

Sunday 21st June 2020

Reading: Matthew 10:26-33

The challenging realities of being a disciple of Jesus

Whom to Fear

²⁶“So do not be afraid of people. Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. ²⁷What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops. ²⁸Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ²⁹For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. ³⁰As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!

Confessing and Rejecting Christ

³²“Those who declare publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same for them before my Father in heaven. ³³But those who reject me publicly, I will reject before my Father in heaven.

We live in a time when more information is known and stored about each of us than ever before. Some of the information we give away willingly on our Facebook page, or other social media, such as giving details of holidays, friends, days out, thoughts on various subject, the list goes on. We carry smart phones which act as trackers following our every move. We absent-mindedly click 'accept all' on websites instead of reading what information on us is going to be collected, thus letting ad agencies know our preferences and shopping choices. One security technologist wrote this: 'If we were told we had to inform the police when we made a new friend, we would never do that. Instead we inform Facebook. Or, if we were told to send the police a copy of every bit of our correspondence, just in case - we wouldn't, but Google stores it for us anyway.'

However, by choosing what we say and which photos we share on Social media we can also manipulate this information, and we can create a 'perfect' version of the 'me' we want to be, and want others to see. We can keep all the other things, the more unsavoury parts of our nature that we would prefer not to be public knowledge, to ourselves. Rather like those 'round robin' Christmas letters that tell all the wonderful achievements of the past year, but don't include the failings and disappointments.

You might be surprised to learn that in Jesus' time there was no real privacy in ancient village life either. Everyone minded everybody else's business. People would have to be careful to hide the secrets about themselves that they didn't want others to know.

So for both the society of Jesus' day and for those of us who read the words of this morning's scripture it comes as a bit of a shock to read 'So do not be afraid of people. Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known'. I don't know about you, but there are things about me that I would rather not have uncovered or made known.

However, these words should be taken, not as a threat, but as an encouragement for those who believe and follow Jesus. He is reminding us that as followers we will always be subject to attack from the world around us. Following Jesus is a life-style choice we make and there are people who will choose to ridicule and abuse those who take it. On the day when all will be revealed, Jesus is telling us, for those who follow Him it will be our loyalty and faith that will be seen and uncovered. All the sinful parts of nature were wiped away by the punishment Jesus took on our behalf when He died on the cross. They have been forgiven and forgotten. Truth will out and justice will prevail, and those who have followed Jesus, lived with integrity and truth despite what the world says about them, will be vindicated. God knows our hearts, and knows those who believe, trust and follow Him. So - do not be afraid of people.

Having told his disciples twice not to be afraid: 'Do not be afraid of people' and 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul' Jesus now tells them that there is something that they should be afraid of - and that is the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. If we don't trust in God then we may be influenced by demonic powers, the darker enemies who are battling for the souls of Jesus' followers; they were there then and they're here now.

Don't be afraid of what people say about you and your life as a Christian. They are not what we should be worrying about - God know our hearts.

Do be afraid of the dark forces that creep around trying to lure you away from God, they are the ones we should fear.

This is a sombre warning from Jesus to His followers, but He then balances that fear. In fact He states a truth that outweighs it altogether.

Here we have one of Jesus' most striking promises about the detailed love and care of God our Father, not only for every one of us, His creatures, but for every hair on our heads. He cares about every part of us. If God really takes note of every single sparrow in the sky or sold in the market, and every single hair of our heads, then there is nothing that is too great for Him to do, and nothing that is too small for Him to care about. 'So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows' (v31). What a wonderful

promise - Nothing can separate us from his love and care. We can pray to God our Father about anything and nothing is too big or too small for his attention. He loves and cares for everything about us.

As I said, to be a follower of Jesus is a lifestyle choice. Here Jesus has spelt out the challenging realities of choosing this lifestyle and being His disciples with both good and not so good news. The good news is that we are precious, valued and loved by God, and God knows every detail of our lives. So, never be afraid, Jesus says - God your Father loves you. On the other hand, the not so good news, is that this lifestyle choice is difficult. It is not easy to be a disciple, you need to be on your guard.

The message in today's passage is plain. You are worth more than a great many sparrows; so rest assured that God knows and cares about every detail of your life, even as you face the temptations and dangers which so easily surround you. Followers of Jesus should expect attacks at all levels. There will be challenges created by living out our faith. Jesus encourages us to recognise them - to be forewarned - and to face them with a resilience that comes from an assurance of how precious we are to God. Keep your eyes on Jesus.

Remember that the one we are serving is stronger than the strongest opponent we will ever meet.

Amen

I am reminded of the words attributed to Mother Teresa, that were written on the wall in her children's home:

**People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centred;
Forgive them anyway.**

**If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
Be kind anyway.**

**If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.**

**If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.**

**What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.**

**If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
Be happy anyway.**

**The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.**

**Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.**

**You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;
It was never between you and them anyway.**

Music:

Chris Tomlin - Nobody Loves me Like you <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KicvBB2L68>

Good Good Father - Housefires <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd-fxhp90pw>

Prayer: (based on a prayer by Iyanla Vanzant)

'Do not be afraid - you are worth much more than many sparrows'

Lord,

Today I need to be still and remember that you love me.

Your love is my strength.

Your love is my protection.

Your love is my light in the midst of any darkness.

Your love is the fulfilment of every hunger, every thirst.

Your love is my source and my supply.

Your love, ever present, is the only thing I need, want or seek today.

For in the presence of your love, all is well in my life and in my soul.

Today I need to be still and remember that You love me. Amen