

The Third Sunday after Pentecost • June 21, 2020ⁱ

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Matthew 10:21-33

“Indispensable”

You should be afraid, right?

We're living in a time when there's so much going on that has disrupted life as we've known it. Sometimes that's been for the worse, sometimes for the better. The ongoing pandemic seems to be entering a new phase in our nation where infection rates are rising. Employers and employees alike are contending with the economic impact of months-long closures and restrictions, many of which are still developing as conditions continue to shift around us. The pervasive nature of racism in our society and its accompanying history of injustice are out in the public consciousness, now potentially more than any time in our past. With in the Church, we are looking at how we'll relaunch in-person worship while continuing to connect people to Christ using new tools and technology. This is a disruptive time, and we don't really know when any of this disruption might end.

You should be afraid, right? Fear. That's the natural response to an uncertain world such as this. When you don't know how events will play out, you might very well fear how much hardship all this disruption will bring into your life.

And what about the disruption that Jesus is speaking of in today's Gospel text? He's describing a fearfully significant level of difficulty that will come upon his apostles, his sent ones. And it's his message that's going to spark it! He's sending them out into this broken world to disrupt the hold that sin has on people's lives. That brokenness will react. It will fight back. Jesus knows this. He knows what the world will do to him. Because Jesus has come, not to disrupt the hold of sin over his creation, but to break its hold. So he sends his apostles – and us, today – with the reminder that “*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.*” (Matt. 10:24) We get to participate in Christ's mission to bring healing to our broken world, and we should expect that the brokenness of the world will fight back. You should be afraid, right?

Fear. That's the natural response. But here's the thing: you have a supernatural reason for hope. You've got a loving Father.

Your heavenly Father holds you to be indispensable. He will never neglect or disregard you. Your heavenly Father is better than even the best earthly father. He knows you, even better than you know yourself. Your Father in heaven understands what you truly need, and the best time to meet (or exceed!) that need. Even in the darkest and most difficult times, the One who has counted the number of hairs on your head **remembers you.**

As a Christian, as someone who is being discipled by Jesus in your journey through life, listen to his words today: “*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.*” (Matt. 10:28) **Jesus calls you to life freed from fear of the world.** There's pandemic in the world. Do not fear it. There's social turmoil in the world. Do not fear it. There's hardship that the world will bring to all who follow Jesus. Do not fear it. **Expect such things, but do not fear them.**¹

Your heavenly Father's care for you is a greater power than anything the world might bring your way. Indeed, as Jesus tells his disciples, your Father in heaven is the only one of whom we'd have reason to fear, as He created us in body and soul. His love for you is perfect. It's that perfect love that sent God's Son into our broken and fear-filled world to bring you back home. It's that perfect love that can give you courage on your way. And as we, His children, confess Jesus in this world, we will be welcomed into our Father's presence.

You and I can look in hope to the same God to whom Jeremiah prayed. The prophet had been imprisoned in the stocks by an unfaithful priest, someone who didn't like the message that Jeremiah delivered from the Lord. But when Jeremiah was set free, he couldn't help but continue proclaiming it! The prophet knew that God is the “dread warrior” who will win victory over all that would oppress His people. Since we're talking about fear, it might help to understand this image Jeremiah uses: the Lord is

¹ With thanks to Dr. Peter Nafzger

the unstoppable, mighty warrior who *inspires fear in His enemies* as he acts to bring justice. If the Lord is standing against you, you'll want to reconsider which side you're on!

When the Lord has called you to be His own, what else, ultimately do you have to fear? We heard in Psalm 91, "*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.*" With the company of the apostles, you've been called into the family of Christ. You have refuge in the name of Jesus, the name which the Father laid upon you in Holy Baptism. And in that name above all names, the indispensable name of Jesus, you are set free from fear, because nothing can take away the new life he gives you. And this is a gift that your Father wants to give all people.

Jesus sent out his apostles with an indispensable message. He's sending you, too. It's natural to be afraid. But you and I are part of the Father's kingdom, the kingdom that comes to us through Jesus. In a world where disruption brings hardship and causes people to live in fear, the message of life in Christ is indeed indispensable. It can't be neglected or discarded if people are going to truly live. Wherever God sends us, we get to show the people we meet that they are valued in their heavenly Father's sight. He remembers them. They are indispensable.

Our Lord send us to bring good disruption in the world. Show love to others who have experienced suffering due to the pandemic. Show love to others who have experienced suffering due to racial turmoil and social injustice. Show love to others who have felt disconnected from God and his Church. Set free from a life of fear, taking courage in Christ, go where Jesus is sending you. Go, as St. Paul calls us, as servants of righteousness. (Romans 6:18)

Go where the Son sends you. Have confidence that our Father values you and remembers you. He holds you to be indispensable, too.

Amen.

ⁱ Passage for memory:

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 6:23