

Devotion: July 22, 2020

Matthew 10:24-39

24 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

26 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. * ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ 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;

³⁶ and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

A couple of decades back there was a hit TV show called "Cheers". It was a show that revolved around the tavern called "Cheers" where, according to the show's tagline, "Cheers was a bar where everybody knows your name."

In Jesus' speech in our text in Matthew, the disciples, a group of 12 anxious apostles are being prepped for a dangerous mission. And part of what Jesus says is a warning: "*Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell*" (v. 28).

But on top of that dire warning come words of comfort and consolation, such as the reassuring reminder that God the Father knows the disciples and is always watching over them. Jesus tells his friends that if a sparrow falls, God knows it. God knows all the hundreds of thousands of hairs on their heads. Their value far surpasses that of the many sparrows sold in the marketplace.

Jesus knows that one of the greatest needs of human beings is to be known. We want to be noticed, to be remembered, to have someone remember your name, to know that we are important to someone.

And in our reading this morning, Jesus reminds us that we are noticed. God has this face recognition thing down cold. God will not forget us, promises Jesus, or fail to recognize us and acknowledge our service. And Christ himself promises to be involved in this process, saying, "*Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven*" (v. 32).

In other words, if we recognize Jesus in public, then Jesus will recognize us in the presence of God.

All these words that are spoken in this Gospel, are set in the context of a dangerous situation, a situation as familiar to us 21st-century disciples as it was to the first followers of Jesus. In the first century the apostles faced the constant threat of the Roman military, and in the 21st century we face the constant threat of militant extremists. In the first century the apostles were criticized by the religious opponents of Jesus, and we 21st century Christians are misrepresented by the media who do a fine job of distorting the Christian faith. In the first century the disciples found enemies in members of their own households, while we, too, discover that strong convictions can create conflict and tension with the people closest to us.

So, if you're a Christian in the first or the 21st century, you know that there will be some anxious days. So it is especially important for us to know God, and to be known by God.

Because, when God spots us, he searches us and knows us. God sees when we sit down and rise up; God discerns our thoughts from far away.

The Lord searches out our paths and our places of rest and is acquainted with all our ways. God hems us in, says Psalm 139, behind and before, and lays his hand upon us.

Which should tell us that God simply cannot keep his eyes off us. But he's not looking for sin or suspicious activity. God is watching us because he truly loves us.

So this constant surveillance of our Lord is based on steadfast love. He follows us to the ends of the earth because he wants to protect us, and not prosecute us.

And because of this we are not doomed to be nameless, faceless souls, caught in the crushing grind of historical events or the anonymous oblivion of contemporary corporate culture. Instead, we are always going to be precious children of the Lord, created, redeemed and sustained in every difficult time and place by the Creator of all that exists.

And here's the best part: there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. And there is nothing we can do to make God love us any less. In the eyes of God, we always have 100 percent face recognition. God will always remember your name.

Gracious and most merciful God, we forget who you are. We get caught up in our own desires. We search for an easy way out of human loneliness. We work too hard, we buy things we don't need, we look for love in all the wrong places. We forget that you are always there, O God, waiting for us to come to you. In fact, we often reject your love. Be with us in our wanderings and our hurts. Help us in our misery to find you, and then to tell others about your faithfulness.