

# Fear Not

Preached on The Fifth Sunday after Trinity  
Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ

July 4, 2021

Text: 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3: 8-15: Luke 5: 1-11

Over these last five weeks our lessons have been showing us what it means to live out the life we have in Jesus. Again, that's the point of the lessons during Trinitytide. Over the first half of the year the Church tells us the story of our redemption as she walks us through the life and ministry of Jesus, from his birth to his cross. Now the Church shows us what it looks like to follow Jesus and to live as one of his people. And so we spent two Sundays looking at the love of God and what it means to live in his love and show it to others. The last two Sundays we have looked at how the love of God should manifest itself in our lives as *grace* and *mercy*. Today the lessons call us to live in the *peace* of God.

These are all challenging things to live out. We accept the grace of God, but then we fail to be gracious with others. We accept the mercy of God, but we fail to show mercy to others. And God grants us his peace, promising his care and provision, but we still hold on tightly to our worldly cares, and look to the world to meet our needs. It's uncertain which is more difficult: to learn to love the unlovable people in our lives, or to learn to truly live in peace, handing over all of our problems to God. But if we would grow closer to God and display his love to the world, these are things that we *have* to do—they're not optional.

St. Peter wrote the Epistle we heard a few minutes ago to Christians who were facing serious persecution. People wanted to kill them. But despite their hardships, Peter says "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind." The world is fractious; it is often every man for himself. Divisions weaken the Body of Christ just as with nations. In either case, it is often not external enemies, but internal rot, that brings them to ruin. The Church should be united, having one mind—"the mind which was in Christ Jesus". Have sympathy and stand with your brothers and sisters the same way that Jesus has stood with you. Show each other "brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind," as Peter says. (3: 8) Model the humble love that Jesus has shown us as we deal with each other, and especially as we deal with the world.

*"Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing." (1 Peter 3:9)*

Look at the example of Jesus. He came to bless us, not by retaliating against evil with evil, but by allowing himself to be crucified. He who knew no sin died a sinner's death, that he might save us from the consequences of our sin. If Jesus had repaid evil

with evil, if he had reviled when he was reviled, you and I would still be dead in our sins. He met evil with good and purchased our redemption, and now we live in that redemption.

As his followers, we shouldn't be surprised when we have to endure evil. It was Jesus himself who told us,

*“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).*

“Blessed are you” when others persecute you? This seems so counter-intuitive. Can you imagine a church in America today that advertises itself as a place where its members will certainly face persecution, but nevertheless are called to bless their persecutors? What is more likely is that you will find a place where people huddle together, bemoaning their victimhood and supporting calumny and false witness against those they perceive as enemies. Hence, St. Peter quotes from Psalm 34, for the benefit of those early churches and for us:

*“For whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:10-12)*

These verses from the Psalms spoke to Peter, especially in light of his temperament. He was an impetuous man who said what he thought, and his mouth sometimes got him into trouble. There's probably nothing so opposed to peace as the tongue. Gossip and unkind words will tear a church apart and utterly destroy our Christian witness faster than anything else. We all, like Peter, have things to learn about peacemaking. If Peter took this lesson to heart, so can we.

But the Church's witness is also severely undercut when Christians align themselves with the power-hungry. Those who idolize power and believe winning is everything, will eventually justify any evil that serves that end. When the Church accepts the world's premise that some desirable end justifies *any* means, then she has lost her way. The world won't see love; it will see a church that seeks to destroy its perceived enemies and whose only concern seems to be self-protection. This is a church ruled by fear, seeing threats everywhere. But St. Peter confronts this in a simple, but wise and beautiful way: “who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?” (13) Why fear evil men? How much time are you spending worrying about evil and not trusting God's promise of blessing? Who has any power to harm you, if you're following the one man who truly is good?

We will surely suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness, but that's not ultimately harm, because we are honoring Christ the Lord. Our prime concern should be keeping our heart in the love and fear of God and obeying him in all things. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and God will take care of everything else. Today's Gospel gives us a dramatic illustration of this. It reminds us that when Jesus calls us to forsake all and to follow him, that we can trust him, not worrying about the outcome. St. Luke tells how Jesus was teaching at the shore of the Sea of Galilee. He was a popular teacher and the crowds had gathered, practically pushing him into the water. There were two fishing boats pulled up on the beach—one of them Peter's—and so Jesus got into his boat and asked him to take it out from shore a bit, so that he could teach the people from there.

This probably wasn't what Peter wanted to do. He and his friends had been out fishing all night and hadn't caught a thing. All he really wanted to do was finish washing out his net so that he could go home and get some sleep. Nevertheless, Peter did what Jesus asked him. Water has good acoustic properties, so Jesus sat there in the boat and talked to the people gathered on the beach. Peter was sitting there in the boat behind Jesus, probably picking the junk out of his net, washing it, and getting ready to lay it out to dry on the beach once Jesus was done. Peter was no doubt listening to what Jesus had to say; but his attention was really on his nets, his livelihood.

How often are we just like that? We read the Scriptures, but our minds are focused more on what we have to get done today than on what God wants us to hear. We are not at peace. We come to church on Sunday to worship, but our minds are distracted and full of care. How often we desire to sit at the feet of Jesus; yet his words go in one ear and out the other because we cannot put aside our anxieties. We're like Peter, sitting there pulling bits of seaweed from his net and just wanting to go home.

But Peter didn't get to go home. Jesus finished teaching the people and instead of asking Peter to take him back to shore, he said, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." We can imagine Peter casting his net rather half-heartedly—not too far out, because he was planning on immediately pulling it back in. But then Luke says:

*And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. (Luke 5:6-7)*

It seems very likely that Jesus has a love of ironic humor. There was Peter, more concerned about his livelihood than he was about the things of God; and now Jesus overwhelms Peter with fish—so many fish that his buddies had to row out and help him, nearly swamping their boats in the process. They fought and struggled to get the fish to shore, and then the reality of the situation sank into Peter's mind. This wasn't just some

rabbi—only God could work a miracle like that! And so realizing suddenly that he was in the presence of the holy, Peter fell down to the ground in front of Jesus and wailed, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

A sense of fear and unworthiness is the universal response of sinful man to a holy God throughout the Scriptures. Isaiah, after an encounter with the Living God said,

*“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Is. 6:5)*

So many in the modern age have lost any sense of the majesty and holiness of God. We imagine a kindly grandfather who wants us to be happy and doesn’t really expect that much from us. This mindset is miles from St. Peter, who falls at Jesus’s feet in humble worship, thankful for this extravagant gift, and trusting in him. Jesus gave Peter a dramatic demonstration that he would take care of him, and Peter was prepared to follow him. “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” And that’s just what Peter and his friends did. “When they had brought their boats to land, *they left everything and followed him.*”

Now Jesus doesn’t call all of us to leave our jobs and make the Gospel our full-time profession; but nevertheless his call is to all of us, and it is quite demanding. In Luke 14:33 he tells us, “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” This is the important lesson for today. You and I need to let go of our obsession with the transitory and fix our hearts instead on Jesus Christ. That is the only way we can serve him with joy. Look again at those closing words from our Epistle.

*“Who can harm you if you are zealous for good? And if you do suffer for the sake of righteousness, consider it a blessing. Don’t be afraid. Do not be troubled. Sanctify God in your hearts—honor him—and he will take care of you.”*

Fear him and you have no need to fear anything else. Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and he will work everything else out for your good and for your eternal blessing.

As Christians we should have a very different perspective on suffering than the world does, because we have an eternal perspective—we know that God is working out all things for good despite what it may look like in the short-term. Think of all the situations in Scripture that would have looked hopeless from a worldly way of thinking; yet God worked them for good. He is the master of turning the tables. He always turns the persecution of the saints into something good. That’s why Peter can exhort us and ask, “Who can harm you?” If God is for us, who can be against us?

Trials and tribulations will come, but we have no reason to fear. Realizing this, we can be about the kingdom work that God has given us. We can truly be the peacemakers he has called us to be, first and foremost because we've experienced his peace ourselves. We already know how the story will end. The saints of God we see in the book of Revelation, those overcoming the armies and forces of evil, do not have weapons; yet they follow the Captain of their Salvation, "clothed in fine linen, white and pure" which is their righteousness. As the angel said to John, these are they who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It is him we follow, and it is by him we conquer and are victorious.

*In the Name...*