

Sermon and Prayers
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
June 25, 2023

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Prayer of the Day

Teach us, good Lord God, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel: Matthew 10:24-39

[Jesus said to the twelve:] ²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! ²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to

bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For 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; ³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

L: This is the Gospel of the Lord

C: **Praise to you, oh Christ.**

Sermon

I have a question for you this day: What are you afraid of? Little kids might say they aren't afraid of anything. Some adults who are trying to impress others with how tough they are might also say they aren't afraid of anything. But, if we are honest, most of us – all of us – are afraid of something – most of us are afraid of a bunch of things.

It's sort of interesting that the physical symptoms of fear and excitement are exactly the same. You would not be able to tell the difference between fear and excitement by checking breathing, heart rate, release of sugar into the blood, or any of the other activities of the nervous system. There is no difference.

What makes the difference is how we perceive something. Whether we are afraid or excited affects how we approach a situation. This has a bearing on our gospel for this week. In our gospel, we hear a lot about fear. Jesus is about to send his twelve disciples out on a mission of their own, a mission where they will exercise great authority and a mission where they will have to demonstrate great trust in God. Jesus has given

them the power to cast out demons and heal the sick, but they aren't allowed to take any money or provisions but instead are to trust in the grace of God as shown in the hospitality of others.

In today's gospel, Jesus is giving them sort of a pre-game pep talk. He tells them about the challenges they will face. Challenges like rejection and slander and persecution and maybe even death. That's enough to make anyone afraid.

But Jesus says, "Do not fear."

There's a children's book by Dr. Seuss which is called "Horton Hears a Who." Maybe you've heard it before or maybe you've read it. It is the story of an elephant named Horton, who tries to protect a tiny world full of creatures called "*Whos*" from destruction. Horton is the only one who can hear the "*whos*", so all the other animals think that Horton is crazy. The theme that is stated over and over again throughout the story is this: A person is a person, no matter how small.

A person is a person, no matter how small.

Jesus believed that. And that is one of the things that today's gospel tells us. Jesus was speaking to his disciples about how they would probably be ridiculed and discounted by others. They could not expect to be treated any better than he was treated. If the world called Jesus Beelzebul, which literally means "Lord of the manure pile", then Jesus' disciples could expect to be called that, too, and even worse.

But then Jesus went on to say, "Have no fear of them." Why? Because the world does not have the final say about anyone. God does. And if God says that you are valuable, then you are valuable, regardless of what anyone else says. In order to illustrate his point, Jesus declared that not

even a sparrow falls to the ground without God noticing. Even the hairs of your head are all counted. Both of these illustrations point to the fact that God cares about all of creation, and in particular, about every human being.

Jesus says, “Do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.” Jesus is saying not to fear those who can alter or destroy your outward self, because no one can destroy your true life with God.

God has created every human being and we are of great worth to God. As Christians, as ones who know God’s love, it is our responsibility to make sure that everyone understands that. That everyone gets it. Jesus was certainly right about the importance of our lives to God and Horton was right when he said, “A person is a person, no matter how small.”

When we talk about our worth and value to God, though, it seems to raise other questions. We tend to say, “OK. God cares for me and I matter to God, then how come bad things happen?” Why is there violence, sin, death, and the presence and reality of evil in God’s good creation? Because we know those things are present. We read about them, we see them, we experience them every day. If God does care, why doesn’t God do something about these bad things?

The answer to those kinds of questions can be found in our most tangible understanding of God. The answer to those questions can be found in the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God does care and God has done something.

God became fully human in Jesus Christ and entered into our experience. God experienced the pain of sin and death. Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, looked with forgiveness on the woman who washed his

feet with her tears, spoke without judgment with the woman at the well, joined Jeremiah's lament from the cross when he cried, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"

God does care and God has done something.

Jesus was betrayed, tortured, and killed. But then Jesus rose from death to new life, conquering sin and death and the grave forever.

God does care and God has done something.

In Christ, God accompanies us with the message, "Fear not". We are not alone.

God is always with us, even in our pain, our suffering, our brokenness. God is with us in our anxiety, our guilt, our doubt, our fear.

Martin Luther said that when we are at our weakest, when things are the worst, when it seems that God is furthest from us, it is at that time that the God who suffered betrayal, execution, and death is most with us.

God does care. God has done something. When we face difficulties, we can remember the sparrow --- not one falls to the ground, but God knows and cares. When we face difficulties, remember that God walks with us. We are not alone.

Despite how things may appear, this is God's world and we belong to God. We have infinite worth and value. God is our fortress. God never fails.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Trusting in God's abundant mercy, let us offer our prayers for a world in need.

A brief silence.

You entice your church to speak truth that challenges false notions of peace. Prevail upon us with the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, that we are compelled to share the gospel with all the world. God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

Under your watch not even a sparrow goes unnoticed. Safeguard plant and animal habitats threatened by melting glaciers, rising oceans, and receding coastlines. Amplify the voices of those calling for responsible stewardship of the earth's resources. God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

Our world is enduring violence and destruction. Rescue your people in nations experiencing conflict or crisis (*especially*). Thwart the efforts of those who sow chaos and terror, and guide those working to bring about peace and reconciliation. God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

You have counted even the hairs of our heads. Reassure anyone experiencing poverty, homelessness, unemployment, or exploitation that every life has value. Look favorably upon all who struggle (*especially*). Answer us, for your steadfast love is good. God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

Even when we experience rejection your love invites us to new life. Lift up anyone who feels shunned or excluded on account of their gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or any other human distinction. Make your people one. God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

All who have died with Christ also live with him. We give thanks for
(*Philipp Melanchthon and*) all the saints whose faithful confession
inspired our own discipleship, and raise us, with them, to eternal life.
God, in your mercy,

Receive our prayer.

Receive our prayers and answer us, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Blessing

The God who calls across the cosmos
and speaks in the smallest seed
✠ bless, keep, and sustain you
now and to the end of the age.

Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the harvest.

Thanks be to God.