

Sermon: *Do Not Be Afraid*
Text: *Matthew 10:24 – 39*
Date: *June 22, 2008 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Two explorers were on a jungle safari when suddenly a ferocious lion jumped out of the bush. The first explorer whispered to his friend: “*Keep calm. Remember what we read in the book? If we stand perfectly still and stare into the lion’s eyes, he will turn and run.*” The second explorer whispered back: “*Yea, I remember. You’ve read the book and I’ve read the book, but what I really need to know is: has the lion read the book?*”

What are you afraid of? John Hopkins University conducted research on elementary school children. 30 years ago, children were scared of animals, dark rooms, heights, strangers, and loud noises. Today, children are scared of divorce, war, cancer, pollution, and being robbed.

And children aren’t the only ones who struggle with fear. Mental health associations have reported a growth in the number of cases involving fears or phobias in the United States. In fact, there is even a fear called *phobophobia*, the fear of being afraid. What are you afraid of?

This week, 60 people gathered in the Fellowship Hall to *Reclaim God’s Vision*. We looked at what the Bible says the Church should be; we looked at what our church is currently like; and we looked at what our community needs are. And everybody seemed to be in agreement ... we are not the church, God is calling us to be. We are a church with tremendous strengths: we are a loving community, a welcoming

community, and a community of faith. But there are some things that are missing. So in order to become the church that God is calling us to be, we must change! But we're afraid of change; we're afraid of the new and the different and the challenging.

In our text this morning, Jesus calls the disciples together and begins to prepare them for their first missionary journey. Now, from the very beginning, we need to know something about these disciples ... these were not seminary trained pastors. These were ordinary people like you. They were fishermen and tax collectors. They had daddies and mamas and some of them even had families of their own, wives and possibly children too. And Jesus says to these ordinary men ... **“Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and preach this message: The Kingdom of Heaven is near.”**

Now, I don't know if He saw it in their eyes or maybe He heard it in their voices, but I believe these disciples were immediately gripped by fear. They were afraid of stepping out and doing something new and different. They were afraid of change. And so, three times in chapter 10, Jesus says to these disciples: **“Do not be afraid ... do not worry ... do not be afraid.”**

What are they afraid of? Well, there are several things that Jesus mentions in these verses.

First, He says don't fear your enemies and your critics. In verse 17, Jesus said: *“You're going to be arrested and beaten and they're going to bring you before governors*

and kings ... and they're going to hate you and persecute you." That sounds like a lot of fun, doesn't it?

Listen friends, just because you become a Christian and just because you go around town telling others about Jesus and trying your best to live for Him, doesn't mean it's all going to be wine and roses. In fact, it is the very fact that you do these things that will make you an enemy to some people. And it's not always the folks out there; sometimes it's the folks in the church you have to worry about. Sometimes it's the people in your own family. In verse 21, Jesus says: "*Brother will turn against brother, and fathers against their children, and children against their parents.*"

But you see, a disciple of Jesus Christ can't worry about who likes them and who doesn't like them, or who likes what they say or doesn't like what they say. Sometimes you just have to speak the truth and let the chips fall where they may.

Don't be afraid of your enemies and your critics.

Second, Jesus says don't fear physical harm. Verse 28 says: "***Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both the body and the soul in hell.***"

Now, you and I don't really know what it's like to live in a country where we can be physically hurt because of our faith. There are places in the world this morning where people are being persecuted, beaten and killed, because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We don't fear that, but what we do fear is that our reputations might be ruined, that if we speak out for Jesus somebody might think that we've slipped off

the deep end and turned into a Jesus Freak or something.

And because of that fear, you and I worry more about what other people think about us than we do about what God thinks about us. Jesus said, *“Don’t fear people; fear God. People might hurt you physically, but God can condemn your soul to hell for being disobedient.”*

Don’t be afraid of being physically harmed.

Third, Jesus says don’t fear for your basic needs. In verse 11, Jesus tells the disciples: *“When you go into a town, you’ll always find a place to stay.”* And in verse 41, He says: *“The ones who welcome you will look after your basic needs.”*

There was once a young man who received the call to ministry. He was so excited and he just knew that everybody else would be excited too. And so, he went to talk to his parents. He said: *“Hey, mama and daddy, God is calling me to preach. And I’m going to sell my stuff and go back to college and then on to seminary, because God wants me to be a Methodist preacher.”* And his daddy said: *“Son, you don’t want to do that. You’ll never own anything and you’ll be poor the rest of your life.”* But you know what? He followed God’s call anyway. And you know what He has discovered: **“My God shall supply all my needs according to His riches in glory through Christ Jesus our Lord.”** Paul said: **“I was young and now I am old, but I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor His seed begging for bread.”**

Don’t be afraid of being without; God will meet your needs.

Don't be afraid; Don't worry; Don't be afraid!

Now, I don't want you to miss the context of Jesus' words of encouragement here. Jesus says: "*Don't be afraid ... don't worry ... don't be afraid*" in the context of witnessing, in the context of leaving the safety and security of the church and going out into the world to share the good news with others.

And that's what we talked about a lot this week, trying to get more people involved in the ministry of our Church, trying to get more people involved in the outreach and evangelism of our Church, changing the very way we do business as a Church so that we can make a difference for Jesus Christ in our community and in our world.

Now, it's only natural that when we start talking about outreach and evangelism and change, people are going to be fearful. Some are going to fear losing their power; some are going to fear losing their position; some are going to fear leaving their comfort zone. But listen friends, Jesus says: "*Do not be afraid.*" He says: "*I love you and I care for you. I know the number of hairs on your head. Look how I care for the sparrows! Don't you think you're more important to me than sparrows? Do not be afraid!*"

And that's the whole key to what God wants to do in our lives and in our Church: get your eyes off of the pastor, get your eyes off of one another, and put your trust in Jesus. He loves you; He cares about you; and you can trust Him!

Little Johnny came into the kitchen while his mama was cooking supper. And she asked him to go

to the pantry and get her a can of tomato soup. But Johnny did not want to go in the pantry alone. He said: *“It’s dark in there and I’m scared.”* She said: *“Oh come on Johnny, reach in the pantry and get your mama a can of tomato soup It’s okay, Jesus will be in there with you.”* So, Johnny went to the pantry door and opened it slowly and looked inside. And sure enough it was dark and scary, but he remembered what his mama had told him about Jesus being in there and so, he whispered into the pantry, *“Jesus, if you’re in there, would you please hand me a can of tomato soup?”*

Do not be afraid; Do not worry; Do not be afraid!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.