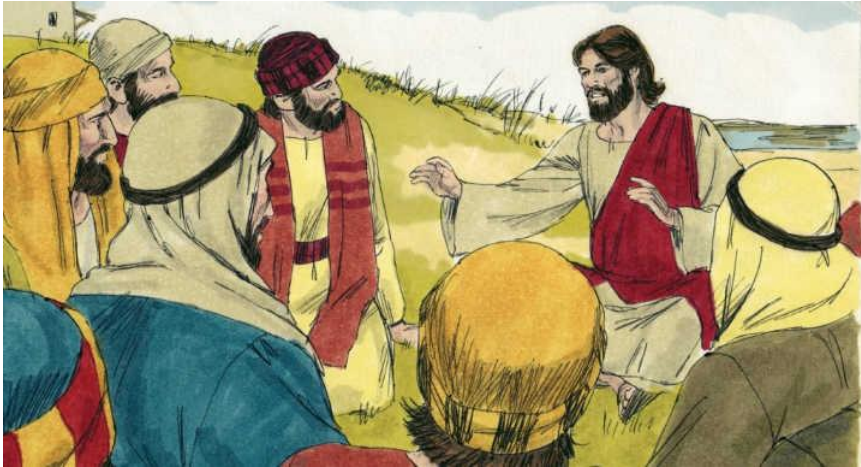


June 21, 2020
3rd Sunday after Pentecost



**Jesus teaching the disciples before
sending them out on their first mission trip.**

Genesis 21:8-21 Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17
Romans 6:1b-11 Matthew 10:24-39

ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Fairview Heights, IL 62208
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ANNOUNCEMENTS: St. John has recently learned that a baby girl has been born to Aaron and Christine Drake on 6/16 in California. Her name is Juliana and she weighed 5lbs, 6 ounces. We wish all the best to the parents and grandparents.

Peace and Blessings, Pastor Rosemary
618-660-8894 gcaptain@charter.net

CALL TO WORSHIP: *Based on the Genesis and Psalm texts*
Come, nations of the earth, to bow before God.
Distant galaxies proclaim the Creator of all things.
We are humbled by the wonders of creation.
We are amazed by God's mighty works.
This infinite God cares for each one of us.
God hears our cries and responds to our needs.
In our days of trouble, we call on our God.
We are confident that God listens and answers.
Let us also call on God with our prayers of thanks.
Let us celebrate the wondrous things God provides.
God cares for us, even when others reject us.
We gather to glorify God's name.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION:

Holy God, come to us in our distress. We are weary of conflict and long for your healing waters of forgiveness and renewal. You have sent us a teacher to draw us into discipleship, and we have found fulfillment when we are faithful to Christ's call. We long to find peace as we serve, but more often we encounter a sword. Our disagreements are many, and our capacity to forgive is strained. Send your light that we might not falter in our caring and in the proclamation of your good news. Amen.

SCRIPTURE TEXT: Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴ "Disciples aren't greater than their teacher, and slaves aren't greater than their master. ²⁵ It's enough for disciples to be like their teacher and slaves like their master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, it's certain that they will call the members of his household by even worse names.

Whom to fear

²⁶“Therefore, don’t be afraid of those people because nothing is hidden that won’t be revealed, and nothing secret that won’t be brought out into the open. ²⁷What I say to you in the darkness, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, announce from the rooftops. ²⁸Don’t be afraid of those who kill the body but can’t kill the soul. Instead, be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. ²⁹Aren’t two sparrows



sold for a small coin? But not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father knowing about it already. ³⁰Even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹Don’t be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

Confessing Christ to people

³²“Therefore, everyone who acknowledges me before people, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven. ³³But everyone who denies me before people, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Trouble in the family

³⁴“Don’t think that I’ve come to bring peace to the earth. I haven’t come to bring peace but a sword. ³⁵I’ve come to turn a man *against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*. ³⁶*People’s enemies are members of their own households.* (from *Matthew 10:36 Mic 7:6*) ³⁷“Those who love

father or mother more than me aren’t worthy of me. Those who love son or daughter more than me aren’t worthy of me. ³⁸Those who don’t pick up their crosses and follow me aren’t worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their lives will lose them, and those who lose their lives because of me will find them.

MESSAGE: (*With thoughts from Fred Craddock and Tom Long.*)

These teachings to the disciples began with last Sunday’s reading and will continue into next Sunday. This fairly long teaching from Jesus gives us words that sound a little confusing. It might be helpful if we think about these words as they were first written down, not as they were first said. The author of this Gospel, for ease we’ll call Matthew, wrote these words 50 years after the death of Jesus. At the time 80 A.D. the early Christians were beginning to form churches under the guidance of those who had followed the disciples, one being the church of this author, Matthew.

“If we take the view that Matthew is here giving to his church, which is living under social, economic, and political as well as religious pressure, the words of Jesus for their situation, then two benefits follow: First, we are better able to understand how the words of Jesus functioned for the early Christians. Here in 10:24-39 we have sayings of Jesus found in partial and modified parallels in the other Gospels, but which are now gathered into a single body of instructions for the mission. Collecting and editing these sayings for a church in a particular situation is Matthew’s gift to his

church and to us. Second, having seen how the church appropriated Jesus' teachings for a given time and place, we are not only permitted but also obligated to hear those teachings afresh and anew in our own situation." (Craddock)

With this in mind, let's look at a few of those passages that make us scratch our heads. In verses 24-25 Jesus tells his followers that they surely can expect opposition because he, their leader, faced it, and the servant is not greater than the master. Expect no exemptions. Matthew relates the Beelzebul controversy in chapter 12. Here the point is simply that Jesus' followers should expect to be called names and to be misrepresented. (*What names are we called in our context? Bible thumpers. Crazy evangelicals? I'm sure you can think of more.*)

Verses 29-31 do not convey warning but encouragement. God will never, in all that you endure, abandon you. God knows and is concerned about the fall of a sparrow, worth only a half-penny. God is so attentive to your life that even the number of hairs on your head is known to God. Can anyone doubt, then, the attention and care of God for those who love and serve faithfully?

In verses 32-33 we read the same theme. There will be earthly judgment, pressure to be silent, to deny Christ; but remember, those who acknowledge the lordship of Christ will have their names spoken in advocacy before the throne of God. Conversely, silence or denial of faith under duress will have its recompense.

I always found the picture scenes of domestic strife created by loyalty to Christ in verses 34-39 disturbing. Do we have to choose between family and Christ? In the time of the first church, it was a huge dilemma for those who wanted to follow Christ and those in their family who wanted to stay in the synagogues where their family had worshiped as Jews for many generations.

For us, it could be a choice between having Sunday brunch with the extended family or going to church. It could be about choosing if your children participate with soccer or ice hockey on Sunday mornings or going to church. This type of domestic strife can be upsetting but know that such pain was and is no surprise to God. In Matthew's church anyone who chose to become a disciple of Jesus had serious personal, domestic, social, political, and economic consequences. (*Do you believe this is true in our culture today?*)

The call we have heard from Jesus numerous times says, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, you must take up your cross and follow. That can sound frightening. However, we can be assured that there is **nothing that the world, in Matthew's time or our time, can do that is able to eradicate the gospel or destroy God's loving and watchful care over the faithful.**

The world can forbid or discourage missionary activity but "nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known." Our friends can turn their backs on us. Our family can be upset with us.

We can be ostracized and, in some cases, thrown into isolation, but they have no power over our soul. Only God has that power. Only God is to be feared, and God, who counts the hairs on our heads and who does not fail to note even the falling of a single common sparrow, can be trusted to treasure those who serve the kingdom.

STAND UP
SPEAK UP. So, proclaim the gospel without dread. (Verse 38) **To live with all one's energies focused in upon oneself is to love the life one seeks; to give one's life away in the name of Christ is to be given all that makes life free, holy, and good. Amen.**

OFFERING: Thank you for continuing your gifts to the church. The doors may be closed, but the work of the church continues.

LET US PRAY: Here we are, dear God of love. We are perplexed during these times of pandemic and social unrest. We are told to stand up, but we are cautious about our health. We are told to speak out but we are afraid we might say the wrong things and upset someone. We need your courage, Jesus. We need the Holy Spirit to lift us up; give us confidence, courage, energy, and joy to be the people you are calling us to be. What we know we can do right now, in this time of worship, is to pray. And we do pray, Faithful God. We pray for those affected by the pandemic; the who are ill, those who have died, and the



families of those who are grieving. We pray for and thank all the first responders who serve to care for those who are ill or grieving. We pray for those on our prayer lists. We pray for those who serve us, wearing their masks and washing their hands. We pray for those in nursing homes who are isolated for their protection, yet make their loneliness worse. We pray for those searching for a vaccine. We pray for those who are making policies and the rules for our lives right now. May they seek the wisdom of the experts. We pray for the families who have lost loved ones who have been killed by those who were afraid of them. We pray for those of us who have white skin that we change our fears of the “others” to love for all. We have a white problem as our brothers and sisters of color are denied the same rights and respects that we enjoy. What can we do to change that? God help us all.

And we pray for our church, that it may once again speak praises and give glory to our God of love and compassion. But we also pray that we can gather safely because we care about each other. May our church be a place of rest, solitude, refuge, and safety to all. We pray all these things in the name of the one who came to save us all, Jesus Christ. Amen.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard, Bill Underwood.

Whenever the Governor allows 50 people to gather, our church will open; possibly by July 5.