Introduction and Family Sunday

Well, good evening everyone. I want to welcome you here to worship together with us at Christ the King Anglican Church. This Sunday and next Sunday are special Sundays. They are family Sundays. That means the kids stay in the service here together with us. And so, the messages will be shorter. They'll be a little simple. And today's message will be more of a devotion for us. And we're going to look at Matthew 10 starting here in verse 29-33. And it is going to draw our attention to a phrase that's repeated all through the scriptures to get us to think about this idea of courage and fear. All through the scriptures, you see a phrase that is repeated through the Old Testament and into the New Testament: Do not fear. Do not fear, for I am with you.

The Command: Do Not Fear

For I have not given you a spirit of fear, but a spirit of power. Go forward, for I am together with you. Do not fear. And again, as Stephen just read here in the middle of the room, Jesus said, "Do not fear or fear not." Three times. It's this idea of do not fear. Now, I don't know about you, but when we hear these words, our minds might go to all different types of scenarios as it relates to fear. For some of us, especially kids in the room, you might think in terms of existential fear, fear of harm.

A Heroic Moment and the Nature of Fear

I go to in my mind, the time when I got to be a sailing instructor back on the east coast in the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland on this thing called water. I don't know if you don't have much out here in Colorado, but I got to be sailing instructor and a squall came upon us and I was in a big 40ft boat and there were eight-year-olds on the boat and so it was just me and all the kids and I put the sail down. I said, "Okay, we got to go to shore." And as I turned on the engine and put it into gear, it stalled. And I realized that it stalled because the rope, called the main sheet, which is how you trim the sails, was wrapped around the propeller, right? So that's fun.

So there we are and it's stormy, it's windy, it's rainy, and I have to jump into the water without a life jacket to go under the boat in the storm to get the rope off the propeller. Only to find out I needed a knife. So, I climbed back into the boat, dove under the water with a knife in the dark, bumped my head against the boat multiple times, cut the rope off, and the boat was saved. It was the most heroic thing I've ever done. But when I think about do not fear, I think about that kind of moment. Kids, you probably know this. You're probably more familiar with this type of fear, but fear is actually all around us.

The Influence of Fear and Anxiety

Fear is more present in our lives often than we know, often in subtle forms; it's one of the things that shapes us perhaps more than anything else in our lives. Marketers know this. They know that we fear loss more than we can appreciate gain. And so marketers and sales people will know, well, you know, if you don't act now, you might lose this sale. And so they like to instill this fear within you. Or marketing says, if you don't buy this product, you won't look like your friends.

Or if you don't embrace this kind of lifestyle, then you won't really be living. And so fear is all around us and anxiety is all around us. And yet the scriptures call us to not fear all the time because the scriptures know that we are so easily shaped and formed by fear. So we hear these words again and again: Fear not. Fear not. Do not fear. Fear not.

And I know in my own life when I read a passage like this or hear sermons like this about do not fear, I'm quickly convicted to say, you know, I have been fearing too much and I have carried too much anxiety. I need to steel myself and stand up and punch the fear in the face or just overcome this anxiety and move forward. In fact, I've even had a sermon where the title was, "If you fear, then you are in sin." And so, I would hear that kind of sermon and I would rally myself and analyze my fears and anxieties and charge forward. But like anything that comes from our own mustering and our own strength, it did not last. I find fears and anxieties come back and more deeply it's not what Jesus is calling us to do here to just sort of face the fear and muster up our courage. There's some virtue in that sometimes we need to walk forward in things but that's not what Jesus is calling us to do here.

Redirecting Fear into Being Known by God

Rather than mustering up our courage and overcoming fear in ourselves what Jesus is saying is don't become a stoic person that just overcomes anxiety but redirect your fear. Redirect it into counting that in God we are seen. We are known and we are deeply valued. And in that we can live in a world that's filled with fear. So let's look at the passage and see what Jesus says here. So again, we're in Matthew 10 and we're starting in verse 29. And the context of this entire chapter is at the beginning a few sections back Jesus sent out his disciples onto mission and he said, "Go and declare the kingdom and heal diseases." And as we get to this section, he says, as you're doing that, and this can apply to us, too, as we're living on mission, as we're obeying Jesus Christ in our lives, Jesus says that you will encounter challenges. In fact, sometimes you will encounter threats. And sometimes these threats will go as far as threatening you with prison or threatening even your life.

Solidarity with the Persecuted Church

And so, don't be surprised when you encounter fear and anxiety in your lives, but trust me in those times. That's what Jesus is saying to those disciples then and there. And I just want to name here, we're going to move into our lives more specifically. I just want to name here that on the surface and on the nose, this passage applies to so many people around the world right now. So many people around the world that live with threats of persecution and imprisonment just because they say that they are a Christian. So many people that live with the loss of their property or the loss of their livelihood or truly live in real suffering and real persecution where these words directly on the nose literally apply to them.

So, we're going to move again into our lives, but we should always remember in prayer those Christians around the world that do face persecution. Let us remember that their reward is great in heaven and that they currently do and will have so much to teach us about what it means to

be a follower of Jesus Christ now and in the world to come. They face existential fear. Lord have mercy upon them. Lord be with them.

The Litany of Humility: Diagnosing Our Fear

By God's grace, most of us, I don't think, face this kind of fear regularly or maybe at all. Maybe you've never faced it, but fear is still very present in our lives and even more so still very formative in our lives. We are still very shaped by fear. There's a prayer called the litany of humility and we are actually going to be saying a version of this prayer later in the service. It was a prayer that was finally compiled about 200 years ago and it's a mashup of a compilation of prayers that people in the church have prayed for centuries. But I find this litany of humility to be a beautiful diagnostic of asking the question how much fear and anxiety shapes our own lives.

And so here's some lines that it says in the prayer: from the love of my own comfort and from the fear of discomfort, deliver me, oh Lord. From the fear of having nothing or the fear of being poor, deliver me, oh God. From the need to be understood by everyone around me and to be accepted by everyone around me, deliver me from the fear of being lonely, from the fear of serving others and being of lower status to them, and lastly, of course, from the fear of death or trial, deliver me, oh Lord. Now, what I love about this prayer is that it's not saying that those things are evil. Of course, who wants discomfort? Who wants death or trial? Who wants to be rejected by everybody? The prayer is not saying that those things are wrong to not want. But it's saying, "Lord, deliver me from the power that these fears and anxieties have over me." Deliver me from being shaped by these fears and anxieties.

Living Under God's Eye, Not Fear's Control

Lord, deliver me so that I do not live in fear of these things. So when Jesus says do not fear, he's saying do not live by allowing these things to have power over you and to shape your souls. And notice in this passage, he doesn't say do not fear as a standalone abstract just by itself and never feel the feeling of fear. He says do not fear those that would persecute you or do not fear what might happen to you. Fear is natural. It's an impulse like hunger.

You aren't wrong for feeling hungry. You aren't wrong for feeling fear. If something startles you, that is not wrong. Of course, if you have anxiety, that is not wrong. Of course, there's nothing wrong with feeling those feelings. But what Jesus is saying is do not let these things have power over you. The scriptures and this prayer expose how much control these fears and anxieties have over us because fear has a way of quietly discipling and shaping our souls.

The Source of Our Value

So I want to ask us, and kids in the room you don't have to answer out loud but maybe think about this as well, adults as well: Which fear on this list that we've spoken about perhaps is the greatest in your life in terms of having control over how you think and move, the decisions you make about your future, how you spend your money and your time? Fear of rejection, fear of

loss, fear of people. Fear tells us to never speak up when we have something righteous to say. Fear says don't stand out. Fear says don't risk rejection. Don't let people misunderstand you. Before long, without even noticing it, we live a life where we're making our decisions around avoiding discomfort or avoiding disapproval or avoiding being unseen because we are living a life that is shaped by fear and anxiety. And eventually, it shapes our souls.

Sparrows and the Hairs on Your Head

Now, in response to this, Jesus gives us two images in this passage, and I'll just read these here. He says this, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny, and not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your father? But even the hairs on your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore, are you of more value than many sparrows?" Now, kids in the room, what is a sparrow? Big bird, small bird? It's the smallest of birds. It's the least significant of all the birds. Jesus didn't say, "You're not of more value than eagles or horses." He said, "Aren't you of more value than sparrows?" Sparrows are so cheap that you could buy two for a penny. They didn't make coins with a denomination small enough to account for one single sparrow, but sparrows are so cheap. And Jesus uses this image to say, "You have so much more value than the sparrow."

Beneath many of the anxieties is the fear of not being seen, of remaining unknown, of living without purpose or meaning, of looking in the mirror and saying, "Does anybody know I exist? Does my life actually mean anything? Does anybody see anything in me?" And so, we live our life sometimes by saying, "I cannot be diminished by others. I must show off my worth and my value to the world around me." Whether it's money or achievement or how I act or show up in my community, I have to show that I'm worth something and I am seen. And really that often causes us to overcompensate, to not live a life that is humble and honoring to God. And it's a life ultimately that is shaped again by fear.

But what if I'm seen? And what if I'm valued by the maker of all things? Then I know I don't have to show up and have a life that is shaped by fear. So for kids in the room, it might mean we don't speak up for someone when we know we should because we don't want to be rejected. Or we don't say our beliefs when we know that they might push us on the outside. For adults, it's the same thing. If the creator, if the king, if the savior values sparrows, are we not of so much more value than them? We are seen and we are valued. And because of that, we can live without fear.

The Meditation of Psalm 69

Jesus also mentioned he knows the number of hairs on your head. And I want to give you all homework. The adults, especially in the room, go home and read Psalm 69. It is a deep meditation on what it means to sit in agony and pain with not knowing what's going to happen next. And this quote that Jesus says, "I know the numbers of hairs on your heads," comes directly from Psalm 69 when the psalmist says this, "More in number than the hairs on my head are those who hate me without cause." So Jesus is referencing this whole psalm when he says this, that when he's speaking about the number of hairs on your head, what he's saying is he's

referencing the psalm. He says, "He knows all of your anxieties. He knows all of your fears. He knows all of your enemies. He knows all of the things that are pressing in and trying to shape your soul." It means he knows us intimately, but he knows our situation.

Conclusion: Entrusting Yourself to God

When we feel overwhelmed, when we feel like there's more than we can count, we can know that God is already ahead of us and has numbered all of our challenges and anxieties for us, that we do not walk alone as we face them in our own lives. So God sees you. He values you. He knows your life down to the number of enemies that you have. And then Jesus says something that pulls it all together here in verse 32. He says, "So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my father who is in heaven." And here is the turn when it comes to facing fear in our lives. Jesus didn't say just don't be afraid and live without fear as a standalone. He says acknowledge me, stand in me, and be known as mine. Christ's answer to our fears and our anxieties is to redirect them to him and to cling to him in the midst of all of the fear that we might feel. The one who sees you, the one who knows you, the one who values you.

So the question for us as we leave here today and I want to ask you to meditate on is not: Am I brave enough? Am I strong enough to fight these anxieties? Am I just the kind of person that pushes through the fears that are in front of me? That is not the question to ask. The question to ask is: Who am I trusting to see me in this place here and now, that sees me for the value that I am because of who I am in Jesus Christ? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died confessing Christ before a hostile state, said that the disciple only has one fear and that is the fear of God, and that single fear of God destroys all other fears. So we don't overcome fear by becoming harder or stronger people. We overcome fear by entrusting ourselves to God. The one who sees us, the one who values us, and the one who knows us. And so go acknowledge him, live in peace, cast your burdens and your fears and your anxieties upon him, and acknowledge him in your fears and your anxieties before God and before all people.

Closing Prayer

Let me pray for us. Lord, we thank you again for your mercy. We thank you for your goodness and how You always know what is going on in our lives and you meet us in the times that are good and in the times that are challenging. Bless us Lord and give us courage to trust in you. Give us boldness to lean in on you in all situations and to trust you for the outcomes. Let us not live in fear. I pray especially for those in the room, Lord, that are battling with long-term anxiety or have special challenges in their lives now. We know that this simple sermon just doesn't erase all of these things. But we ask that your spirit would visit them now by the power that you promise here to offer your peace that transcends all understanding. That they would know your promises that when they and we acknowledge you that you offer us your peace and your presence. So bless us and bless them. We pray in your great and holy name. Amen.