June 25, 2023 **DARING DISCIPLES**

As Christians we can live beyond our unhappy circumstance, by seeking Christ in all things - by seeking his grace, his touch, and his mercy, also by immersing ourselves in his word and his work. We can also develop a disciplined devotional life and by being obedient to his will for our life. There is nothing like working for and through Christ. Whatever our sorrow or challenge today, we don't have to live unhappily ever after because God has a way of making things better for those who truly seek God and work faithfully for God.

In the beginning of Matthew gospel chapter 10. Jesus sent his disciples out to preach the Good News that the Kingdom of God is at hand. Jesus recognized that this would result in conflict. There would be those who would accept their word and there would be those who would not accept their word. And Jesus realized that when the disciples ran into inevitable opposition, they would be afraid. He realized that they would worry. And so Jesus said to his disciples: “Do not fear….”

In our Gospel reading for this Sunday, St. Matthew 10:24-39, is a reminder of just how much God cares for us. God’s promise of care and concern for his people extends from the pages of the Old Testament into the New Testament and even right into our own lives today. In Isaiah 43:1 we read “But now, this is what the LORD says--he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ’Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." We take our theme for this Sunday from the words of Jesus in our text: “Do Not Be Afraid”

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, there was a real danger of being killed for preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God. First Century Palestine was seething with unrest - under the yoke of Roman rule. And anyone, who threatened the delicate status quo, ran a serious risk of being put to death. And as we all know - Jesus himself was crucified for his radical message.  Our greatest comfort in any fear that we might face is knowing that someone really cares. At times there can be nothing more frightening than loneliness. Whenever someone who cares for us, this can make all the difference in the world.

We also live in a time of fear. The media loves to exploit the fears that our modern age seems to offer at every turn. Therefore, God’s choice is as important as ever in our lives. God’s choice is important not just for us but especially for those sitting in the darkness of fear all everywhere. We are reminded of God’s grace – a Father’s undeserved love for his disobedient children. By no choice of our own and by not doing of our own, God has saved us. In Acts 22:14,15, we read, "The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. You will be his witness to all men of what you have seen and heard" So do not be afraid. Share God’s valuable message with others.

Isn't that amazing? God knows everything that we go through and nothing that happens to us escapes him. Even if we die, it doesn't happen apart from God. **Even if we seem totally abandoned, even if our prayers don't seem to be answered, even if everything seems hopeless, God knows and God cares.** If that's the case, we can stop being afraid

Fear is “the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind.” Fear can box us in and hold us captive. It’s something which strikes not only our lives but our faith journey as well. Fear seems to be a part of our human experience. Adam and Eve have sinned, and God comes in the cool of the evening for His afternoon walk with them and he couldn’t find them. When He does, He asks, “Where were you?” Adam’s response was, “I was afraid!” There is a relationship between the fall of humanity and the fear of humanity.

There is a relationship between the fear which often grips our lives and sin. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus was trapped in fear. The religious leaders had been growing in their concern about Jesus that his popularity among the masses was too great and that they would lose their position of power, authority and influence.

The same is often true in our lives, especially in these times of uncertainty. Fear is a key issue in our everyday lives. “What will the doctor find in this test? Will I be okay after surgery? Will I have enough money to get to the end of the month? Will I be able to retire?” There are many fears, and we call them by many names: worry, tension, anxiety, or stress. One study looked at 500 different people and found that among them they had 1800 different fears. And it doesn’t help that we live in a culture that is filled with fear. The fear of the COVID 19 is still prevailing, the fear of terrorism, crime, cancer, and the list just goes on and on. But Jesus said do not be afraid, if you like to know more, please join us in our worship on Sundays at 11:00 A.M.

Peace!

Rev. Dr. Christopher Ponnuraj

Minister