

Faith Lutheran Church (Okemos), Pastor Julie Winklepleck
Pr. 7A, L12, P+4, June 25, 2023
Matthew 10

Kids [adapted from Carolyn Brown]: In Genesis 21 [semi-continuous reading, I forgot to ask which Old Testament reading Faith was using], we hear a story about two mothers who couldn't get along. They bickered, they were jealous, they treated each other badly. Even God couldn't figure out how to keep them in the same tent. When Sarah sent Hagar away into the wilderness, God helped her find an oasis with water. God protected Hagar and Ishmael as they traveled and made a new home. God fulfilled the promise that Ishmael would also father a great nation, or religion, which we now know as Islam. God also fulfilled the promise to Abraham and Sarah, who through Isaac and his son Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons, created the nation of Israel. God loves us, even when we are at our worst; God protects us and brings us out the other side to a better tomorrow. Let us pray.

Jesus, help us to stop bickering and truly love our neighbors. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, through God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I begin this morning by quoting that great princess, Carrie Fisher, who said: "Stay afraid, but do it anyway."

We are going to be afraid. That's human. Someone who is brave...it doesn't mean they are not afraid... it means they hold their fear in tension with their ability keep moving, and to do what they need to do.

Jesus is sending us out to proclaim God's love, to proclaim the kin-dom. Last week, God told us through Jesus to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. That means to go out, and share God's love, and be prepared for anything. **You** can't prepare yourself for anything, right? But **God** can prepare you for **anything**. God prepares us for the jobs God gives us to do.

This kin-dom, which God forms out of us, it is an upside-down world in which sparrows matter, and we are valued even more. Even though the word "trust" does not appear in this passage, the concept of trust is shot through

it, the idea of letting God use us, letting God hold us, as we do the things that we need to do, trusting that God will guide and direct us. Our work may not be flashy; we're not building kingdoms, or nations, like Isaac and Ishmael did; but we are creating love in our corners of our world. In those places, in this house, in this community, we are making God's vision come alive.

Our passage holds many surprises. It begins, *A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master* [v. 24] ... that is in response to last week's reading about going out, being wise as serpents, innocent as doves... the idea of running into trouble. Running into people who aren't going to listen to you, who are going to reject you. Jesus is saying, don't worry about them. *If they have called the master of the house Be-el'zebul, how much more will they malign those of his household* [v. 25b]... Jesus is saying, you have to go to the people who are going to listen to you. Larry Foster, who was a pastor, who died recently, he taught Healthy Congregations, what we also call Family Systems, which Pastor Ellen may have talked to you about. He used to say, Work with the motivated. He would say, don't worry about the people who aren't with you. Work with the motivated, the people who get your vision. When you have visions, as this congregation does, for the work you do with refugees, the work you do feeding people, and through your personal needs pantry... if someone isn't on board with that vision, don't worry about them. Just go ahead, carry on, carry out your vision.

I love when Jesus says, *What I tell you in the dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the housetops* [v.27]. Jesus doesn't operate in secrets. Jesus makes himself known. And God makes God's love known. If someone says to you that they have a secret, something they know that you don't ... don't worry about it. Trust the knowledge that comes to you from God.

I'm avoiding talking about the hard part, which is this sword thing [v. 34]. This is not what we expect to hear from Jesus, right? that he has come not to bring peace, but a sword. Because I think this is a difficult-to-understand concept – what is Jesus talking about here? I am going to invoke Martin Luther King, Jr., who in a speech given in 1961, called “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience,” talked to Southern liberal whites about the student movement, the Freedom Riders, addressing the question, why are they

coming to the South? Martin Luther King talked about the students' responding to a negative peace that had encompassed the South.

True peace is not merely the absence of tension, but it is the presence of justice and brotherhood. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said, "I come not to bring peace but a sword." Now Jesus didn't mean he came to start war, to bring a physical sword, and he didn't mean, I come not to bring a positive peace. But I think what Jesus was saying in substance was this, that I come not to bring an old negative peace, which makes for stagnant passivity and deadening complacency, I come to bring something different, and whenever I come, a conflict is precipitated, between the old and the new, whenever I come a struggle takes place between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. I come not to bring a negative peace, but a positive peace, which is brotherhood, which is justice, which is the Kingdom of God.

[from *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James M. Washington (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), pp. 50-51].

This sword that Jesus brings has the potential to divide us; it also has the potential to reveal where our work is, to reveal where oppression is, to reveal where hunger is, to reveal where God's people need to be shining God's light and love.

Jesus says, don't be afraid. Even though the devil may come after you... all right, he doesn't say the devil, but he talks about those who can destroy both soul and body in hell. I think of that as the devil. Jesus says, do not fear this. God has your back. God, who loves sparrows, and values you even more.

Our thread is always love. Our thread is doing God's work, which we are called to do. I think about... as the end of Pride month is coming... I think about division, those things that can divide families, and I think about all the lgbtq persons who have been isolated from their families. One of the blessings of the AIDS crisis, back in the 90s... there were many stories... obviously of the gay community coming together to take care of their own. But there were also stories of families who had thrown out their queer kids... bringing those queer kids back home to nurse them... and learning, in the midst of a crisis, to look beyond their fear, and to look beyond what they had

been taught, to learn something new. These divisions that can happen... it breaks my heart how much they happen in the church, because of the church. How many faithful people rejected their queer kids because they thought that was somehow pleasing God... and I know that's not what you believe here, I know you are a Reconciling in Christ congregation... I know that you are very supportive of the LGBTQ community and indeed have LGBTQ members. Therefore, I feel safe talking about this, talking about the ways the church itself can go astray, and the way that we as church can learn something new, can listen to the voice of God's love bringing us back together.

Our Romans reading calls for unity, and I struggle with it, because there are going to be as many kinds of churches as there are people... I don't think there will ever be one great church again. So perhaps this is a cliché, but I would say we are being called to unity but not uniformity; that's the distinction, that we are called to unity in Christ, Christ who loves us, who died for us, who shows us how to live and serve... how to form a new family. Hopefully it includes our old family. But what is important is the work we do together. What is important is the support we give one another and the witness we take out into the community, of who we are, who God is, and how that love shapes and directs us.

Fear not, Jesus says three times in this passage. I think he's trying to normalize the idea that there **is** fear. I think he's saying, together, find the strength and fortitude to conquer that fear, to hear God's voice, louder than the voice of our fears. To hear God's voice... telling us to love, telling us to embrace people who are different... telling us that his eye is on the sparrow... so we have no fear, and we know that God watches us (and not in that creepy stalker way, in the good way). God undergirds everything we do. God's love surrounds and fills us; God's love makes everything possible.

In the name of the Creator, the Child, and the Comforter, Amen.