

"Choose Joy with Confidence"

Text: Matthew 10:21-22, 26-33

Grace, mercy and peace be multiplied to you, the most blessed of all people - blessed because you both know the one true God and, even better, because you are known *by* Him. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, the 19th century writer Charles Dickens began his masterpiece, A Tale of Two Cities: "*It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.*" Scholars debate what Dickens meant by those words, but the best part of great literature is that the reader is free to assign his own meaning or interpretation – to find his own insights. My own personal takeaway is that any given time can be either the best or the worst, and we have the power to decide which it will be.

To put the thing into modern terms, given what you've been seeing lately in the news, would you characterize our present situation as the best of times or the worst of times? Whatever you allow to occupy your thoughts – whatever you allow to draw your attention and fill your world – that is what will determine your impression of the present. If you find yourself absorbed with politics, perversion, and lawlessness, you will inevitably conclude that we are living in the worst of times.

But then a strange thing happens when you turn off the news and drive from your mind what others are doing or saying, along with the fear of what *might* happen (to our country and to you personally,) and look only at the way things truly are *right now in your world*. In fact, we need to go even further. Even in our own world we need to apply this same attitude, because in every life there is always good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant, desirable and undesirable. That means we can always find things that will demoralize and discourage us, things that, if we allow them, will fill us with fear and anxiety. Or we can trust God to be God, and dwell on the innumerable good things of the present, trusting him to take care of tomorrow.

In case you're wondering what's good in your life, here's just a short list to prime the pump. No one tried to prevent you from coming here today to worship your God according to the dictates of your conscience. You have enough money not only to live, but to live well. (Visit any Third World country if you doubt that.) Our homes are filled with non-necessities, our closets are bursting with high quality

clothing, and watching our weight is more a concern than wondering where our next meal will come from. Pretty much everyone over the age of 16 has a cell phone. Everyone here can see and hear. Jobs are plentiful, our city enjoys law and order, and we have families that we love and that love us. (The list is actually pretty much endless.) Focus on those things, and it will be difficult to come to any other conclusion than that we are living in the best of times. This should be a consistent Christian sentiment.

That's not to say, of course, that there will never be difficulties or hardships. Of course there will be when we live in a world broken by sin. But we can actually *choose* to live joyfully in such a world. We can live without fear and anxiety of what might happen because of the sure and certain promises from our God. All of which means that we can not only choose joy, we can do so with confidence. With these truths in mind, we consider our text for this morning, the Word of God found in Matthew's Gospel, selected verses from the 10th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Matthew 10:21-22, 26-33 *Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,* ²² *and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved...* ²⁶ ¶ *"So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.* ²⁷ *What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.* ²⁸ *And 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.* ²⁹ *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.* ³⁰ *But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.* ³¹ *Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.* ³² *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,* ³³ *but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.***

This is the Word of God. The God who gave us these words certainly has the power to preserve all who put their trust in him. That our God would bless each of us with joy and confidence through our study of his Word this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

Given the positive tone of the introduction this morning, you might have found it jarring when our text began as it did. It sounds even more dire if you go back a couple more verses, where we read this: ***Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.***

^{ESV}(Matthew 10:17-18) That's part of the challenge of textual sermons – sermons based on a set of texts or portions of Scripture. Often the words appear out of context – as though we are taking our seats in the middle of a play and trying to figure out what's going on. That doesn't mean that the words are in any way false or misleading, but the lack of context can create a challenge.

The context of our text is Jesus' sending out his Apostles. He warned them of the very real danger that they could face hardship and persecution, but the whole point of the exercise was not only to spread the gospel, but to teach his representative that God could be trusted to protect and provide for them. You may recall how he sent out the 12 without any provisions – no money, change of clothes, or food. He also later sent 72 others with the same orders. From Luke's Gospel we learn their frame of mind when they returned: ***The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" ¹⁸ And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. ²⁰ Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."***

Every part of this dialog is important, and it goes to the heart of our study this morning. It is silly and naïve to imagine that those Jesus sent encountered no opposition, rejection, or hardship. Of course they did. But what was their frame of mind when they returned to their Lord? They were filled with joy and excitement. Their minds were obviously occupied not with what went wrong, or with what was disagreeable, but with what was good and with what went right.

Still, Jesus had to guide them in their enthusiasm, didn't he? The problem was that the basis for their joy was the fact that ***"even the demons are subject to us in your name."*** While what they said was true, Jesus redirected them from what might not last to that which would: ***"Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."***

This is the base, the foundation, on which every Christian must build. Outward circumstances will always shift and change. The temporary things that give us joy or satisfaction in this life are fickle and unreliable. Not so with our ultimate goal. No changing circumstances in this life can ever rob us of the peace and joy in knowing that our salvation has been secured for us by Jesus, on the cross of Calvary, and that heaven is our final destination.

Still, Jesus in our text teaches us that our joy could be buried under life's hardships – *if we allow it*. Jesus spoke the words of our text to the 12 Apostles as he sent them out into the world as his witnesses. They would break no laws, hurt no one, deprive no one, say nothing untrue, and yet Jesus assured them that they would encounter irrational hatred: ***Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.***

That is the challenge that we confront this morning. *Can we really live joyfully in a world where we can expect to be hated – even when "the world" at times includes those nearest and dearest to us?*

Profoundly sobering question, isn't it? In fact I would suggest that if you do not find this whole topic intensely sobering and relevant, then you're probably not thinking about it clearly or honestly enough. No human being wants to be hated. No one relishes the thought of hard times or persecution. We are hard-wired with a desire to be loved and respected, and to live without discord and strife. And yet Jesus here tells us that the job-description of every single Christian includes not only enduring the hatred of the unbelieving world, but actually going out and saying and doing the very things that will make incite that hatred – at times including resistance and animosity even from the unbelievers who are closest to our hearts.

The solution is not to shirk our responsibilities as God's spokesmen and representatives. Jesus made that clear in our text: ***What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.*** We have God-given work to do, and that work involves saying what many will not want to hear.

There are two realizations at work here in every Christian heart. The first is the instinctive understanding that to actually speak up and speak out would accomplish the very thing our Savior said it would: the animosity of the world around us. We all have a natural aversion to that hatred - we dread it like the plague. And yet the second realization is

also at work, which is that speaking up and speaking out also accomplishes something else: human souls are rescued, saved, delivered, won. Not all, but some. These two truths continually war within us.

Why would Jesus, the Prince of Peace, advocate such discord? Why would the very embodiment of divine love ever encourage or even *compel* us to be the source of conflict? Why would he tell us, his beloved children, to do what he knows would cause discord and animosity? Three reasons. First, because he knows that that hatred already exists in the heart of every unbeliever, at times lying dormant, but always present. Second, because he knows that there is no other way to address unbelief, no other way to rescue sinners. Third, he knows that there is also a personal element in all of this. *Our own souls* are at risk whenever we struggle to blend in with the world.

Here's an example of how that works. Anecdotal evidence abounds of deep cover agents inserted into the United States by the Soviets during the Cold War. These men and women were extensively trained to speak, act, and think exactly like Americans, and to go about their lives in the United States ever ready to heed the call to action from the motherland. What happened to a significant number of them is that their acting became reality. Mentally and emotionally, they became Americans, and actually refused to obey the command of their former country when it finally came – this despite the meticulous vetting and training process where only the most dedicated and patriotic individuals were sent.

The same thing can happen to Christians. Live long enough in the world as a deep-cover actor only pretending to love the world, and that love and allegiance for the world eventually becomes our reality.

Our text spells out the advantages of the other scenario – where Christians strip off their camouflage and actually ***"say in the light what Christ said in the dark"*** and ***"proclaim on the housetops what we once heard whispered."*** The result is that God, your friend and ally, works in and through you – not only strengthening you but saving others. Our text assured us: ***"Even the hairs of your head are all numbered."***³¹ ***Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."*** The only animosity that we cannot possibly bear up under is that of our Heavenly Father. He is the one enemy that we absolutely cannot afford.

So then what is the goal here? What is the point or purpose of Christ's words in our text? Does he say this to terrify us into compliance? Are these words recorded to frighten us so terribly that we finally do what he wants out of abject fear or dread that if we don't, we won't be saved? Or is

the point to make us think that we only have his love when we are doing what he wants us to do? Obviously none of these. Our Savior in our text is instructing us on how we can have consistently joyful hearts, even while we carry out his work and will – no matter what our outward circumstances. Forgiveness and salvation are already ours – secured for us, and credited to us, by our Savior. Nothing in all creation can rob us of what our God has done for and promised to us. Whoever believes in God's Son, Jesus Christ, *will be saved*. This is our confidence. This is the bedrock on which we build, and when we do, nothing can rob us of the joy that our Savior has given to us as our permanent possession. We can then choose to focus on the joy that is to be found in every phase of our earthly existence, knowing with confidence that our foundation is sure and the best is yet to come.

Obviously there is discord in the world. Clearly there is opposition to God's Word and will, so there will also be opposition to all who live and speak that Word and will of God. Accept these as inevitable facts, but never let them rob you of the joy of living as those ***"whose names are written in heaven."*** The One who earned your forgiveness and provided your perfection, can and will preserve you until he calls you home. Amen.

ESV **Exodus 19:2-8** They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." ⁷ ¶ So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸ All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

ESV **Romans 5:6-15** For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person--though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. ¹² ¶ Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ ¶ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many.

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The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 18, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 8 (Red Hymnal)

"Father, Who the Light This Day"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Exodus 19:2-8) Our Old Testament lesson is a rather rare example of a two-sided covenant in the Bible. Here God offered Israel national independence and prosperity on the condition that they keep His commandments and continue to honor Him as the one true God. Had Israel followed through on their side of the agreement, God would certainly have carried out His. The New Covenant is one-sided. God provided all that was needed.

Psalm 100 (Supplement page 35) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 5:6-15) Though it is true that God established a two-sided covenant with the nation of Israel, that covenant did not involve the earning of heaven. The Jews, however, came to believe that they could indeed earn heaven by their "good works." Obviously they could not, as Paul so clearly teaches in our New Testament lesson.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 746 (Brown Hymnal)

"Father, Most Holy, Merciful and Tender"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 10:21-22, 26-33 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Choose Joy and Confidence"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 414 (Red Hymnal)

"The Man Is Ever Blest"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 651 (Stanzas 1-2, 4) (Red Hymnal)

"Be Still My Soul"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (45) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship Hour |
| Tues-Thurs | -9:00 a.m. | – CLC General Pastoral Conference |
| Next Sunday | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service w/communion |
| | -11:30 a.m. | – Fellowship Meal |

CLC News – Messiah of Eau Claire has called Pastor Roehl. Pastor Sam Naumann has resigned from the public ministry for personal reasons. The General Pastoral Conference of the CLC is scheduled for Tuesday-Thursday of this week in Eau Claire. This conference takes place every other year and includes all pastors and theologically trained professors of the CLC.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the CLC General Pastoral Conference this week in Eau Claire, leaving this afternoon and returning Friday. As always, he can be reached on the church cell phone at any time.

Confirmation Sunday – Next Sunday has been designated as Confirmation Sunday here at St Paul. Our lone confirmand this year is Gabriel Jonas. Please join the family in celebrating this milestone in Gabriel's Christian education with a fellowship meal following the service. All are encouraged to join us, regardless of whether or not you were able to bring any food.

Call Deliberation – As noted in the CLC News, Pastor Roehl has received a call to another congregation – Messiah of Eau Claire. Feel free to share your thoughts with Pastor Roehl. As you know, he now has two divine calls and must decide in which call the Lord would have him serve. Above all, pray that the Holy Spirit would grant him guidance and clarity, that God's will might be done.