

June 21, 2020 Sermon
Matthew 10:24-39

I can't imagine that anyone reading this sermon right now, can honestly say they have never feared anything, or that they have *no* fear of anything at this point in time. We are taught from the very beginning of life that there *are* things we should fear.

I've never known parents-to-be that didn't baby proof their house. You know what I'm talking about. The outlets are covered in order to keep objects from being pushed into them, thus causing a shock or electrocution. Kitchen cupboards have special latches on them (that work so well even ADULTS can't get into them), so colorful, yet harmful liquids or powders will not be ingested.

All of those cute little glass knick-knacks are removed from end tables and reachable spaces in order that nothing gets broken, and children do not get cut. Some parents will even go so far as to put padding on corners of coffee tables and end tables to prevent injuries.

As children get older, we offer them *safety* tips such as, *not* playing in the street, *not* talking to strangers, *not* getting into cars of people they don't know. We tell them to wear a helmet when they're riding a bicycle to avoid a head injury, and that's on top of telling them to be sure and look both ways before crossing the street.

We do these things to PROTECT our children, when in fact, it sometimes instills *fear* in them. And that's okay, I guess. If fear keeps them alive, then maybe we have done our job as parents and caretakers of children.

I do recall a time, though, when my daughter came home terribly upset at the fact that her brother had run home ahead of her. I had asked her, as the older sibling, to please keep an eye on her brother when they walked home from school.

I didn't realize how seriously she had taken this responsibility. She was visibly upset, crying, angry and scared that something could have happened to him on the way home. She was *totally* convinced it would be her fault if something had happened to him while she was not watching. It was complete, and utter fear...if not terror, that she was experiencing.

So here we are, in an effort to keep our children safe, whether it's our *own*, or a *classroom* full of students, or even *children* of our friends, we scare them. It is not our intention to scare them, but in the midst of *trying* to keep them safe, we teach them about the dangers of growing up; the dangers around them, and, as they get older, the dangers that are present in our society. The world-- is a scary place.

Remember a few verses back in Matthew, where Jesus was sending out his disciples and telling them to travel lightly? "Just take the clothes you're wearing, nothing more. No food or drink because that will be provided for you by those who allow you into their home." That *had* to be a little scary for the disciples, but they did as they were told. They were obedient.

Now keep in mind that "disciple" means "learner." So, discipleship is a journey of learning. And we just talked about how learning involves a certain level of fear, but in today's Gospel lesson, Jesus says three different times to *have* no fear, or do *not* be afraid.

How do we conquer our fears? Well, it's good to *name* them. Sometimes it may sound silly, but naming your fears may actually help you to overcome them. I will tell you that I am fearful that Covid-19 will sneak its way into my congregation. So how do we conquer that fear?

God gave us common sense, and people with awesome scientific brains, so we're going to tap into that information and use it to our advantage. When our doors open in July, we will have masks to wear, and hand sanitizer available, and pews marked off, and on and on, in order to *not* be afraid to be together.

Jesus said, “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not *one* of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the *hairs* of your *head* are all counted. So, do not be afraid; *you* are of *more* value than *many* sparrows.” In these few sentences, we have the promise of God’s presence in our lives.

Now, we should not just take these things to mean we can do *anything* and *never be harmed*, that’s *not* what God is about. But, as was mentioned earlier, God gave us common sense, education, science, and each other so we may learn, weigh what we have learned, and do what is right. The confidence we gain is in the knowledge that God is with us in *everything* we do, *including* our fears.

We have had *plenty* of reasons to be fearful in the last few months. I have heard people name their fears about the church doors being closed. Some have felt that the work we have to do as God’s hands and feet will be left undone, that *somehow*, being *in* the church is what keeps a congregation together. What we have *found*, though, is that God continues to work through us giving us the strength we need to *conquer* those fears and continue to be together in *other* ways, rather than physically.

And as if the virus wasn’t enough to scare us, we were presented with protests and demonstrations. But I believe the protests broke out due to fears that have been brewing for a very long time among those in the black community, and so hundreds of thousands of people have been *out*, *naming* the fears of ALL people, coming together and showing support for one another, in an effort to make a change in the way things are done.

I’m learning more as *I* ask questions. I have a white friend with a lot of kids. Some are her biological children, and some are adopted. One of the adopted is black. She will be moving in with her white sister soon. Precautions have been taken that normally don’t have to happen for a white person. They’re hanging a picture of the two of them in the apartment so they can prove they both live there. A chain is now being installed on the door as extra protection when someone knocks at the door.

The black daughter needs to carry an ID with her, even though she doesn't drive, because if the car she is riding in, driven by her white friends or family, gets pulled over by the police, they may request HER ID, even if they don't request it of any of the other *white* passengers in the car.

And Jesus says, "Do not be afraid." That's a tough call. Ask *questions*. *Listen* to the answers. Be *open* to understanding.

And just imagine the fear of having one or more of your family members protesting in the streets-- not knowing what might happen to them from one minute to the next, yet *also* knowing that sometimes fears have to be *named*, or *shouted*, or *written* on the back of a refrigerator box and presented for the world to see.

I'm certain there may have been families that were torn apart by these decisions. Families may have been divided on the issue of what was the right and wrong things to do in order to name fears. And if we're going to be the kind of disciples, we feel *God* wants us to *be*, then *sometimes*, it will cause division among families.

In today's lesson, Jesus says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have *not* come to bring peace, but a *sword*. For I have come to set a *man* against his *father*, and a *daughter* against her *mother*, and a daughter-in-law against her *mother-in-law*; and one's foes will be *members* of one's own household."

I don't believe for a minute that Jesus is declaring that violence is okay, but I **do** believe he is saying to us that when we take a stand for what we believe, it's not always going to be agreeable to others. As I said earlier, we were given a mind to make decisions, and right or wrong, they *will* cause division in families and neighborhoods, and that's what has happened in the Black Lives Matter movement. We can't deny that sometimes, in order for there to be change, there **has** to be an upheaval.

If you don't like the way your kitchen looks, and you want to update, then you've got to take down a few walls. And even with a plan, taking down walls is a little scary because it means things are not going to go as they've always gone.

Your kitchen will be completely different than it was before, but with time and patience, and understanding, the kitchen will come back together in a way that is *better*, more *efficient*, and *up* to date.

As disciples of Christ, we must continue to seek out God's kingdom at every turn. We must learn to name our fears. We must learn that, sometimes searching for justice for others, can get ugly and loud and scary, but in the end, God's kingdom will be better for it. In the *end*, **we** know that God continues to walk with us, even through the *fearful* parts of our lives.

God in Christ doesn't promise us that life will be a bed of roses. Sometimes, the peace that we're used to and comfortable with, **has** to be disturbed in order for healing and restoration to begin. God doesn't promise that there will be no obstacles as we make our way through the maze of life. He *doesn't* even promise us that our *decisions* will *not* have consequences, but he *does* implore us to *not* be afraid. As disciples, we are to live *fearlessly*.

We were raised to fear the world around us, for our safety. Jesus says, fear not. "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." We can *all* learn to conquer our fears, as long as we remember that God *knows* our fears. God *knows* our pain. God *will sit* with us in that fear. God *will walk* with us in that fear, all the while offering his unceasing mercy and grace. Amen!