

Matthew 10:24-39

Jesus said to the twelve disciples, “A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it 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!

“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that 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. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 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.

“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

“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.*

Whoever 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; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

I don’t know if it is the same for you, but sometimes wonder, when I reflect back on how humanity got to be where it is today, I wonder what was, what is, the greatest repercussion of the fall? Was it that Adam and Eve lost their beautiful home in the Garden? Was it, maybe, that food would now have to be sown and tended and harvested by their own efforts, if they were to eat and survive? Could it possibly be that they would now have to wear clothes which would eventually lead to the fashion industry? God help us.

Maybe it was something less physical. Maybe the greatest repercussion of the fall from grace was loneliness. No more walks in the garden with God. No more long talks, face to face,

with the Creator of all things. Maybe it was joy and leisure. Once they turned their back on God and took things into their own hands, from that day forward they would have to work and toil for their livelihood. They would have to struggle and fend for themselves in the emerging harshness outside of paradise. Maybe it was clear vision. Maybe the greatest repercussion was that they, we, lost our ability to see beyond ourselves. We forfeited the vision to see the possibilities at the heart of God's creation.

I don't know. Maybe it is all of these things and many more. But, I still had this feeling that there was one overriding repercussion of our original sin, one overriding effect on our lives, that holds us in its relentless grip. And then it dawned on me, through the Spirit I trust. IT WAS FEAR! Fear is what has the greatest impact. Fear is what was used by Satan to tempt Jesus...fear of starving to death, fear of abandonment by the Father, fear of insignificance in the world. Fear is the irrational emotion that stops us in our tracks and holds us there, disconnected from the life that God made us for.

And if you want to get a taste of what I mean, just Google the word, "phobias." There are literally thousands of them documented. Fear of all manner of things, all with names that are too hard to pronounce. Fear of heights, spiders, flying, elevators, and the dark. Fear of belly buttons, knees, rain, writing in public, Dutch people, bald people, beards, chop sticks, and being without a smart phone. Fear of the color purple, the number 13, and the force of gravity. All of these, and thousands more, are documented fears that plague people in our world today.

If there is any one thing that has definitely resulted from our separation from God, it is fear. Is it any wonder, then, that the most common phrase throughout all of Scripture is, "Fear not!"? Is it also any wonder that actions designed to bring fear are used so effectively as a weapon in our world today?

But when Jesus says "fear not", or "don't be afraid" he is talking about something bigger than what we do to each other. And he is also not telling us that there are not things to be afraid of. There clearly are. There is evil in our world and we should be afraid of that which threatens our souls. We heard that this morning in our Gospel passage. There are actions that evil takes that would lead us away from God, and we should be afraid of those things, those things that leads us to eternal separation from God. Those things are worthy of fear. Fear of those things and that presence is appropriate. What Jesus is telling us, however, is that there is no reason to succumb to that fear. He is telling us that we should not live in a state of fear, even when there are things that we should rightly be afraid of. Those things have no power over us, if we choose not to let them by drawing close to God.

Unfortunately, we do let them. The reality is that we do, in our fallen condition, live in a continuous and constant state of fear. And that it has become our greatest burden. It has become our greatest burden because it has become our normal state of being, always on edge, constantly on defense. We tell ourselves that we will not give in to the forces of terror. We convince ourselves that, if we just live our lives as normal, terror won't win. And this works somewhat

well when it comes to specific acts of terrorism currently plaguing the world. You hear our earthly leaders proclaim it in loud voices. We will not let them win. We will stand strong. We will not succumb and hide, quivering in the shadows. We will not give in to the fear they want to bring. And I think that, for the most part, we do stand up, thumbing our noses at their pathetic actions. We hear the words “fear not” and we say, “darn right”.

But, terrorism does not come just in the form of bombs, and knives, and cars plowing down tourists. There is a more insidious terrorism that we inflict upon ourselves. We hear it every day. It is the terrorism of rhetoric. It is when we use words of fear to demonize those who simply and sincerely hold differing opinions. It is when we use words of fear and derision to divide and destroy others. It is when we use our rhetoric of fear to gain personal power and financial gain.

All of this plays right into our fallen condition. And it works. It belittles others. It shuts down conversation. It breaks community. It destroys the transmission of the love that God gives to each one of us to abundantly share with everyone else. It stifles the truth that God entrusts to all of us for the sake of humankind. What it does is it takes the Great Commandment to love your Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind and makes that love conditional when it comes to sharing it with your neighbors as you yourself have experienced God’s love in your life. It is a breaking of relationship that tells us that others are deserving of that love that we have embraced only when they agree with a particular issue or opinion.

It is a fear that brings division to such a point that when a congressman is shot at baseball practice the internet lights up with people who say he deserved what he got. It is a fear brings us to the point where a “comedian” and a well know actor suggest publicly that a President should be killed. It is a fear that leads to such anger that people of differing opinions are not willing to be in the same room with another human being simply because of the t-shirt they are wearing. It devolves into profanity-laden name calling and truth distorting rock throwing. It points at others and tells everyone to be afraid, be very afraid, instead of inviting us all to draw near to God in order to see the world through a filter of love and possibility which leads us to a dialogue together. The terrorism of rhetoric plays to our lowest selves and our greatest weaknesses.

And worse than all that, it provides cover for true evil. It blinds us to what we should really be afraid of. When we can raise up particular disagreements on particular issues and challenges that we face to the level of the pinnacle of evil, then we make our fight to be against each other rather than against the powers and principalities that threaten our very souls. And when we do that, evil, true evil, wins.

As it said in our passage this morning, our call is to shine the love of Christ in the darkness. Our mission is to proclaim the love of Christ from the rooftops. Only then will we be able to stand against that which truly terrorizes our world.

Amen