

## Gospel - Matthew 10: 24-39

Third Sunday of Pentacost

Sermon 6.28.20

**Patti Case**



“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul...”

Today’s gospel seems tailor-made for the troubled times we’re living in. Or maybe it’s the Bible in general. Hmmm.

The pandemic. The death of George Floyd. Protests – and counter-protests, some violent, across the country and across the world, almost all without the simple protection the CDC so strongly recommends, Demands for an end to racial injustice, police brutality, for an end to law enforcement, capitalism, demands for an end to...well, you name it.

While some are reveling in this profound shake up, many of us are fearful.

Is this the kind of fear that Jesus is talking about? Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

As a white collar white kid, I have both feet firmly planted in the privileged class. Yes, I can say that I have been exposed to prejudice, profiling, harassment and other inequities as a woman. But I have never gone hungry. I’ve never been evicted. I’ve never been jailed or brutalized.

I have never walked a single step, let alone a mile in those shoes.

Yet I, too, will admit to having had sleepless nights. And I have heard fear vocalized by so many of my friends and colleagues. Fear of being laid off. Of not being able to provide for children. Of what is happening to elders. Of isolation. Of anarchy. Fear of losing power as the political climate swings wildly. Fear that the future may be even worse than whatever we fear today. Fear of the police. Fear of not having police. Fear of the unknown. Fear of the known. Fear.

John Lennon is credited with saying:

“There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love. When we are afraid, we pull back from life. When we are in love, we open to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.”

Jesus is asking us to let go of our traditional fears and open our lives to passion, excitement and acceptance.

I found another profound statement about fear, this one from Marie Curie: “Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

How do we understand these wildly different perspectives? By getting past the headline-stealing rhetoric and truly listening. I’d like for the stories behind the headlines to do that for me, but sadly that’s not always the case.

A notable exception appeared in the Aberdeen Daily World. The headline was predictably eye-catching:

“Demonstrations turn into ugly clashes in Aberdeen.” The story recounted protests in downtown Aberdeen – one group in support of Black Lives Matter and one in support of law enforcement. When the two groups met, some angry protesters frightened others. Understandably. But the story goes on to explain that a social media post announcing the pro-law enforcement demonstration stated the idea was to “wave signs and flags in a show of support for our friends and neighbors in local law enforcement. This will be a peaceful gathering and any behavior besides that will absolutely not be tolerated.”

Reverend Sarah Monroe, who helped organize the Black Lives Matter gathering, explained: “Many of us have friends and family in law enforcement and were not there to wish any harm to police. We hope to continue to call for more resources and funding for treatment and housing in our community, instead of leaving the fallout of homelessness and mental health to police.”

I daresay there's a lot of middle ground there. Had the day not deteriorated into cursing and shouting, that ground could have been explored and solutions proposed. Maybe there's still opportunity for that outcome.

I spoke with Bishop Greg Rickel last week via Zoom. I don't say this to brag that I have the bishop on speed dial, although that was part of his message to me. I want to share something else he mentioned. I was relating my view that many of the positions the Bishop's office seems to advocate are urban-centric. They lack connection with the more rural elements of this diocese and sometimes they even veer off into political rhetoric rather than staying squarely centered on messages and acts of compassion. He related a bit of his background growing up in rural Arkansas. He demonstrated that, though he may not quite get the frustrations of rural dwellers in Mason County, he most certainly understands and often shares the perspectives of those living in the so-called "fly-over states." He said at one point he recommended that urban congregations find rural congregations and adopt one another, having a series of conversations in order to better understand diverse points of view. Maybe it's time to employ such a tactic again. Maybe we should adopt a lot of other congregations. Maybe, just maybe, we can find someone within our own congregation to listen to.

It is certainly time to listen. It is not time to condemn our neighbor or our fellow parishioner simply because he is of a different political party. Because she is wearing a mask and asking for six feet of space. Because we are fearful, and because we are reacting in anger. I would say it is never time for that, but particularly not now, when emotions are running high.

Our gospel is not just a song of comfort. By the time this gospel was written, disciples of Christ were being persecuted for their beliefs. So this is a march, not a lullaby.

For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Perhaps you read this as rationale for teen rebellion. I'm sure it's been used that way more than once! But no, it is a warning that following others in the name of wrongdoing was not an excuse for the early day disciples, and it's no excuse for us. These may be terrifying times we're living in, but they also represent a precipice. With the help of God our savior, we can listen. We can freefall into change. Or we can huddle, wrapped in fear of the "other."

George Floyd is an unlikely martyr. By all accounts, he had his ups and downs in his life. He served jail time. But maybe that's exactly the point here. What if God WAS one of us?

George Floyd's girlfriend, Courtney Ross, asked for the community to respond to his death in a way that honors him: "You can't fight fire with fire. Everything just burns, and I've seen it all day – people hate, they're hating, they're hating, they're mad. And he would not want that."

Amen.