



Third Sunday after Pentecost

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Sunday 21 June 2020

READINGS

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

Don't fear, God is near

God is faithful and invites us to look beyond our own resources and self-interest to a larger vision of life. When trouble surrounds us, we are not alone; God is with us. These affirmations burst forth from today's lectionary readings.

In the first reading, in Genesis, Hagar is distraught after her banishment together with her son - she cries out to God in anguish and God responds and provides means for their survival. Our cries for help are part of a myriad of other voices and influences within which God is at work. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul recognizes the destructive power of sin but he counters that with the saving power of Christ. He further talks about the Christian journey being a process of dying to self. We die to the past, to sin, and to old behaviours. We rise to new possibilities and an open future in God. In Christian spirituality, dying to self often points to letting go of our individualistic selves in order to open ourselves up to a much wider vision of life.

In today's Gospel passage, which is the end of Jesus' commissioning speech to his disciples, He prepares and instructs the twelve for the continuation of his mission. They are to demonstrate what God's Kingdom looks like, to bring new possibilities for healing, wholeness, truth-telling, and to repair relationships. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus empowered them to do the things that he does: **cast out demons, heal people with every kind of sickness, teach about God's ways**. We, too, struggle to fully understand Jesus' power and to "keep the faith," That is why Jesus encourages his disciples not to fear those who might contradict or even persecute them.

In this Gospel passage, Matthew reminds his listeners, and subsequently reminds us to embark on the path of Christ, embracing both the joys and tragedies of life in their totality. Here too, we become aware that part of embracing these seemingly contradictory realities of life, is to let go of self interest and embrace a larger vision of life: Dying to yourself, and losing your life, takes us beyond the anxieties of the moment to finding meaning in God. No longer imprisoned by the past, we journey forth with new life. This is not some pie in the sky teaching! The mystic theologian Meister Eckhart expressed it in these words: **"Even now one rarely hears of people achieving great things unless**

they first stumble in some respect.” He also says further: “For the person who has learned to let go and let be, nothing can ever get in the way again” You can imagine Jesus on the eve of sending his twelve, probably naïve disciples when he pauses to equip them with a final spiritual gift: the ability to persevere in the face of resistance. Then he reminds them that our Heavenly Father is both incredibly powerful and infinitely compassionate: He assures them:

I. On the Journey, They Will Encounter Opposition

He begins with a wise warning: they will be called names, and as we all know, names do hurt us. They will even be misunderstood. Jesus is telling them that their lives will not be easier than his, and he urges them to embrace the life of faith with all of its pain and glory.

II. On the Journey, They Will Encounter God's Love

Jesus then urges the disciples to have no fear of those who might abuse them. In the Gospel, he is so insistent that he repeats three times that they need not be afraid. He encourages them to speak boldly to remember that they are answerable only to God, who alone has power over both their bodies and their souls. So Jesus says in the Gospel: “Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body”

Our society is saturated with anxiety, worry, and fear. For many of us, fear has become a lifestyle that demands some kind of relief, some therapy. What do we fear? What fills our heads with dread? What keeps us awake at night in these uncertain and disturbing times? Financial uncertainty, continued isolation – especially our elderly folk who are vulnerable, we also fear impoverishment and loss of our homes. We fear violence and ultimately, we fear death itself. Some of us are simply afraid of facing our deepest fear.

So how do those words of Jesus “do not fear” breathe new life in the hearts of fearful, powerless and voiceless disciples? Bad news engulfs the world, but we have good news to share with our neighbours, friends, coworkers, and others. Many are waiting for this good news

In his memoir **Secrets in the dark**, Frederick Beuchner has these encouraging words for us:

“We have it in us to work miracles of love and healing as well as to have them worked upon us. We have it in us to bless with God and forgive with God and heal with God and once in a while maybe even to grieve with some measure of God’s grief at another’s pain”

That is the good news! That no matter how fragile our faith and fierce our fear, we have freedom in Christ. We walk with God, we encounter our Lord Jesus Christ in Word, Sacrament, and in the gathered community, and we walk by faith through the gift of the Holy Spirit. God is faithful and invites us to look beyond our own resources and self-interest to a larger vision of life. When trouble surrounds us, we are not alone; God is with us. Amen.