

Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 21, 2020, Year A

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

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 10:16-33

***"Do Not Fear"***

You have got to admit that we are surrounded by people who love to “try” things just for the excitement and thrill of it all and for the adrenaline rush: from bungee jumping to driving at excessive speeds to test and experience fear firsthand. Many people like to watch movies that scare the dickens out of you – just simply because it is exciting.

And then there is the fear of the unknown. It may be better known as anxiety, worry, angst – or apprehension. All of those are other names or classes of 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. The only real answer to fear 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, but instead it means that *somehow – you get past it* – and do the job that you were called to do.

Three times in today's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples – and us - not to be afraid. Jesus' point from the three repetitions of His command not to fear is pretty clear. In Verse 26, He says "*So do not be afraid of them.*" In Verse 28, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*" And in Verse 31: Jesus says, "*So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*" Jesus wants us to overcome fear and to instill in us courage. But, I have got to ask - courage to do what?

To speak clearly - in the light- and openly - on the housetops – and you know what - that could be in the lunch or break room, in the library – when we are allowed to go back in there again - on the bus -remember those – when we used to be able to rise a vehicle together? Remember malls, maybe even in a restaurant, when tables were not that far apart. It could be a place where you can share with others – like the 6-foot line- when you are at the supermarket. To be not afraid – to speak clearly what Jesus Christ has taught you - NO MATTER WHAT THE COST. Jesus is not ashamed of you – and we have absolutely no reason to be ashamed of Him. Or to express this point more precisely: “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 --- 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 him 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 – he saves Dorothy from the Wicked Witch of the West. We find out that the 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 strong reasons why we should have the courage to speak His truth, ideally with the courage of a lion.

At the beginning of verse 26, 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, specifically, "*If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!*" Therefore we must have no fear of them. That alone should make you fearless. 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 very well expect the same treatment. They will be coming at us 'gangbusters.' 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 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."

Another thing that Jesus assures us is that the truth we are speaking will triumph. It will be vindicated in the end. Even though people may reject it now. They may call it the word of the devil -Beelzebub – like in today's Gospel. And 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 in telling us to take heart in the cause of the truth, because in the end - all truth will be revealed, all reality will be uncovered. What is the most important thing in a relationship with other people? Love. Not the earthly kind of love - but a passionate caring for one another. That is what sets us apart. All in the end will be revealed. Those who spoke it with clarity and openness will be vindicated. So - do not fear!

In verse 28, once again, Jesus tells us not to fear, after all – the worst that could happen is you could be killed! I remember in 1999, we were flying from Atlanta to Zurich, Switzerland on our way to He Israel. My son John leans over to me and says, "You know what Dad, what is the worst thing that could happen to us if the plane crashes?" He says, "we will be with Jesus!" I said that is great wisdom, but not really words that I want to hear right now. I have flown a lot, but I am not a very good flyer. Jesus tells us time and time again, "fear not – the worst thing that would happen is that you will be with Me." He said, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*" Last Sunday, I spoke to you about John 3:16-19, where of you believe in Jesus – you are already saved, but if you don't believe – you are condemned already! They cannot kill your soul if you are a believer. 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 with 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 friends - is what you ought to fear. All that another human can do is send your soul to paradise. Fear not!

God keeps reminding us to have courage. As a matter of fact, I love this computer program that I have called Bibleworks. You can scan the Bible to see how many times a phrase is said. I came up with some numbers for you today. God reminds 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 would think through all of that - that mankind would get the message!

Jesus is telling all believers not to fear to speak the truth, but be courageous and speak clearly and openly because God is giving close and intimate attention to all that you do. I believe He is paying closer attention than we could possibly imagine. We love and serve a God of detail. Remember how God told Moses all of the details for the Ark of the Covenant and for the Tent of Meeting. Very intricate details! He told Noah how to build the ark – lots of details! Jesus says to us, *"Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."* The suffering that you might undergo in speaking the truth is not because God is not interested in you or your troubles. He is close enough to you that He can separate one hair from another and give each one a number. And so, once again - don't be afraid -- fear not!

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: *"Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father."* I don't know about you -- but this fills me full of courage. 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. My daily prayer has changed. I was talking to Marilyn about this when we were driving along yesterday. My daily prayer has changes – I used to thank God for everything, and then I would give Him a list of needs. He already knows them, BUT – God gave me something that I will never, ever forget. He is God and I am not – He knows and can do all things – so what I need to do is lift up the people I care about, those that I love – and let God do His will. I can speak the names of the people of this parish and of my family – and I lift them up to God – and let God do His will – not mine. Marilyn said to me “that will preach!” “That is a sermon in itself” Well, I just wanted to let you know about something that I found out, and is helping me tremendously in my daily prayer. Let God be God!

Being in relationship with Jesus – as part of His family – should fill us with the desire to tell others about Him. We can tell people about the great things that are going on in our lives, why can't we tell them about what God has done in our lives? How He has transformed us; how He has changed us – to the point of overflowing. Telling others about Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection -- is called 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. The Ten Commandments – the first four are between us and God – and the last six are between us and one another. God is telling us about how we are to treat one another.

So the 64,000-dollar question is this --- who are you, when no one is looking? Are you the person that is sitting in church as you appear? Think about that for a moment, or are you someone else. Is your language different when you are alone or with one group of people? Who are you when no one is looking?

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Jesus reminds us that when we acknowledge Him to others – then He acknowledges us to the Father. No matter what others might say – we must love and speak the truth!

What you learn of Christ in private – you are to speak in the light – in public. What you hear in the Scriptures then proclaim from the housetops. And do not fear anyone!