



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 15, 2008
5th Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 9:9-13
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 20:7-13
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 31
Second Lesson: Romans 5:12-15
Gospel: Matthew 10:24-33

Confidently Proclaim Christ

Don't fear those who oppose you
Don't fear God has forgotten you

We really don't like to repeat unpleasant experiences, do we? I once was driving into Lake City and was going down the rock cut and it was a snowy day. It was pretty slushy. I was going fairly slowly but as I went down the rock cut, I picked up speed. The car spun around a couple times, went across traffic, flipped over, hit the guardrail, knocked the guardrail off, flipped over, landed on its roof and slid to the bottom of the rock cut. I wasn't hurt. The car was totaled, but guess how I felt the next time I was driving on slushy, snowy roads. I wasn't real excited to be there. I was the guy that you are hollering at when you are behind me; you know, "Take your skirt off and drive, won't you?"

We don't like repeating bad experiences and yet you sit here today on Father's Day, don't you? You fathers, some of you have more than one kid, right? Have you ever had a bad experience with your child?

I saw the beginning of the movie RV last night. It was kind of interesting. Robin Williams plays a father, and he is just delighting his daughter. His daughter is saying, "Dad, I don't ever want to get married because I want to live with you forever." Then they fast forward to when she is a teenager and she is in the seat behind him in the car. All she can do is talk about what an idiot he is and how uncool he is and doesn't want him to show his face around her and stuff like that. Things change.

As parents though, even though we have bad experiences in parenting, we continue to parent. We continue to serve as fathers and mothers because we know that's what we are supposed to do, right? And there is a social stigma associated with not being there as a father or a mother, right? You see stories all the time about fathers not paying their child support. There is a social stigma attached to not being there for your child. Even though maybe sometimes being a parent does have some bad experiences associated with it, we know this is one of the ways we serve God who has given us these children.

In the words I read to you, Jesus is talking to his disciples about bad experiences that are going to come their way. He was sending them out to go to the towns and villages and preach the news that the kingdom of heaven is near, and he told them that they were going to be persecuted, that they were going to be rejected and like he said in our text, "If they call me Beelzebub, what do you think they are going to call you?"

There is no social stigma associated with stopping talking about your Savior, is there? If you have a family member you are concerned about and you have been sharing the gospel with them and you stop because you are tired of how they look at you and how they react to you, the next time you get together and you don't bring up Christ they don't say, "Hey! How come you aren't talking to me about my Savior?" Do they? Or a coworker or anyone like that—there is no social stigma associated with that. That's why as Jesus sends them out, he knows they are going to go through these bad experiences. He knows the human nature and its inclination to give up when faced with this kind of adversity when it comes to living your faith and talking about Jesus with others. He really speaks to them and encourages them and us to continue to confidently proclaim Christ. Don't be afraid of the people who oppose you and don't ever in your heart be afraid that because people are opposing you that means God has forgotten you.

He uses some beautiful pictures in here that tell us that our God never forgets us when we are persecuted. I think we can also use these pictures and apply them to other areas of our lives as well.

These words in Chapter 10 of Matthew are still part of the same talk that Jesus gave to his disciples that we started looking at last week. He told them he was going to give them power to heal the sick and raise the dead. They were going to go out and do these miracles and they were to preach that the kingdom of God is near, freely received, freely give. He is still talking to them and in the verses in between, he had told them about that persecution that was going to come. That is at the tail end of what he is talking about because he talks about this Beelzebub. "If they call me Satan, you know they are going to treat you poorly too. You should expect it. You should know its coming, but don't be afraid of them." Three times in our text he uses that same phrase. "Don't be afraid of them." The first time he uses it, at the start of the second paragraph on the back of your service folder, it has the meaning "don't even start to be afraid of them because they can't do anything to you." That's what he is saying. "What I tell you, what you have learned from me as you followed me and what the whole world hasn't seen, you make sure you get on the rooftops and you make sure everyone hears it after I'm gone and as they go out in that point in time. You make sure that you tell other people about it."

What is the worst they are going to do? The worst they are going to do is what they did to many of those people that were hearing these words, right? Peter, tradition says, was crucified upside down. James, in the Book of Acts, he was killed in the Book of Acts before the Book of Acts was even finished. He died early on, just a few years after Jesus went to heaven. But he says, "Don't be afraid of them because the worst that they can do is kill the body. Instead, be concerned about, be afraid of, have reverent fear for the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell." That's not Satan. Satan can't destroy us in hell. He's not the one who sits on the throne at the end of the world and judges the people and says, "Depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fires prepared for the devil." The one who judges the living and the dead is Jesus. We just said it a little while ago in the Creed. God is the one who destroys both soul and body in hell when he sends those who do not believe that Jesus is their Savior there on the Last Day. So be concerned more about what he thinks and what he says.

That's real easy to sit here and say. It's a lot harder to do at times. I've been called a lot of different names as I've shared the gospel with different people and shared the law with different people. I've been told how foolish and superstitious I am. I've been told how dumb I am. I've been told I'm an idiot, and that's by other people. It's not fun. When you leave the meeting and you get in your car and drive away, you don't say, "You know, I would like to turn around and go back and have some more of that. I really enjoyed that." It stinks! No one likes to be rejected, especially when eternal life is at stake. It gnaws at your gut and it leaves you with a feeling like "I don't really want to have to go through that again. I don't like that feeling."

When I grew up, my dad served as an elder in our church for many, many years. In fact, he made the last elder call they made for any number of years while I was still living at home. He went to visit someone and the guy was out in his barn and dad went out in the barn to talk to him. The guy would never meet with him. As they started talking about God and who God is and what we are and what God is like, the guy grabbed a pitchfork and chased my dad out of the barn. My dad said he thought if he had fallen down, the guy would have stuck him. Now if you go back to an elders' meeting and report that contact, do you think anyone else is really eager to go out and say, "Let me go talk to him."

You maybe have experienced it as you talked with a coworker or a friend or a relative. You are desperately worried that they don't know their Savior or they are wandering away from their Savior. You tell them about who we are as sinners and what our sin means and how it earns hell, just plain and simple. They say, "Who are you to tell me that? You are no better than I am." Then they maybe get a little more in your face and tell you, "Just shut up and leave me alone and don't bring it up again!"

Jesus knows our temptation is going to be to not bring it up again, to not find ways in love not to be pushy—I'm not talking about being pushy. I'm talking about living our faith and confessing what we believe to be true and when God brings us the opportunity to share Christ with these people, we might be much more inclined to talk once again about Brett Favre's retirement than talk about the one who rose from the dead. That's our nature. God tells us, "Don't be afraid of what anyone can do to you. Instead, worry about me."

When you think about who he is and what he has done for us—the incredible love he has shown us. If you want to talk about a father's love, there is no greater father's love than the love our heavenly Father has for us. Human fathers mess up. They make mistakes. We all do. But our heavenly Father never does. If he brings us into a situation where we have the opportunity to proclaim Christ and we do so with trembling hearts and weak knees, God will help us. He didn't make a mistake in giving us that opportunity. He will strengthen us so that if we mess up this time, he'll help us to get better next time.

How can I be so sure of that? How can you be so sure of that? He sent his one and only Son to live in our place and die in our place, to live perfectly and share the gospel perfectly where you and I have failed, to die on the cross for every time that you and I

have failed to speak up or were ashamed of Christ. He took every one of those sins to the cross. He loved us enough to do it even though he knew how often we were going to fail him when we could be absolutely certain of his love.

And just in case that's not enough, Jesus gives us a couple more illustrations to tell us just how certain we can be about his love. He talks about two sparrows being sold for the smallest coin they had—for us, a penny, right? Yet, not a single sparrow falls to the ground without the Father knowing about it. The Father knows that much about the things that are insignificant. He says “you are worth far more than sparrows.” We are created in his image. The sparrows weren't. We are redeemed by his Son. The sparrows weren't. Yet, he knows the sparrows that intimately. Then he says something that completely boggles my mind. He says, “Even the very hairs on your head are numbered.” Not just that he knows how many there are, but he knows each and every one. That's hair number 982, I don't know, he knows it.

Think about that. In our house, I think we have a corner, when I walk into the bathroom in the morning and they leave out the brush on the sink, we have a corner in every long, curly red hair in Brown County. They are all right there in that brush it seems like. God knows every one of those hairs, which follicle it came out of and which head it came out of in our house. Can you imagine that? Can you begin to imagine that? That's amazing, isn't it? That incredible in depth knowledge that God has of us. Remember, it's a knowledge that is there not to scare us because that means he also knows our sins, but it's there to comfort us because he loves us in spite of knowing our sins. He loves us and has taken away our sins. He knows us that intimately.

So when we are worried and troubled, when we are facing uncertainty, when we are facing rejection as we share Christ with others, we might want to say to ourselves, “Lord, I'm doing what you want! Where are you? This isn't working!” We might be inclined to think that God has forgotten about us. That's where Jesus comes to us and says, “Think about it. If I know the hairs on your head, I know what you are going through. I'll help you through it. I loved you enough to die for you. I'll love you enough to help you through it.” So he encourages us, “Just keep acknowledging me before men and I will acknowledge you before my Father.”

What's at stake is eternity. What's at stake is NOT my comfort or discomfort or your discomfort. That's not what it's about. It's about the people that Jesus lived and died for and how you and I have become his voice and his hands to be the love that is tangible, that is seen, that is expressed of Jesus Christ as we live and speak and lovingly and patiently and with all kindness and gentleness continue to tell others of how important God is to us and how we want God to be important to them also because he lived and died to take away their sins as well.

So continue to comfort each other with these words as we face things that trouble us. Continue to share these words with those who don't know him yet, and trust that God will produce the results. He is our perfect heavenly Father.