peace." You have the powerful word of God to hear and read and remember. Your Savior Jesus is with you always, to the very end of the age.

And at the end of the age, he will say to you, "Come, live with me forever." The confession of faith that you have given here will stand before the Judge. Jesus will defend you with his declaration of "Not Guilty!" He will place you into the mansions he has prepared for you. You have been given eternal blessings in addition to the daily ones that you can already see. God has given you more than can be measured!

Which is worth more to you? That is really the heart of the matter, especially when persecution shows itself. When we have to make the choice and stand on something, will we stand with Jesus, or will we give him up? There is the First Commandment again. Sometimes the right now benefit of not hurting a loved one with God's law seems more valuable than calling for repentance. Sometimes the right now benefit of wishy-washy-ness seems more valuable than God's grace alone gospel. Sometimes we make excuses for silence and weakness. Sometimes we are afraid of them. Lord Jesus, forgive us our sins!

Jesus forgives you. He also gives you courage to stand firm on the powerful words he has given you. He will not fail to provide your needs – when you are hard-pressed and even when you are heart-broken. He will not fail to confess you before his Father in heaven. You have a Defender who has risen from the grave! St. Paul says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Jesus stands with you and he fills your mouth with words to say. Bold words like those the Psalmist wrote: "The LORD is my light and my salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid?"

What are you afraid of? Social pressure or the ridicule of people? They won't make me deny my God. An underlying factor in Martin Luther's reformation was his confidence in what God had revealed. He could not and he would not back down from God's Word! Not even the emperor could force him to renounce Jesus.

What was true 500 years ago is still true today. We stand on Christ! God has placed the pure gospel into our hands and hearts in an age that is outspoken in its opposition. God has given his message, and he defends his people. We are not afraid of them! SDG Amen.