

Lessons for The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 25, 2023

Psalm 91:1-16 ~ *The psalm gives the assurance of God's protection for those who suffer disaster.*

Jeremiah 20:7-13 ~ *Jeremiah had to proclaim God's destruction in the face of persecution.*

Romans 6:12-23 ~ *Christ has conquered sin for us so we may serve Him in righteousness.*

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33 ~ *Jesus warned His followers of persecution but promised His support.*

GATHERING THE TEXTS: What are You Afraid Of?

Jeremiah was afraid of the abuse he suffered at the hands of the people of Jerusalem, but he was more afraid of displeasing God if he were to abandon the mission to which he had been called. Through the cross of Christ, we don't even have to fear the slavery of sin or death which is ours as a result of Adam and Eve's first sin! Even those who are called to God's mission and embraced by the life of Christ can expect abuse at the hands of this world, but they can also count on God's care and protection in all circumstances.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE: Lord God, my Fortress and my Strength, you deliver me from danger and guard me from evil. Help me respond to your call and be faithful to Christ my Lord so that I may not fear the terrors of this world but rejoice in your promise of eternal life. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT: God has given us all good things to use for the benefit of our neighbors, to share God's love in Christ by opposing oppression, persecution, and abuse in their lives.

OFFERING PRAYER: The goods of this world, O Lord, that you give
provide joy and safety where we live.
For your purpose bless this offering
to show your love in midst of suffering. Amen

CONVICTION AND COMFORT: We live in the midst of fear. Even when life is good, we fear the loss of what we enjoy. We are afraid of persecution from rulers, oppression by legal powers, and abuse from our neighbors. Rather we should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. That means we should fear the wrath of God for our sins. But thanks be to God, Christ has conquered sin for us so that we may serve God in all righteousness without the fear of eternal destruction for our sinfulness.

Questions to Consider: On a scale from one to ten, what are you most afraid of?

- What alternatives did Jeremiah face? How did he resolve his dilemma?
- What alternatives does St Paul set before us? Which slavery do we fear?
- Name some things the disciples might fear as they went out on this mission.
- Why did Jesus say, "Fear not!" after first saying, "Fear the one who can destroy . . .?"

Bonus on next page: A Christmas sonnet, used here to illustrate the variety of our fears.

The Word a World Forgot

The shadows of the evening brought to mind
still darker demons lurking on the hill
outside of Bethlehem that night. Behind
each rock the shepherds felt an evil will
and cloaked themselves with chant and spell
to fend the spirits from each heart and soul.
They dared not cry to heav'n for fear of hell,
for well they knew their sin would pay its toll.
But from the sky the angels cried, "Fear not!
Now God has cloaked His love in human flesh
and comes to speak the Word a world forgot:
the cross is hidden in the manger creche.

The holy One whose birth the angels sang,
in death has broken sin and evil's fang.

--Gilbert A. Franke, 12/10/2010