

## Sermon for June 22nd, 2014

### Matthew 10:24-39

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Over the last couple of weeks we have heard about the tongues of fire which came upon the people in Jerusalem during the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We have heard about the Holy Trinity and about the **mystery** of how God is present as 1 in 3 persons. This week we begin what is called the 'Green Season'. This is the time of the church year which extends—with a couple of exceptions—up until the time of Advent. This long 'green season' in the church year is also called the 'ordinary season' which means that this is the time in which we are hearing about how God comes to us in '**ordinary**' ways. It is how God is **with us** in our daily lives, day in, and day out. Nothing particularly exciting or tremendous. Just our **everyday life** as we dwell with God in our comings and our goings.

The portion of our gospel text that I would like to **focus on** this morning are verses 26-31 where Jesus was giving **instructions** to His disciples. He spoke to them about having **no fear**. The idea of fear is something which is very much alive in our world today. It is a powerful and motivating force. One does not have to look too far to find **some sort** of tragedy happening around us right here in

Riverside—as a matter of fact on Friday morning a **police helicopter** was circling near my house—**suddenly** I heard sirens—then the helicopter was **gone**, there are **terrorist groups** in other parts of the world are doing **harm** to their fellow human beings, and there are **calamities and upheavals** happening right here in our own country.

What causes people to worry about their **security** and their **future** anyway? The other day I had the opportunity to attend a **wonderful** seminar about elder care and elder abuse which is happening **right here** in our area. I heard stories of how our elders have been taken advantage of by **unscrupulous** contractors, **ripped off** by scam artists, heard stories of people who are **suffering** with Alzheimer's and dementia, and people enduring **all sorts of abuse** even at the hands of those they love. **No wonder** we have cause to be worried and concerned as we ourselves age or have aging family members.

Worry, fear, anxiety. We Americans seem to **invite** anxiety even in the **best** of times. Living in fear can become a lifestyle. I used to be a person who **worried about everything**—it seemed my stomach would perpetually be in knots. Would we have **enough food**? Would we have **enough money** to pay the mortgage? What if our one and only **car breaks down**—how am I going to get to work? And the list goes on. I am sure you all have your own set of worries. But as I got **older**

and hopefully **wiser**—I found that no amount of worrying helped the situation.

**Nothing** I could do on my own made it **any** better.

It is said that in the bible the words, “*Do not fear, have no fear, or do not be afraid*” are used **at least 365** times. Think about it—that is one time for every day of the year. I thought that was **pretty incredible** when we look at it like that.

Every day of the year we could read a bible verse in which **God**, or a **prophet**, or **Jesus**, or **disciple** or an **apostle** would offer comfort by saying, “*Do not be afraid*”. **Yet**, here we are living in a world which is **racked** with fear.

So the question for the morning is: What can help people break out of the cycle of worry, fear, and anxiety in this world? **I believe**, as a Christian, that what can help us break out of this cycle is a **belief, a trust**, in something greater than ourselves. When we **lose ourselves** to the **darkness** of this world and we realize that we are not in control. We live in **sheer chaos**. When we **realize that God** is in control, and that what we **need to do is to trust** God, we can live outside of the **darkness** which envelops us. We can live openly and in peace **in spite of** what is going on in our world. Our peace will come from the **Spirit within ourselves**—from within our own souls.

In our gospel reading for this morning Jesus is talking to his disciples. He **warned** of following evil which he called *Beelzebul*, who was known as the “*god of filth*”, the one who was **1 step up** from the devil. He warned of how a

household could be thrown off into the **darkness** that following evil would bring. Then he went on to comfort **them** by saying, “*So have no fear of them (the evil ones); **nothing** that is covered up will **not** be uncovered. **Nothing** in secret will **not** become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.*” Yell it out. Do not be afraid. “*After all, **do not fear** those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; but rather **fear the one who can destroy both the body and the soul.***” **Trust** in God. God is bigger, stronger, and more powerful than all the evil in the world.

Yes, there **are** those who have the power to kill the body, but they **cannot** kill our soul or our spirit. During the course of a month I talk to **many** people in my office and on the phone who are **suffering** in body, mind, and spirit. But the one thing that seems to be the overarching truth and a common thread for each of these people, the thing which binds them together is that, **no matter** how challenging their circumstances are: they have a deep belief and trust that no **wherever** they go, and **whaever** they go through God is with them.

Jesus **continued** by saying, “*Are not 2 sparrows sold for a penny? Yet, not one of them will fall to the ground that God does not know about. Even the hairs of your head are all counted.*” In Jesus’ time town merchants sold small birds like sparrows in the marketplaces as one of the few meat sources for the poor. Jesus used this analogy—one which the people of the day could have understood—to

**emphasize** God's divine goodness. **Everything** in the world rests within God's power and might. Right down to the **flight** of a small bird and even **something smaller**—to the hairs on our head. If He directed such things of small worth, how much more will God care for **each and every** one of us? Have **no fear**, God **loves you** more than the sparrows. **Faith** in God is what matters. **That** is what will save us when all is said and done.

So do not be worried, do not be fearful, do not be anxious. In this '*green season*', the season of '*ordinary time*', God is **with** us—right here with us in the **midst** of all our fears. **All** is in God's powerful hands. **AMEN.**