

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 3A - Proper 7A
June 21, 2020
Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

God is For the Birds

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. . . . 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Matthew 10: 28-29, 31 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

With all the talk of slavery we've been hearing lately, it's good to hear our Lord's Words today. For we are not what we once were. We were once slaves to sin, death, the devil. We were enslaved to the world and our own sinful thoughts and passions. We were God's enemies. But, in Christ, we have been set free from all that. In Christ, we have been released from sin and brought from death to life. Christ has freed us from the power of the devil so he no longer has dominion over us. We are no longer captive to the world and its sinful ways and desires. We've been freed from the dominion that sin had over us and we now are under grace and not law. God has made us His children so we are free from sin and slaves to Him. And what a blessed bondage that is! For it sets us free from fear of God's wrath and punishment. It sets us free to love and serve our neighbor without compulsion but willingly and with great joy. It sets us free to live as slaves of righteousness.

Still, as the people of God, we face danger on every side. Not only is there much to fear just by living in this world, there's even more to fear being a child of God. That's what Jesus tells His Apostles as He sends them out to labor in His harvest. And He knew what He was talking about. He knew full well how difficult it is to follow God and His Word as the devil and the world team up against Him.

You see, the world always wanted to kill Jesus. When He was just a young boy, Herod sent his soldiers to kill every boy under two years old in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. But God warned Joseph in a dream, and Jesus was delivered from death.

Thirty years later Jesus preached His first sermon in Nazareth. They wanted to kill Him then too. And this time it wasn't an impersonal order from an insane king. In Nazareth it was people who'd known Him who wanted to throw Him off a cliff. But Jesus was again delivered from death as He walked through their midst (John 4:16-30).

But the world would eventually get its way. The day would come when Jesus would not be saved from death, but delivered into death by the will of the Father in order to make sinners

into sons – and so we are. The people who Jesus came to save would eventually gather in the court of Pontius Pilate and cry out, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” The world simply could not pass up the chance to murder the Son of God.

This isn't surprising, of course. The world is thoroughly ruined by sin and enslaved to death and the devil. When the world sees Jesus it sees someone it can't handle or control. Our Lord is not like other men. He is offensive to the world because while the world is filled with sin and death, Jesus is filled with forgiveness and life. He holds Truth and Beauty before our eyes and the world can't handle the truth and isn't interested in beauty. And so, though Herod and the Nazarenes don't get to kill Jesus when they want to, Jesus will still walk the road to Golgotha and die.

He does not save Himself from His crucifixion. He does not come down from the cross in earthly pomp and might. He does not kill every sinner with a word and send them all into everlasting torment. When the Lord is betrayed, He loves His betrayer. When He is reviled, He does not revile in return. When He is slandered, He remains silent. When He is handed over to the centurions to be crucified, He lets them drive in the nails.

And Jesus tells those who follow him that they too will be persecuted. But the persecution won't always come from outsiders. It will often come from much closer to home. Jesus says, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.” How horrible that is! And yet we see that it is true – in history and in our own day.

Yet, what goes for Jesus goes for us also. As many of us as have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death and resurrection. So we will be persecuted. The world will stop at nothing until it has removed every trace of Christ, His message, and His people.

You see, you are no better than Jesus. That's why He tells you to expect the world to treat you as it treated Him. And it does. The world will do everything it can to silence you, minimize you, cancel you, and swallow you up in its grave forever. The world demands that you listen to its words and follow its ways and not listen to nor trust the Lord's words. God has promised that He will provide all that you need, both now and in eternity. The world doesn't want you to believe and trust what God has promised. And so the world might try to convince you that when the rain washes away your crops, you lose your job, or you suffer disease or hardship that God has abandoned you.

But if the world can't make you think God's abandoned you, it will often do something even worse. The world may try to make you think that you can get along fine without God. The world might give you wealth, a stable job, a healthy body, and every good thing that your heart can desire.

In either case, the world wants you to share in its hopelessness, to live without God. It wants you to despair that God loves you or to be so comfortable that you don't think God has anything to offer. Both of these roads are on the wide path that leads to eternal death.

So, beloved, just as trees cannot live without water, Christians cannot live without the Church which delivers the life-giving and life-sustaining Word of God. For it's that very Word that tells you that you are a sinner for whom Christ died. That Word tells you that the creator of the Universe took on human flesh so that He could suffer and die in your place. That Word in the water is the means by which you became God's child in Baptism. That Word combined with bread and wine is the means by which you receive the forgiveness of your sins in the Lord's Supper. And if you separate yourself from the place where He gives life and salvation, only death will remain.

And so it is not lightly that Jesus says, "Fear the One who can destroy your body and soul in hell." For the devil and the world don't have that kind of power. But the One who does, God Himself, is for the birds. "Not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." Elsewhere Jesus says, "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" To which Jesus says, "Fear not, you *are* of more value than many sparrows." So if God is for the birds, He is even more for you. He even knows, and cares, how many hairs you have on your head.

So in the midst of fears brought on by the world and the devil, as they scream and rage and do their worst against you, remember the One who is for you. For they do not have ultimate power over you. God does. Those who seek to destroy your body have been overcome by Jesus. Your heavenly Father has not killed you in your unholiness. He has not held your iniquity against you. Instead He has punished His own Son. He has offered Him in your place. The Lord's divine justice has been satisfied. Every sin has been punished. And Jesus, who has borne them all in your place, still loves you and still cares for you. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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