

5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 5, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
You Are Worth More than Many Sparrows

Dear Friends in Christ,

What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of spiders or snakes? Maybe both? Are you afraid of what the politicians on the right will do or afraid of what the politicians on the left will do? Maybe both? Tornadoes, yes. Earthquakes...not so much in Iowa. COVID-19, cancer and death certainly would be some things people fear. Maybe you fear losing a spouse or a friend. Maybe you are afraid that your children won't remain in the faith when they are adults. I'm sure we could add to the list of things people fear in this life.

The fears I listed can all be legitimate fears. It is good to have a healthy fear of poisonous snakes. It is wise to fear tornadoes and not stand outside while it is picking up your car from the driveway. Of course, there are also some fears that are a bit irrational. My family watched a video recently where two children were terrified of a tiny puppy. It was funny because the amount of fear in those children was thousands of times more than called for. That puppy could not harm them. It was really small, but they reacted like a grizzly bear was after them.

We have trouble looking at our fears objectively too. Today Jesus helps his disciples deal with those things that cause fear. First, Jesus tells us who we should truly fear. Then Jesus tells us how much we are worth.

Fear God

Matthew 10:24–33 (NIV84)

A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! ²⁶ So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. ²⁷ What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. ²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Last week we considered the beginning of this account. Jesus saw the crowds coming to him and had compassion on them. Therefore he gives his disciples instructions to go and proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near. The portion of God's Word for us today is a continuation of Jesus' instructions to his disciples as they go out with the gospel. Jesus has warned them of opposition that will not believe the message. He warns them here that they will be slandered and called agents of the devil. Since the enemies accused Christ of being in league with the devil, they will also accuse his disciples of the same. This is what they meant by calling Jesus, Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

The enemies of Christ were powerful. They were not some little puppy yipping at the disciples. They could bring some real harm to the disciples. They could turn a crowd against the disciples. They had connections in politics and government that would eventually be used to kill Jesus and many of the disciples. But Christ says, "Do not be afraid of them." Before COVID and sometime in the near future, we will again knock on doors in our neighborhood and invite people to hear more about Jesus. The first times someone knocks on a door can be filled with fear. What if the person who answers is mad? What if they yell at me? What if they slam the door in my face? Those things happen on a rare occasion, but not often. The disciples had the real possibility of being run out of town and even killed for simply telling someone that the Christ had arrived.

The sinful world continues to find ways to silence the truth of the Bible and silence Christians from speaking the truth. It may be threats of violence and attempting to destroy the life of a Christian as Jesus says. It is more often cultural pressure to keep silent, cultural pressure to go along with whatever popular culture has decided is right at this time and place. A very effective philosophy to keep Christian truth silent is the idea that everyone can have their own truth. Everyone can believe whatever they want. If I believe that I am a 6' 10" professional basketball player, who are you to tell me that my truth is really a lie? In matters of eternal life, someone might believe they have been good enough for God to accept them into heaven. Culture says it is wrong to tell that person they are wrong, which is more than a little ironic. Culture says it is wrong to tell someone they are wrong in believing everyone will go to heaven and there is no hell. Culture says it is wrong to tell people to repent and believe in Jesus because everyone has their own truth. But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

We answer to a higher authority than popular culture. In fact everyone will answer to the Triune God in the end. He has a monopoly on the truth. God sets the standards for truth. Jesus tells us that his word is truth. And God is the one who can "destroy both body and soul in hell." What can man do to us? Fear God. He will destroy the body and soul of all who reject his truth. Sometimes we Christians can convince ourselves of alternative truths in regard to our own sin. We may use our Christianity as a way to hide our sins from ourselves. "I go to church, so I can do whatever I want and say whatever I want during the week." "As long as I look like I'm a Christian in front of other church people, I can act a different way with others." Or we may minimize our own sins or even think we don't sin much at all. All these lies are shown for what they are in front of the Almighty God. Jesus gives all, including you and me, a strong warning to face the truth, repent, and fear God above all else.

When we fear God, we no longer need to fear what popular culture says about us or does to us. Then we can speak God's truth, in love. Jesus gives his disciples another reason we can speak the truth in a hostile world. You are worth more than many sparrows to God.

You Are Worth More than Many Sparrows

How much is a human life worth? At one point in our nation's history you could have answered that with a dollar amount. Human beings were bought and sold as slaves, having economic value but not being seen as having human worth. But through time, our nation is progressing towards the idea set forth in the Declaration of Independence. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Of course, we are not there. There are still those who place little value on the lives of black Americans. There are many who will discard the lives of the unborn for the sake of convenience. There are those who call it mercy to kill a child who might have Down's syndrome before that child is born. There are those who hasten the end of lives who are terminally ill, who often see themselves as a burden to society. There are those who fill our cities with drugs and violence, not caring whose life is destroyed. There are those who try to end their own lives because they think they are worth nothing. In this world of sin, human life is too often considered far below its true value. Jesus tells us how much humans are worth to God.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. ³⁰ And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹ So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

You could buy two sparrows for the smallest coin you had. While they were not free, they were almost free. But what does God the Father know about these nearly worthless birds? Everything. He knows about every sparrow in the world. I think there were about a million around the house where I grew up. I can't imagine how many there are in the world. But God knows when even one sparrow falls to the ground. He knows when one human is suffering. He knows when one person is struggling. He knows when one human is feeling worthless.

Jesus gives us another illustration that tells us how much he knows about us. Our Father in heaven has counted the hairs of our head. Now, some of us make it easier on God to count hairs than others. He knows how many or how few hairs each of us has. Who do you know the most about? It is likely your best friend, your spouse, your parents or your children. You spend time and effort to know what they like and what they don't, what they are good at and what they struggle with. Their life is valuable to you and you therefore learn lots about them. Your life is valuable to God and he knows everything about you. He knows your fears and your struggles. He knows what is happening in your life at all times. He knows your secret sins and he proved how much you are worth by forgiving your sins.

You are worth more than many sparrows. You are worth the life of God's one and only Son. Judas betrayed Christ for 30 pieces of silver but Christ is worth much more. He is true God, eternally begotten of the Father. Christ lived the only perfect life ever lived. The Father paid this price for you. He gave his one and only Son to die on the cross in payment for you. God considers you of such great worth that Jesus died for you. This is God's truth. Don't allow your own truth of feeling worthless to compete with the absolute truth. You are worth more than many sparrows.

The world needs to hear this truth. The scared mom considering abortion needs to hear this truth. The person suffering injustice in this world needs to hear what they are worth to God. The young person who feels like their life is not worth much and the old person who feels like their life is a burden to others need to hear God's truth. Christ asked his disciples to go out with this truth to motivate them and this truth to declare. Christ has given this truth of the gospel to you and sends you to the people in your life so that they may know how much they are worth to God. He gave his Son to give eternal life to all who trust in Christ. Do not be afraid to tell God's truth in this world that needs it.

Amen.