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Matthew 10:24-39 (The Message)

*Fear*

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“A student doesn’t get a better desk than her teacher. A laborer doesn’t make more money than his boss. Be content—pleased, even—when you, my students, my harvest hands, get the same treatment I get. If they call me, the Master, ‘Dungface,’ what can the workers expect? “Don’t be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open, and everyone will know how things really are. So don’t hesitate to go public now. “Don’t be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There’s nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands. “What’s the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right? And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So don’t be intimidated by all this bully talk. You’re worth more than a million canaries. “Stand up for me against world opinion and I’ll stand up for you before my Father in heaven. If you turn tail and run, do you think I’ll cover for you? “Don’t think I’ve come to make life cozy. I’ve come to cut—make a sharp knife-cut between son and father, daughter and mother, bride and mother-in-law—cut through these cozy domestic arrangements and free you for God. Well-meaning family members can be your worst enemies. If you prefer father or mother over me, you don’t deserve me. If you prefer son or daughter over me, you don’t deserve me. “If you don’t go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don’t deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you’ll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you’ll find both yourself and me.

I grew up going to church but when I first accepted Jesus into my heart it was out of fear. I went to a church every other Sunday that I perceived told me that if I did not ask Jesus into my heart I was not going to go to heaven. I wanted to go to heaven! So, I can honestly say that it was fear that was my motivation. I asked Jesus into my heart out of fear. When I read Jesus’ words in Matthew’s Gospel I think of fear. Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for the hostility and suffering they will encounter on their mission as they share the message of the grace and love of God. On their journey the disciples will be called names. The life of faith is full of pain and glory. Being a Christian means some people are not going to like the way we live.

In this journey we will have fear, but Jesus tells the disciples and us over and over in this passage to not be afraid. Jesus encourages the disciples to speak boldly, without regard for the local authorities. They are answerable only to God, the God who has power over our bodies and our souls. The God who numbers the hairs on our head.

And as the great hymn reminds us, “Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come? Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home? When Jesus is my portion, my constant friend is He.   
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;  
 His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me. I sing because I’m happy,   
I sing because I’m free, for His eye is on the sparrow,  
 And I know He watches me.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Jesus also tells the disciples to acknowledge God as first in our life. “If your first concern is to look after yourself, you’ll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you’ll find both yourself and me.” Jesus’ words still challenge us today. Do we share when our prayers have been answered? Do we share about moments when we have felt close to God or had a spiritual insight? Do we share about a poignant moment that touched us in church or do we talk of our struggle in the life of faith? Or are we afraid of how our words will be received? Do we let our fear dictate and let the moment pass? How can we move beyond our fear? How can we commit ourselves to being one of God's people, even in the face of opposition? May we have courage and stand firm whether it is in the locker room, at the pool, in close ball games, around the office, in the cabin at camp, in traffic on highway 75, and in other situations as we make our witness.

Friday was World Refugee Day. Did you know that there are 51 million refugees in the world? Our own Bill Holston, who is Executive Director of the Human Rights Initiative of North Texas, shared a great commentary on KERA about the resilience of forcibly displaced people across the globe.[[2]](#footnote-3) I learned from Bill’s commentary that the United States caps refugee admissions every year at 70,000 and this year so far about 37,000 have entered, including thirty-five hundred in Texas, the largest influx in any state. Those seeking asylum are not included in those numbers. As Bill shares in his commentary, people who are forced to leave everything they hold dear and come to Dallas include women fleeing sexual assault in the Congo; religious minorities from Eritrea facing torture and jail; and pro-democracy activists fleeing prison from Rwanda.

These are people leaving their home and everything they know because they fear - fear of gang and drug violence, of rape and abduction. And when they make it to America, they have to start all over again. There has been a large influx of unaccompanied minors into America. This year alone estimates are 50,000-60,000 unaccompanied children will be detained in the United States as they flee gang violence in Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador.[[3]](#footnote-4) They cross the border and Border Patrol gives them water and an apple for 4-5 days while they are being held in detention. There are children suffering from dehydration and malnutrition.

The Dallas Observer shared a story about 15 year-old twin brothers, Jose and Juan, who fled Honduras after their father was murdered because he refused to pay the war tax to one of the gangs responsible for making Honduras’ murder rate what it is today. Honduras has the world’s highest murder rate, it is 90.4 murders per 100,000. The gang was now targeting the 15 year-old twin brothers, Jose and Juan. So, they rode a bus to Guatemala, crossed the Mexican border on foot, and walked for a week to the train station where they rode on the roof of a freight train north through Mexico. Near Mexico City the drug cartel kidnaps train hoppers and holds them for ransom or kills them. The train that Juan and Jose were on had one of the cars derailed and 50 passengers were kidnapped. Once they got close to the U.S. border, they spent 3 days on the banks of the Rio Grande until they crossed in a small boat in the middle of the night. They walked for hours before Border Patrol picked them up. They spent time in a shelter before they were sent to live with their older brother in Lubbock where they enrolled in high school and are currently juniors. Jose wants to be a doctor and Juan wants to be a lawyer.

It is hard to imagine a life of fear like Jose and Juan have endured, but fear exists from the moment we are born. We learn to fear the world around us. One of the first lessons we teach our children is to not talk to strangers. Fear often drives our politics and is the motivating factor for which neighborhood we pick for where to live. Jesus knows that fear affects our willingness and our ability to share the message of love and grace that Jesus wanted us to share.

We fear from the moment we are born. Even right now we have fear. How many of us are scared to death of people finding out what our life is really like? How much energy do we “expend trying to keep a failing marriage, crumbling finances, problems with the children, our health issues, and more locked up in an emotional vault so that no one will ever know our struggles? How much focus do we expend on trying to project to others that we’re competent, talented, and successful so that no one will ever know our inner thoughts of critique and failure?”[[4]](#footnote-5) Jesus’ disciples left everything they knew, the security of their homes and families to follow Jesus. Jesus found out that they were not as put-together as they might have originally appeared. Yet, God knows the number of the hairs on our head. Yes, we are not as put-together, as smart, or as carefree as we like to appear to the world. Yes, our lives have problems, we have problems, but we can not fear. “For His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me.” I am loved, you are loved, we are loved. Jesus wants his disciples to know what threats they will face from the world, but he also wants them to not let their fear get the better of them or hinder their witness.[[5]](#footnote-6) May we not let our fear get the better of us or hinder our witness.

Jesus’ disciples undertake their mission in complete vulnerability and dependence on God. When there is a threat from a bully, may we remember that the bully can do nothing to our core being. Jesus’ disciples face hatred, persecution, arrest and beatings, opposition even from family members, but when Jesus names what suffering awaits them, Jesus is helping to release the disciples from the grip of fear. May we resist our fear. Because as Jesus says again and again, do not fear. For it is God’s presence that has real power. Yes, proclaiming Jesus’ message of love, grace, and hope is not easy and it will bring suffering, but we must proclaim from the housetops. And may our identity and calling as followers of Jesus be first and foremost in our lives. May we remain firm in our commitment to Jesus and to the mission that we have been given to be a witness to God’s love. For if we follow the light of the world, we will learn the mystery of what we were meant to do and be.

1. http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/h/i/hiseyeis.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://keranews.org/post/world-refugee-day-why-we-should-change-how-we-look-people-our-city [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.dallasobserver.com/2014-04-10/news/texas-refugees-courtroom-nightmare/2/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. http://www.rickmorley.com/archives/3071 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\_id=2098 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)