

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 10:16-33

***"No Fear... It Takes The Courage Of A Lion"***

In today's world, there are quite a lot of people who try things just for the excitement and thrill of it – to test their amount of fear – all for the adrenaline rush: from bungee jumping to driving at excessive speeds - and then some – purely to test and experience FEAR firsthand. So, what about the fear of the unknown? Is anyone here familiar with that one? What will tomorrow bring? It might be labeled as anxiety, worry, angst – or apprehension. All of those are other names for fear. Fear can be so bad that when it gets a hold of you it can practically immobilize you and freeze you in your tracks. There is only one real answer to fear and that is courage! Courage answers the question – are you pretending to be a lion or a mouse? "Courage" is a remarkable thing. It doesn't mean that you are not afraid – instead it means that *somehow – you get past it – and then you do the job that you were called to do.*"

Three times in today's Gospel, Jesus tells His disciples – and us - not to fear – not to be afraid. Jesus' point from the three repetitions of His command not to fear is pretty clear.

1. In Verse 26, Jesus says "*So do not be afraid of them.*"
2. In Verse 28 He says: "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body.*"
3. And in Verse 31: Jesus says "*So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*"

Jesus' aim here is to help us to overcome fear and to instill courage in us. So let me ask you -the courage to do what? To speak clearly - in the light- and openly – as He said - on the housetops and rooftops – and that could be having lunch at work, on public transportation, in an airport, on the line at Harvey's or Walmart, or God willing – one day – Publix, or maybe even in a restaurant -- when that kind of "speaking" might get you in trouble. Heaven forbid we are not 'politically correct!' We should not be afraid to speak clearly and openly what Jesus Christ has taught you - NO MATTER WHAT THE COST. After all - Jesus is not ashamed of you – and we have absolutely no reason to be ashamed of Him. Let me be more precise: "Be courageous to speak the truth of Scripture clearly and openly for all to hear even if it is unpopular and dangerous." It is crunch time my friends --- are you a lion or mouse?

When I think of the word "courage" - I can't help but think of the "Cowardly Lion" from the movie The Wizard of Oz. Bert Lahr played that character to the hilt – "if he only had the nerve – he would be king of the forest." We are shown that through his courage – along with Tin Man, Scarecrow, and, yes, even little Toto too – he saves Dorothy from the Wicked Witch of the West. That lion had the courage all along – God given if you will. When he realized the truth – he finally did take his place as a real hero – complete with medal and all – the king of the forest – all because of that truth!

Jesus, who in Scripture is called 'the Lion of Judah,' gives us five reasons why WE should have the courage to speak His truth – with the courage of a lion.

Please open your Pew Bibles to page 1515 and Matthew chapter 10 to follow along as I refer to today's Holy Gospel:

**1.** First, notice the "so" at the beginning of verse 26 when Jesus says "*So do not be afraid of them.*" (some translations use the word "therefore") In other words, fearlessness flows from what Jesus just said in verse 24, namely, "*A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!*" *So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*" (Matthew 10:24-26) And so we MUST have no fear of them. Does that help to make you fearless? Well, it should! If Jesus as the Master of the house is verbally disrespected and torn down – then, we as His followers – and here Jesus is actually calling us family – members of His household – we can expect the same treatment. I believe that what Jesus is saying to us is this: "Any mistreatment for speaking the truth clearly and openly is not to be some unexpected, accidental, random, or meaningless experience; it's just the way they treated Me, and so it's a sign that you belong to Me -- you are part of My household. So don't be afraid of the names they call you when you speak out plainly, those very names bind you and Me together."

**2.** Second, notice the words "*there is nothing*" in the middle of verse 26 "*So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.*"

*This is BIG! This is HUGE! This assures us that the truth we are speaking will triumph. It will be vindicated in the end.*

- People may reject it now.
- They may call it the word of Beelzebub (or the devil) – like in today's Gospel.
- They may cast it (and you) out.
- They may try to bury it and hide it from the world and pretend that it does not exist.

But Jesus gives us great comfort and certainty by telling us to take heart in the cause of truth,

- because in the end - all truth will be revealed,
- all reality will be uncovered.
- And those who spoke it with clarity and openness will be vindicated.
- Do not fear!

**3. Third,** in Verse 28 Jesus tells us not to fear, after all - you can only be killed! He says: "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*" This might not sound like good news --- but hold on a minute -- In other words, the worst thing your enemies can do to you when you speak the truth is to kill your body. And that leaves your soul untouched and happy in God forever and ever. But if you keep silent, if you walk away from the truth and fall in love with the praise of men you could lose your very soul. And THAT, my brothers

and sisters - is what you ought to fear. But don't fear what man can do to you. All another human can do is send your soul to paradise. So **Fear not!**

It is important to know that throughout Scripture – God keeps reminding us to have courage: What did the angels say to the shepherd – “fear not!” God keeps reminding us to have courage – as a matter of fact He says “fear not” 165 times, He tells us “Do not be afraid” – 114 times, and simply “Do not fear” 138 times. You’d think by now we would get the message!

4. Jesus’ fourth reason: don't fear to speak the truth, but be courageous and speak clearly and openly because God is giving close and intimate attention to all you do; attention more closely than you can even imagine. My brothers and sisters in Christ - we love and serve a God of detail. Remember that it is God who told Moses all of the details for the Ark of the Covenant and for the Tent of Meeting. Intricate details! Remember when He told Noah to build the ark this many cubits by that many cubits? Incredibly intricate details. Jesus says to us, *"Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."* The suffering you may undergo in speaking the truth is NOT because God is disinterested in you or unfamiliar with your troubles. He is close enough to you that He can separate one hair from another and give each one a number. (If you look around the room – all of us have different numbers!)

Don't be afraid -- Fear not!

- He is close;
- He is interested;
- He cares.

Be of good courage and speak the truth - no matter what!

It is amazing – we look back on the history of this church – back to 2013 and because this parish – this congregation had the courage to speak the truth - we are here today we are growing spiritually!

5. And finally, Jesus says that we should “fear not” because God will not let anything happen to you - apart from his gracious will. Jesus logic is plain and precious. Look at Verse 31: *"You are worth more than many sparrows."* Now look at verse 29 about the sparrows: *"Not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care."*

I don't know about you -- but this fills me full of courage. Birds don't do anything to earn a living. They just go and enjoy that is there in front of them – God's gracious will. No harm will befall you but what God mercifully wills. I pray each and every day to be in - and to do God's Will. Knowing that God cares even down to the number of hairs on my head;

- He cares that I will spend eternity with Him; cares enough to send His Son to die on the cross for the forgiveness of my sins. If we remember that the ultimate victory has already been won – then we can claim the peace of Christ even in the most troublesome of times! This absolutely fills me with courage.

Third Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, June 25, 2017, Year A

Being in relationship with Jesus Christ– as part of His family - should fill us with the desire to tell others about Him – to the point of overflowing.

I am very very proud of George Blampied. God gave him the courage to go and speak to the Seniors Citizens, during their luncheon at the Weir Center. He spoke to those present about “Heaven is for Real.” God spoke to him as the person who was supposed to speak at the Kiwanis Club meeting on Tuesday Night could not be there due to a death in the family, and so George is going to step up and he is going to share God’s Word. How awesome is that?

Telling others about Jesus, His life, death and resurrection, His promise of Eternal Life -- is spreading the Good News – And that Good News is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We can spread the Gospel not only through what we say – but by who we are – and how we treat others. So here is a very important question: Who are you, when no one is looking? Who are you when no one is around? Are you the same person that you are on Sunday morning? Are you the same person when you are behind the wheel of the car? Are you the same person when you are all alone on the computer? Think about it – who are you when no one is looking? If you are not being consistent there is one thing you can do – and that is ask Jesus to help you. He cares, He is there, there is nothing that we do that He does not see. Don’t be ashamed – He is not ashamed of you.

When we acknowledge Jesus to others – then He acknowledges us to the Father. No matter what others say – we must love the truth! The TRUTH in Jesus Christ tells us: What you learn of Christ in private – you are to speak in the light – in public. What you hear in the Scriptures proclaim from the rooftops. And do not fear the face of any one.