

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKEY

25 June – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

HYMNS: 36 199 200 171

INTROIT: Psalm 91:1-10

The one who lives under the shelter of the Most High will stay for the night in the shadow of the Almighty.

I shall say to the LORD, "My Refuge and my Fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

For He Himself will rescue you from the fowler's snare and from the destructive plague.

He will cover you with His feathers, and you will take refuge under His wings. His truth will be your Shield and Buckler.

You will not be afraid of the terror of the night or of the arrow that flies by day or of the plague that stalks in darkness or of the pestilence that lays waste at midday.

A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

You will only look with your eyes and see the retribution on wicked people.

For You, O LORD, are my Refuge. You have made the Most High your Dwelling-place.

No harm will happen to you. No plague will come near your tent.

COLLECT: O God, because Your abiding presence always goes with us, keep us aware of Your daily mercies, that we may live secure and content in Your eternal love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS:

Jeremiah 20:7-13 The LORD is with me like a powerful warrior.

Romans 6:12-23 We are free from sin to serve righteousness.

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33 Stop being afraid.

Jeremiah 20:7-13

⁷ LORD, You have deceived me, and I have let myself be deceived. You have overpowered me and have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long. Everyone mocks me. ⁸ Each time I speak, I cry out and proclaim, “Violence and devastation!” The Word of the LORD has brought me disgrace and derision all day long. ⁹ However, when I think, “I shall not mention Him or speak in His name any longer,” then His Word is like a burning fire in my heart, shut up in my bones. I wear myself out trying to hold it in but cannot do it. ¹⁰ For I have heard many people reporting: “Terror is all around you. Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” All my closest friends are watching to see me stumble, saying: “Perhaps he will be deceived. Then we shall overpower him and take our revenge on him.”

¹¹ Nevertheless, the LORD is with me like a powerful warrior. Therefore, those who are persecuting me will stumble and will not win. They will be greatly ashamed that they have not been successful. Their eternal disgrace will not be forgotten. ¹² However, LORD of hosts, You test the righteous man. You see his inmost being and thoughts. Let me see Your revenge against them! For I have disclosed my case to You. ¹³ Sing to the LORD! Praise the LORD! For He has rescued the life of a needy man from the hands of evildoers.

Romans 6:12-23

¹² Therefore, let sin not keep on reigning in your mortal bodies with the result that you obey their sinful desires! ¹³ Stop presenting the parts of your bodies to sin as weapons of unrighteousness! Rather, present yourselves to God, as people who are alive from the dead, and present the parts of your bodies to God as weapons of righteousness! ¹⁴ For sin will not be master over you. For you are not under Law but under grace.

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under Law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶ Do you not know that, when you present yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are the slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which results in death or of obedience, which results in righteousness? ¹⁷ However, thanks be to God that, although you used to be the slaves of sin, you have obeyed from the heart the pattern of teaching to which you were entrusted! ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have been made the slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in a human way because

your human nature is weak. For, as you presented the members of your bodies as slaves of uncleanness and lawlessness, leading to more lawlessness, so now, present your members as slaves of righteousness, leading to holiness! ²⁰ For, when you were the slaves of sin, you were free concerning righteousness. ²¹ Therefore, what harvest did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? None, for the end of those things is death. ²² Rather, now, after you have been set free from sin and have been made the slaves of God, you have your harvest leading to holiness, and the end will be eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

⁵ Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following Instructions: ... ²¹ “One brother will betray another to death, and a father his child. Children will **rebel against** their parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² You will also be hated by all people because of My name. Nevertheless, he who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When people persecute you in this city, flee to another! Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. ²⁴ A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household! ²⁶ “Therefore, do not be afraid of them! For there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known. ²⁷ Speak in the light what I tell you in the dark and proclaim on the housetops what you hear in your ears! ²⁸ Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell! ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. ³⁰ As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered. ³¹ Therefore, stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows. ³² I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others. ³³ I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEM
Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Pentecost 2023
Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel from before, Matthew 10:5a, 21-33: **Jesus sent these Twelve out with the following Instructions: ...** ²¹ **“One brother will betray another to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death.** ²² **You will also be hated by all people because of My name. Nevertheless, he who endures to the end will be saved.** ²³ **When people persecute you in this city, flee to another! Truly, I tell you, you will certainly not finish the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.** ²⁴ **A disciple is not above his teacher or a slave above his master.** ²⁵ **It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and for a slave to be like his master. If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household!** ²⁶ **“Therefore, do not be afraid of them! For there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and nothing hidden that will not be known.** ²⁷ **Speak in the light what I tell you in the dark and proclaim on the housetops what you hear in your ears!** ²⁸ **Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!** ²⁹ **Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father.** ³⁰ **As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered.** ³¹ **Therefore, stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows.** ³² **I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others.** ³³ **I shall also deny before My Father in heaven whoever denies Me before others.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

A familiar saying is, *“Life was not meant to be easy!”* This is certainly true at times, but perhaps it is most true when following Christ. After all, we know that to follow Christ means the world will be against us. We know this because this is what Jesus says today in our text. Many of Matthew’s Gospel readings describe the opposition we can expect from an unbelieving world.

And that opposition can be brutal, even deadly. But the amazing thing is, even though Jesus knows people will treat us this way, still, He also tells us, **“Do not be afraid of them.”**

Jesus begins today by saying: **“One brother will betray another to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and cause them to be put to death. ²² You will also be hated by all people because of My name.”**

Jesus speaks here of severe persecution. People will even hand their family members over to death because they belong to Christ. Do you think Jesus is exaggerating? Think again. These words have come to pass many times over the centuries. Christians have been handed over and put to death, even by their own family members, simply because they have become Christians. The history of the church is written in the blood of the martyrs. In many countries worldwide, our brothers and sisters in Christ are being disowned by their families, persecuted and imprisoned, dragged out by mobs and put to death. It is a dangerous thing to be a Christian.

But, you say, *not here in Australia*. That is true; Christians are not being put to death in our country. But opposition and hostility can take other forms, less severe. And so, in our text, Jesus says that we Christians will be spoken evil of because we belong to Him: **“If people have been calling the master of the house ‘Beelzebul,’ how much more the members of his household!”**

“Beelzebul” was a derogatory term that Jesus’ enemies used against Him, saying He was actually in league with the devil. So, if they said this about Jesus, the most remarkable and holy Man who ever lived - if they called Jesus a devil, think of what they’re going to call us, we who actually have things we can be criticised for. The world will despise, malign, and speak evil of us.

And this sort of thing is happening in our country. We see officials in our government and various politicians supporting certain acts that are contrary to the Word of God. They openly support abortion, euthanasia, gay rights, promoting the transitioning of one gender to another, and so on - and if we as Christians speak out against such things, then they forcefully criticise and

come out against us because of our beliefs. Make no mistake; they are keeping a close eye on what we as a church teach and confess. But not only officials, we see pundits and opinion-makers, figures in the media and education and the entertainment industry, all speaking and acting against Christianity. They ridicule Christians and say we are on the wrong side of history. Well, so be it. We shall see who was right and who was wrong when the Lord of history returns. The Apostle Paul writes, “*“As surely as I live, ’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before Me, and every tongue will make confession to God.”*” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Romans 14:11-12). One day, to their horror, they will have to acknowledge that they were on the wrong side of history and will be forced to bow before God. But, for now, our culture has turned against the church in a big way. Australia is no longer the friendly place it once was for Christians to make their home, and it will probably get worse. If you want a picture of where Australia is headed, look at Europe. Europe has become highly secularised and post-Christian, hostile to any semblance of the historic faith. And that’s likely the direction we’re headed, too.

So, the world is against us. This is nothing new. Jesus told us this would happen. Hostility, opposition, rejection, ridicule, persecution, and even martyrdom. These things happened to Christians back then; they’re happening now and will continue to happen as long as we are in the world.

Still, the words of Jesus, who says: “**Do not be afraid of them,**” seem a little hard to take because we know what such enemies can do against us. They can ruin our reputation. They can make life difficult for us. We could lose our job or our friends for being followers of Christ. Even family members may turn against us. Isn’t it better to keep quiet? Isn’t it better to lay low and not rock the boat? Besides, look at Jesus and how He often rocked the boat, and where did that get Him? It got Him nailed to a cross, and we do not want that.

No, we don’t. Our flesh shies away from any thought of trouble coming to us on account of our faith. And really, nobody likes to undergo suffering. We don’t enjoy it. Even Jesus Himself prayed and asked if there was any other

way possible, other than going to the cross, that's what He would prefer¹. But there was no other way. Only the Son of God, suffering and dying for us sinners, could win the salvation Jesus was sent to win, and so *that is what He did.*

So, if suffering and persecution are what we must endure because we belong to Christ, so be it. It comes with the territory. But thank God for that territory! Christ has brought us into the kingdom of God, and that's why Jesus can tell us, **“Do not be afraid of them.”**

If there's anyone we should fear, it's God. The damage the world can do to us is only temporal. The worst they can do to us is kill us. Far worse would be to be lost for eternity, which would happen to us if we were to turn our backs on God and go on our own and give up the faith out of fear of persecution. That would be infinitely worse. Jesus tells us, **“Stop being afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul! Rather, be afraid of Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell!”**

No, you don't want to give up the faith - and your salvation in Christ with it. There is nothing more precious than that. In Christ, we have a sure and certain hope, the sure hope of everlasting life, a life that conquers death. What could be greater than that? *Nothing.* And it is God's free gift to us - eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. The world's opposition pales in significance next to this one great gift.

Christ assures us of this love. He says, **“I shall confess before My Father in heaven whoever confesses Me before others.”** That's really something, isn't it? Imagine, Jesus Himself speaks up for you before the throne of God and says, **“This one is Mine.”**

But there's more - *there's always more.* Jesus assures us of the Father's own love when He says, **“Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father. ³⁰ As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been numbered. ³¹ Therefore, stop being afraid! You are worth more than many sparrows.”** If God cares for just one seemingly insignificant sparrow, a mere bird, and not one sparrow falls

¹ Luke 22:42

to the ground without the Father knowing about it, how much more is the Father going to care about us? A lot, a whole lot! Even the hairs of our heads are numbered. Our heavenly Father, infinite in His mercy and love and care - our Father loves us more than we could imagine. And the proof is in the cross of Christ. If God has loved us that much, to send His own Son to die for us, surely, He will see us through all the troubles of this life.

Dear friends, today Christians all around the world are being hated and persecuted by the people of this world, and yet our Lord Jesus says to us today, **“Do not be afraid of them.”** For our heavenly Father will strengthen us and see us through the world’s hostility. The day is coming when the sun will not strike us any longer, nor any scorching heat². So, Jesus says, **“Do not be afraid of them.”** Instead, have faith in God! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Lord our God, You are our strength and our joy, for everything You do is marked by kindness and love. Because You are gracious, we trust in You and offer You our prayers.

We thank and praise You for all Your kindness to us: for blessing us with life, for equipping us with all our powers of body and soul, for giving us the ability to be useful, for permitting us to enjoy Your creation, and for surrounding us with the warmth of human relationships in every facet of life.

We confess our sins before You, repent of them, and earnestly turn from them. Do not look on us in anger, for Jesus’ sake. We praise You above all else for Your grace in Christ Jesus. You have sent Your Son to die on the cross, and have raised Him in power and glory, to provide all the riches of our salvation. In Him You have given us free pardon for all our sins, the strength to overcome evil, and the sure hope of eternal life.

² Revelation 7:16

We rejoice in the death of Your Son, through which you have been reconciled to us, so that we may approach You as a God of love. Comfort us with Your free forgiveness, and fill us with the new life of the Spirit. Help us to be alert and to stand firm in faith in every temptation and test, so that we may resist Satan and His evil tricks, and hold our ground against all evil.

Be gracious to Your Church, O God, that it may seek the lost, lift up the fallen, comfort the broken-hearted, and heal the afflicted. Enable Your pastors and people to proclaim with courage and conviction the message of life in Christ Jesus, and to declare to all people Your mighty acts of judgment and mercy. Cause growth among us, through Your powerful Word.

Reveal Your power to all lands and nations. Remind people everywhere that You are the Lord of all history, that You judge the leaders of the nations, and that You have the power to break bows, shatter spears, and destroy all human might. Remind all those in authority that they are accountable to You. Grant that all people may turn to You and follow Your truth.

Be the heavenly guest in all our homes. Move all families to trust You in everything, and to love and serve each other, until that day comes when You call us from our homes on earth to live with You in our heavenly home for ever.

Bless all who are in any need of body or soul. Teach them to humble themselves under Your mighty hand, trusting that You remove all burdens in Your own good time. Teach them to place all their worries on You, and assure them of Your infinite understanding and loving care.

Gracious God, since You have called us to share eternal glory in Christ, make us strong, and make our lives holy. Hear our prayers for the sake of Jesus, to whom be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Article: The Human Heart

The human heart is a common symbol in modern Australia. It generally stands for love, most often in the romantic sense. But did you know that the main points of the Biblical message can be shown in passages that talk about the human heart?

In the Bible, the heart has nothing to do with romance. It is the seat of thought, intention, and will. The Lord says, "*For the mouth speaks what runs over from the heart*" (Matthew 12:34). We should love God with all our heart (Matthew 22:37), that is, with all our thoughts, intentions, and purposes.

But since we fall into sin, the human heart is opposed to God. God said, "*For*

what human beings think in their hearts is evil from their youth” (Genesis 8:21). The Lord said, *“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual sins, thefts, false testimonies and slanders”* (Matthew 15:19). Every sinful word or deed was first a sinful thought. We sin more often in thought than in any other way.

It is sad for a person to realise that his heart is sinful, but it is necessary to know the problem to be prepared for the solution, the forgiveness of sins. The psalmist wrote: *“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and crushed heart, O God, You will not despise”* (Psalm 51:17).

The message about sin breaks the heart. But Christ heals the broken heart with the message of forgiveness that He has earned for us by His perfect sacrifice on the cross in our place. Faith in Christ, the God-Man, is trust that our sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. This faith is given to people through the Word of forgiveness. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” This is the Word of faith, which we are preaching, that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved”* (Romans 10:8-9).

Believing in the resurrection of Christ means believing that by raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that He has accepted Christ’s sacrifice and forgiven our sins. With this Word and the faith it produces, the Word of God says that Christ dwells in the believer’s heart (Ephesians 3:17).

This Word and faith give the believer great joy. David was inspired to write, *“Nevertheless, I trust Your mercy. Let my heart shout for joy over Your salvation!”* (Psalm 13:5). Jeremiah had been told that he was to face severe persecution for preaching God’s Word, but he still said, *“Your Words have become my joy and the delight of my heart”* (Jeremiah 15:16).

It may be nice to talk about the heart in a romantic way. But it is much better for all of us to think about what God says in the Bible about our hearts. Why not look up Matthew 6:19-21 and see what Jesus was talking about when He said, *“For your heart will also be where your treasure is”*?



Children's Message:

Have you ever been afraid of something? We all have been afraid of things sometimes, haven't we. What kinds of things may frighten someone? Sometimes we can fear little things like being called names or having someone lie and say we did something bad. Jesus mentions that in the Gospel for today. Sometimes we can be afraid of more significant things like dying. We all are afraid of dying, or at least we have been afraid of that at some time in our lives.

But in the Gospel for today, Jesus tells His disciples, *"Do not be afraid."* We do not need to be afraid of little things like being called names. We don't even have to be afraid of big things, like getting sick and dying. We can and should fear God, like Jesus says in the Bible or like Luther taught about the First Commandment in the Small Catechism. That means we should respect God, love Him, and trust Him above everyone else. But when Jesus says, *"Do not be afraid,"* He means that we do not need to fear anyone or anything else in this world.



The reason that we can have no fear is because of what Christ has done for us. He has died on the cross to pay for all of our sins. And He's not dead anymore, is He! What happened on the third day after Jesus died? He rose from the dead! And He can't die again because He has defeated even death itself. So now we don't have to worry or be afraid that God will punish us. He gives to us eternal life. Because we have been made God's children in our baptism, we have the hope that we, too, shall rise from the dead; that hope drives away our fears. And because we are God's children, we already have eternal life by God's gift to us of faith.

That faith, which enables us to fear, love, and trust in God above all things, also helps us not to be afraid of anyone or anything in this world. Because of what Christ has done for you by His death and resurrection, God is pleased with you and is glad that you are His child. He watches over you so carefully; Jesus says He even knows exactly how many hairs you have on your head! And He looks forward to welcoming you into heaven to live with Him forever. Amen! *Thank You Jesus, for helping me not be afraid. When things do scare me, please remind me that You are always with me. Amen.*

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

| 2 July 5 Pentecost | 9 July 6 Pentecost | 16 July 7 Pentecost |
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| 8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA HC 9.30am GRN LR 10.45am AUB HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR | 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.30am MARBURG HC |
| Sunday, 2 July | | |
| READINGS: Jeremiah 28:5-9; Romans 7:1-13; Matthew 10:34-42 | | |
| HYMNS: 518 361 372 (157 289) 380 | | |
| Sunday, 9 July | | |
| READINGS: Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans 7:14-25a; Matthew 11:25-30 | | |
| HYMNS: 355 854 308 (345 294) 208 | | |

Wednesday, 5 July, 10.00am. Women's Guild at Bethlehem Toowoomba.
Opening devotion: Vicki. Choose a Bible verse from Leviticus 21-24. Item of interest: A glass (eg. wine or beer).

Saturday, 8 July, 10.00am. CoC/Sem meeting at Bethlehem Toowoomba.