

SEASON AFTER PENTECOST SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST JUNE 21 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 10:5, 21-33

'Fear Is Not A Factor'

Originally airing twenty years ago, reality television show Fear Factor challenged contestants to perform dangerous and disgusting stunts to face and master basic fears. Those who were too afraid were eliminated. The last man or woman remaining in the game won \$50,000. Successfully mastering all of the fearsome stunts of the show, the host Joe Rogan congratulated the winner with these words, "Apparently, fear is not a factor for you."

The show was so popular, it was revived several times. Why? Perhaps we identify with those on the show because we are surrounded by fears. Life in North America in the twenty-first century is saturated with anxiety, worry, and fear. For many, fear has become a lifestyle that demands some kind of drug, some kind of therapy, some kind of relief. What do we fear? Our fears are as unique and personal as each of us. Children fear their parents, parents fear their children, wives fear their husbands, husbands fear their wives, grandparents fear their grandchildren, workers fear their bosses. Some fear being late, missing the deadline, losing their jobs, or losing the farm. Some are deathly afraid of losing friends, of not being loved, of loneliness. Did you not hear your own personal fear? Perhaps you are not afraid of anything. Or maybe, you are simply afraid of facing your deepest fear.

Jesus spoke the words of our text to His twelve disciples as they sent out to preach the Gospel to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. They were afraid. Plainly, Christ told them that they were sent out like sheep in the midst of wolves. Persecution, whippings, trials, and hatred from their own family members was waiting for these disciples of Jesus. They should not be surprised that this would be coming, Christ assured them. He was their Teacher and their Master. But the religious experts called Him Beelzebub, the Prince of demons, working His miracles by satanic arts. If people did not hold back from blaspheming Jesus, the Lord

of Life in this way, certainly those who follow Jesus would also be called names. The twelve disciples certainly had good reason to fear.

But Christ told them three times, “Do not fear.” Losing property, popularity, and even our lives are tragic events for us. But we should not fear any of these things. Indeed, all twelve disciples except Judas would one day face those who kill the body, and lose their earthly lives for confessing Jesus before men. Something far worse truly should stir fear in our hearts: losing God, losing our bodies, and losing our souls forever.

The first commandment teaches us to fear, love and trust in God above all things. Part of believing in God is a healthy fear of Him: fear of losing His love for all eternity. Proper fear in the heart of the Christian is the fear of God who is able to destroy body and soul in hell. Public shame, persecution, even prison and death cannot compare to the unending anguish, regret and torment of those in hell: where forever the damned are painfully aware that they have rejected God and His love, and must forever be separated from Him. Hell comes to those who deny the Saviour before men. Fear of men silences the words we would speak to confess Jesus before the world. But do not fear men. Do not let what other people think or say keep you silent about your Lord or stop you from confessing Christ. People come and go. But God remains forever. Without Him, we will most certainly be destroyed in body and soul in hell. Of this, we should be afraid. Be very afraid.

To us, who have not always confessed Jesus before men, to our very real fears of hell and other smaller fears, God speaks His comforting word of forgiveness. While warning us of the greatest danger that threatens us, Jesus makes it very clear that God’s power, love, and compassion are even greater. Fears may surround us on every side. But Christ factors out fear. Jesus tells us that the Father cares about sparrows sold for less than a penny, and that the Father numbers each hair on our heads. That the all-seeing Creator keeps track of such trivial details shows us how much more He loves us, and cares about us. We are worth more to God than sparrows and hair. How do we know this? His only Son Jesus faced the fearful ordeal of the cross: both agonizing and disgusting, for us. Christ chose to face the anger and fists of those who kill the body, but cannot touch the soul. Like a sparrow falling to the ground, Jesus died on the cross for us, insignificant to many, but precious to God, and to us who believe. In place of us who deserve it, Christ faced the fear of hell itself, and descended where body and soul suffer to announce His victory over sin, death, and hell. Christ rose alive again to factor fear out of our lives. We ourselves have no power to banish the fears which threat-

en our bodies and our souls. But the resurrected Jesus washes fear out of our lives with water and His Word. The living Jesus feeds us with His body and blood to strengthen us so that we can stand up to those who strike fear in us. Christ factors fear out of the hearts of those who believe in Him.

We pray that we might be bold to confess Jesus at all times and in all places. But not only fear of hell opens our mouths to confess Christ before men. We also have His promise. "So everyone who acknowledges Me before men," Jesus promises, "I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven."

The Sum Of All Fears is a movie of escalating international tensions when a nuclear bomb goes off at a football game in Baltimore. The greatest fear evoked by the movie is not only death, but the total destruction of all life on the planet by nuclear weapons. The sum of all our fears, Jesus tells us, is not nuclear war, but the very real fear of being separated from God forever in hell. Yet, even this fear is not a factor for those who are in Christ. In the face of every earthly fear, we confess Christ with the promise that He will confess us before the Father in heaven. Amen.