

The only thing we have to fear-June 21, 2020-Matthew 10:5, 21-33

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. You probably all know that line, but do you know where it comes from. It was from Franklin Delano Roosevelt's inauguration speech in March of 1933 during the days of the Great Depression.

If you have never heard it, it is worth reading for this time, as FDR spoke on that day, **“This is preeminently the time to speak the truth, the whole truth, frankly and boldly. Nor need we shrink from honestly facing conditions in our country today. This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. 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.”** His firm belief in that time was that fear would be the biggest paralysis to moving forward as a nation.

I know you as you sit here today or as you sit at home have your own set of fears these days. Perhaps fears over your job or bills or certain situations in your life. Perhaps you are living in great fear these days over something happening to you or your loved ones due to the virus or the unrest of these days and it has left you a bit paralyzed, not knowing how to move forward.

Well, if your fears have left you in that place, let me remind you of some facts. You have a God above you who knows the very number of hairs on our head. He holds you as invaluable in his sight and is there to help you face your fears. It doesn't mean he will just take them away or that you won't live with the risk of danger in your life, but Jesus today teaches on how to face them. He wants you to face them with an eternal focus. It is always that focus he would want to work in us as His disciples.

For today in our Gospel, Jesus points his disciples to an eternal focus, as he addresses some of the fears He knew they would face as His followers.

For one, fear for their lives, too. Jesus addresses that in v. 21-23 on Matthew 10. He is honest with them that their connection with him would lead family members to hate them and betray them and rise against them; that a brother would deliver another brother over to death or a father his child or a child his parents. He tells them they would be hated by all for His name's sake and that they would be persecuted.

He is painting a very honest picture for them that their connection with Him would lead to threats on their life, but what was their encouragement in the midst of those threats? If they continued to endure in faith towards him to the end, not abandoning their course as His disciples even in the face of threats, they would be saved, as he says, **“But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”**

It is where Jesus is teaching his disciples that they couldn't face the days to come with a short-sighted view and he would teach us the same.

A short-sighted view would be to say, “I can't follow you there because I might die if I do. I would rather just sit here Lord and be safe.”

It is that temptation Jesus knew his disciples would face too. Jesus knew his disciples would face the temptation that when times got tough to abandon their course as his disciples and let the fear over their lives hold them back from His calling to follow.

It is why Jesus says to them, **“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”**

It was Jesus' way of telling them that to be his disciples would come with the same treatment He would receive at the hands of men, as He was accused by the Pharisees of casting out demons by Beelzebul, referring to Satan, and so they wanted Jesus dead. In that same way, Jesus is being honest with his disciples that they would face the same treatment, but that in the end, they would receive the eternal life he promised them as they held fast to Him in faith, even in the face of threats to their lives, as he says to them. **“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.”**

Jesus is making it clear that in the end their faith in Him would be shown as worth the sacrifice and the risk, as the truth about Jesus would be known to all on the last day.

It is why he directs them in the next verses to go out and face their fears, to not let them hold them back from His calling. As he says to them, **“What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

Jesus can't be clearer to them and to us is that the thing to fear the most in our lives is not the loss of our earthly life, but the eternal ramifications of denying Christ and abandoning our course as His disciples due to fear.

It means even if our lives are threatened for our witness and faith in Christ, so be it. You can know your faith in Christ saves you.

If however we let our fears hold us back from what is faithful, abandoning all faith when Christ would call us to fear not and follow Him as our teacher, Savior, and Lord, then what we should fear most is the Lord holding us accountable for that absence of faith in the end.

An eternal focus is echoing the words of Luther in the hymn “A Mighty Fortress.”, where he says, **“And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife, Though these all be gone, Our victory has been won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.”**

It means the risk is always worth the reward when it comes to Christ and when we have that eternal focus, it can drive away our fears.

It is a like a man who lived in China in 1997 named Gao Feng. He was simply a worker in Chrysler’s Jeep plant, yet he was led by his Christian faith to petition the communist government in China to allow his protestant church to safely worship.

His bold move of faith led to his arrest. He was sent to a Chinese prison and greatly mistreated as part of the Chinese “re-education” program that would force Christians to work long, hard hours and make them watch government t.v. in the hopes of leading them to deny their faith in Christ, but Gao refused. The guards even prodded him with cattle prods as part of his torture, but yet after his release, two years later. Gao said, **“I would prefer to be in prison for two years than to do nothing for God.”**

Now what could lead a man to say such a thing? Only the Holy Spirit working in him to have an eternal focus. He did not fear that which killed or harmed the body, because He knew the promises of Christ, the salvation promised Him of deliverance of His body one day to heaven through Him in the resurrection.

For us too, as we live in the fears of this time, we can face them with that eternal focus. Christ has promised us the crown of life through our faith in Him. He has also promised us that just as God the Father cares for the sparrows. That not of them falls to the ground apart from the will of the Father, as Jesus says, even though they were considered so worthless. Two sparrows sold a penny. So too, God the Father will provide for you through the fearful times of life because he wants you to share in His kingdom in the end.

As Jesus says, **“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

Jesus tells his disciples three times in this passage to fear not, and he would say the same to us. He cares for you as His creation. He loves you as His child. He let His Son die for you so you could have forgiveness for your sins and everlasting life and so you need not fear these days in Him. Do not fear that which kills the body, but put your trust and faith in Him completely and entirely for the facing of these days, acknowledging Him before all as Your Savior and Lord, and you have the promise of Jesus that He will acknowledge you one day before His Father.

He will see that you get your promised eternal life for following Him and when we have that focus, we can live in peace no matter what we face, as Jesus said to his disciples, **“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives, so do not let your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid.”** Amen.