

## FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Church and Community

Date: Sunday 21 June 2020

Reading: Matthew 10:24-39

Theme: Do not be afraid

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There can be no doubt that Jesus was an amazing teacher. The crowds spoke of his teaching with authority. And in this, he was different from and unlike other rabbis of the time.

Sometimes he used great word pictures: related to the local landscape or very familiar figures. He spoke about sowing and seed, about light and dark, about trees and fruit, about the wide and the narrow way, about the wise and foolish builders, about the unjust judge, the great banquet, the tiny mustard seed and the pearl of great price.

Sometimes he used repetition. He said the same thing over and over again or in different ways. Here in Matthew 10, we find Jesus speaking with great clarity in his familiar kind of word pictures and repeating the most important points. Three times he says: "Do not be afraid."

The whole of chapter 10 is about mission – about the speaking out of the love of God to a needy world. This continues the theme that Josey picked up in Matthew 28:

*<sup>18</sup>Jesus drew near and said to them, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup>Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in*

*the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup>and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age."*

And it continues the theme John was focusing on last week also in Matthew 9, the theme of the harvest and the workers:

*<sup>36</sup>As he saw the crowds, his heart was filled with pity for them, because they were worried and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>So he said to his disciples, "The harvest is large, but there are few workers to gather it in. <sup>38</sup>Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."*

So today we continue with the focus on mission and the recognition that it is not always easy and that we may find it hard to do. More than that it can be scary. Jesus says three times: do not be afraid.

Being afraid is a very common experience. We might be afraid of spiders or things that sting, bees or wasps. We of crowds, or of new situations and of unknown people. I am not afraid of many things, but I am afraid of heights. The first time I can remember this was on a school trip to Parish when I was about 10 years old. We went right to the top of Notre Dame and walked around the outside. The barrier wall seemed very low, not quite knee height but very low even for a small boy and I was mightily relieved to get back inside safely. I have had the same feeling at the top of the Eiffel Tower, on coastal walks, on the top of the 02 Arena, in Lincoln Cathedral, in chair lifts going up

French and Swiss mountains, and most recently in a lookout tower in Prague last year.

Now you may say why on earth didn't you just stay on the ground? Why didn't you just wait for others to come down and tell you all about it? Look at their photos? Watch their video for goodness' sake? The answer is, of course, that I wanted to do it for myself. I wanted to have the experience, to see the view, to discover the thrill of being in a slightly dangerous place.

Speaking about Jesus can be scary. But it's something I want to do, I feel I must do, and so I decide to do it, even if it will make me a bit apprehensive or a bit anxious.

1 I do it first of all because, Jesus says that we should:

<sup>26</sup> *“So **do not be afraid of people.** Whatever is now covered up will be uncovered, and every secret will be made known. <sup>27</sup> What I am telling you in the dark you must repeat in broad daylight, and what you have heard in private you must announce from the housetops.*

You must repeat ... you must announce ... do not be afraid of people.

And yet, you know, the funny thing is that people often are really pleased that we have spoken up. People often are much more ready than we might think to hear us speak about God who loves them, or about Jesus who died for them, or the about the Holy Spirit who energises us, gives us gifts and produced fruit in us.

People are much more ready to accept an invitation to come to something we can confidently commend than we might think or engage in thinking about the big things in life. Too often we can say people's no for them and miss the opportunity for God to make himself known.

Jesus says do not be afraid of people.

2 I do it second because Jesus contrasts our fear of people (which we should not really have) with a fear of God (which we really should):

<sup>28</sup> ***Do not be afraid of those who kill the body** but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell. <sup>29</sup> For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent. <sup>30</sup> As for you, even the hairs of your head have all been counted.*

In other words, he is saying what's the worst that can happen? Someone can say no to an invitation we give them. Someone can think we are a bit strange if we are into all that God stuff and they don't really get it. That, my friends, is not the end of the world. Our eternal life is secure with God for ever. Temporary setbacks or knockbacks we can live with, can't we?

And the reason for not being afraid is that God knows us and loves us and absolutely has our back. If he knows about and cares about penny sparrows and the hairs on our head, we can surely trust him for the bigger stuff too.

Jesus says do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.

3 And finally I do it because Jesus links time and eternity:

<sup>31</sup> ***So do not be afraid; you are worth much more than many sparrows!***

<sup>32</sup> *“Those who declare publicly that they belong to me, I will do the same for them before my Father in heaven.*

This final time Jesus links time and eternity. What we do in this life has implications and consequences for the life to come.

In the here and now we need to know that we are worth more than many sparrows. At times when we are anxious or worried, or feeling full of despair, we can remember that God’s love for us is great, his desire to relate to us is real and his care and concern for us is infinite.

But all this is only temporary. The response we make to Jesus now will determine his response to us in the hereafter. As we align ourselves with him now, so he assures us of our place with him in heaven when the time comes. Another reason not to be afraid.

And of course, none of us knows when that time will come. This week have had the shocking news that Kathryn’s mum’s sister had had a stroke on Monday. She was taken into the JR in Oxford, but she died on Wednesday. Kathryn has had the unenviable task of communicating this news to

her mum with a mask on through an open window. It doesn’t get much worse.

At the same time, we have been making preparations for opening the church again. We imagine that some will want to come into the building to pray ... perhaps most of all those who have lost someone in this time of the pandemic. Maybe death was Covid related and there were elements of shock; maybe there were underlying causes.

Knowing God loves us, cares about us, understands our frailty and vulnerability more than we can imagine, is both reassuring and comforting.

And having the privilege of sharing this simple message with other people, knowing that we need not be afraid of doing so, can be both a calling and a real joy. In our hospitality in our reopening church building, in our publicity and decoration, we are trying our best to get that message out and trying to follow Jesus instructions not to be afraid.

Let’s pray together ...

God of Mission, who alone brings growth to your Church, send your Holy Spirit to give Vision to our planning, Wisdom to our actions, and Power to our witness. Help our church to grow in numbers, in spiritual commitment to you, and in service to our local community, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.