

## ***Not Above***

Matthew 10:24-39

June 25, 2017

### First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

*“A student is not above their teacher, nor a servant above their master....”*

So we have a rather interesting passage here...one in which it would be easy to misunderstand the words of Jesus. I am looking mostly at the first half of this text. Jesus is basically telling us not to be afraid. Nothing overly profound here. Jesus often cautioned against fear. In this text, Jesus gives us some good reasons not to be afraid. We need to first consider the context.

Jesus sent out his top twelve disciples. He gave them instructions about how to pack and prepare for the journey. Jesus basically told them to trust him and preach that the kingdom of God had come near.

He sent them out with a few cautionary words. He told them, “Be on your guard.” They were to be on their guard because they would face opposition and persecution. They were told they would be handed over to local ruling bodies. He told them they would be flogged. He did not say they might be. He said they would be. Jesus told them not to fret over what they might say to their accusers and persecutors. Jesus assured them they would be given the words to say.

Jesus then warned them there would be betrayals. He told them they would be hated. They would be hated not because of who they were; they would be hated because of Jesus. “All will hate you because of me,” Jesus said. He then urged them to stand firm. He further told them that when they were persecuted in one place, they should then go on to the next place.

So there would be this persecution. That’s where we picked up the reading. Jesus said a student is not above the teacher. It is enough for the student to be just like the teacher. Here’s the

deal on this. Jesus was persecuted. If Jesus was opposed and treated badly because he was Jesus, why should any of his followers expect not to be opposed? Why would we think ourselves better than Jesus in that regard?

Have you ever endured any opposition or abuse because of your relationship to Jesus? If so, what was that like? Was it something big...or more along the lines of ridicule? What was the worst? Or has there been nothing?

I began the college phase of my life at the University of Minnesota. I attended the U for two years plus three summer sessions. Then I was able to afford transferring to Bethel. My freshman year at the U I lived on campus. Territorial Hall. I lived across the hall from Joe Micheletti. That means something only to those who watch hockey on NBC. Anyway, I moved into Territorial Hall not knowing who my roommate was to be. He moved in the day after I did. That’s when I met him.

This context prevents me from saying what I would really like to say about that arrangement. Suffice it to say it was a mismatch. It did not start out that way. The first couple of days were okay. But it did not take long for us to realize we were not suited to occupy the cramped quarters of the same dorm room at the same time for any length of time.

I am not opposed to fun. You should know that about me. I like a good time just as much as the next person. But while in college, I also rather enjoyed attending class. I began the practice—which continued throughout my higher-educational experience—of scheduling as many of my classes as possible before noon...then having the afternoon for study...freeing up some of my evenings. My roommate preferred to sleep in until noon...go to class in the afternoon...and

then only if the mood hit him. It was one of those deals. We were destined to separate before we even met.

One day early on in that first quarter, I was at my desk...reading. I was reading the Bible. He walked in from just having skipped another class. He asked me what I was reading. I told him I was reading the Bible. His response was, "Oh no; please don't tell me they got me rooming with a Jesus freak!" All I could say was, "Uh...okay...then I won't tell you they got you rooming with a guy who is rather fond of Jesus." And so for the rest of that day he told anyone who would listen that he had a roomie who got up early and was a Jesus freak. He started calling me "Jesus Freak". By the start of the second quarter, he was in Frontier Hall.

So...that is about the extent of the "persecution" I face. At the time I thought I was blessed...suffering for Jesus...suffering for the name and all that. Okay...so our message is opposed sometimes. There are those groups who want to squelch it. But we can still speak it. And speak it we must. Jesus has sent us to proclaim the kingdom. So there is a little opposition. Boy howdy, we have brothers and sisters in some places in this world where persecution of a severe kind is a reality...places where there are beatings and worse...places where family member does turn in family member for being a follower of Jesus. It is increasing. And it may increase here. Who knows?

Jesus said it would. Look what was done to him. And we are no better than Jesus. Tough times and tough opposition will come. The word from Jesus is not to worry about it...not to be afraid of it. And I see Jesus giving us three real good reasons why we need not be afraid.

First, and I am not quite sure how to say this. Let me try to put it in the form of a question. What is the worst thing any person could do to us? Most would say the worst any person could do to us is maybe take our life. Well, the worst any person could do to us is nothing compared to what God can do.

In verse twenty-eight Jesus says, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Now that sounds almost scary. But here's the deal. Who is the One who could destroy both body and soul? That would be God. This does not mean we suddenly need to be afraid that God will do that. Jesus is saying that the worst anyone—including the devil himself—can do to us is harm our body. They cannot touch our soul. God is in charge of that. So do not be afraid. God is on our side. God is more powerful than any who would persecute us.

Second, we need to keep things in perspective.

We all know what perspective is. Perspective is that ability to see things in terms of relative importance. It is the capacity to see things in light of the bigger picture. Like when I might complain about not having enough, I need to see the big picture and know that I have more than ninety percent of the people in the world. We are often encouraged to keep our lives in perspective.

Perspective is also an art thing. I cannot draw much more than straight lines...stick figures. Even then I need the aid of a straight edge. But when I draw two lines parallel to each other...and I draw them in a way that they get closer together...I am giving the illusion of distance. That's perspective. Perspective is the gift of being able to draw three-dimensional solid objects—like a box or a ball—on a flat, two-dimensional surface.

Here is a little tidbit about perspective I found somewhat interesting...an art history lesson, if you will. Perspective was discovered. I mean, up until the late thirteen hundreds and early fourteen hundreds, most artists simply drew more important people and objects bigger than less important people and objects. That was the limit of their perspective.

With that in mind, if God were to draw a picture of creation, God might draw the people bigger than everything else. In our text Jesus says that two sparrows are sold for a penny. God

cares for sparrows. We are worth more to God than many sparrows. Not worth more than just two sparrows...worth more than many sparrows. Jesus said the same thing back in the Sermon on the Mount. We are of more value to God than the birds of the air.

We must remember this. In God's picture we are drawn very large. We are important to God. Perspective.

Finally, quickly, providence. We are valuable to God. So God will take care of us. No worries. You know what? That's all I have to say about that. God will take care of us.

So the worst any person can do for us does not measure up to God's protective power over us. We are most valuable to God. God will take care of us. What does that mean for us?

It means we can boldly give witness to Jesus. We can boldly acknowledge Jesus before others. We must do that. It means we can and must sell out totally for Jesus...love Jesus more than anything or any person. It means we can take up our cross and follow Jesus. In doing this we will find life. Hey...Jesus gave his all. He did not back down when evil people persecuted him. He is now seated at the right hand of God.

A student is not above their teacher. A servant is not above their master. We give witness to Jesus, there might be some opposition. Don't worry about it. God has our backs.

*"A student is not above their teacher, nor a servant above their master."*