

Jesus doesn't say, "You'll have no enemies." Just before today's Gospel He tells the disciples that He is sending them out **"as sheep in the midst of wolves."** He tells them that they will **"be dragged before governors and kings,"** that family members will deliver one another over to death, that they'll be persecuted, hated by all. Because, Jesus says, **"a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household"** (10:24-25). Jesus tells the disciples and He tells you what to expect when His Word is proclaimed, believed, confessed, and when we live godly lives according to it.

But after telling His Christians what they will endure throughout the centuries, Jesus says, **"Have no fear of them."** Now this is not to say that true Christians have no trepidations, no emotional fears or nervousness when they suffer for the faith, or are confronted by opponents who dare them to confess the truth and then face the consequences. We are not told that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are not emotionally afraid when they are brought before King Nebuchadnezzar after refusing to bow down to his golden image. They are threatened with death by fire, and all they say is **"We have no need to answer you in this matter...our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you...that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."**

They tell Nebuchadnezzar, the most powerful king of that time, who had demolished the temple in Jerusalem, whose armies devoured nations and kingdoms, that they have no need to defend or deliver themselves from his threat. And notice that they don't even say that they know for certain that God will deliver them from the flames. They confess that He is able to do that, but notice they also say that even if God does not deliver their bodies from a fiery end, they will not serve false gods, will not yield to Nebuchadnezzar's ungodly and sinful command.

This is confession of the true God that fears, loves, and trusts in Him above all things. This is what Jesus speaks of when He says to **"fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."** It is what our Lord Jesus demonstrated as He stood before Pilate, whom He could have easily dazzled with His divine power, forced him to make obeisance. But He instead obeyed the will of His Father, confessed His witness to the truth, that God is the justifier of the ungodly, the one who saves sinners who cannot save themselves. And the Father vindicated His Son, showed His sacrifice to be perfect and full for all humanity, by raising Jesus from the dead.

The God whom you believe in is not powerless to defend His people. The Bible shows many times how God comes to the aid of ancient Israel. History also bears witness to the truth of Jesus' promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. The devil has used men and empires to try to snuff out the confession of the only true God and His Word. Much of Israel rejected the Messiah, booted His followers from the synagogue and sought to imprison them. Their chief leader Saul became Paul and the greatest evangelist the church has ever known. The perversions of works-righteous attempts to earn God's favor and forgiveness were exposed by the clear teachings of Holy Scripture which have always been confessed by the church, and which find their center in the forgiveness of sins that is accomplished in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

That is what we see in the Augsburg Confession, the first and foundational public confession of the Lutheran Church. Our Church is not built upon Luther, not upon Melancthon, not upon some stereotypical ethnic tradition ala the Prairie Home Companion. It is built upon the confession uttered by St. Peter: **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God"** (Matt 16:16). It is built upon Holy Scripture, teaching only what can be said on the basis of the plain words of the Bible. It is no invention of the 16th century, but what has always been believed in the Church. There is no novelty, no original doctrine that is new to the Augsburg Confession, nor to any of our other confessions. What God has said plainly in His Word we **"proclaim on the housetops"** and confess **"before men"** (Matt 10:32).

There continue to be those who oppose what we confess. At Augsburg, when the Lutheran princes were ordered by the Emperor to renounce their beliefs and put a stop to the Lutheran preaching in their lands, one of them knelt before the Emperor saying, "Rather than deny my God and suffer the Word of God to be taken from me, I will kneel down and have my head struck off." Our church body, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, exists because Lutherans in nineteenth century Germany refused to say that what God's Word teaches doesn't matter. They would not back down

even when kings and dukes used threats of jail and sent soldiers with bayonets to force joint services with Reformed Christians who rejected the presence of Christ's true body and blood in the Sacrament, that baptism forgives sins and gives new life with God, and even that Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Many of those Lutherans came to this land where they could freely and openly confess the truths of the Bible.

Here in this land today, there is opposition not just within the wider visible Christian world, but from unbelievers as well. All manner of forces seek to silence the plain teachings of the Bible, not just when it comes to salvation and how it is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus, but things that were once obvious even to the pagans. We are not threatened with flames in this country. But there are Christians being fired, fined, and losing the love of friends and even family. No doubt many of you fear this, if not for yourselves, for your children and grandchildren. I certainly do. Perhaps those whom you dearly love have wavered in their confession, have bowed down before the politically correct and tolerant gods of this world. Perhaps you have not verbally denied the Lord, but have kept silent. Where, like Daniel, you weren't asked to do something openly ungodly such as worship an idol, but simply told to keep silent, just don't pray to your God, just don't speak His Word, confess His truths. That is a very easy thing to do.

But if your Father in heaven knows the flight of the sparrows, who are of so little value. If He knows the path of every earthworm, He knows the very hairs of your head, because you are of far more value than sparrows and worms. You have been redeemed by His Son who took on flesh like yours and who died for your sins. He rose again from the grave, showing what is promised to your body that suffers so in this life, and will be destroyed, if not by those who hate you for confessing Christ, then certainly by death. Your weakness and fear are covered in Jesus' blood. Your loved ones who have fallen away are still the beloved and baptized children of God, and He is always working for their good, seeking and calling them back.

He does all this through His Word. For you and for them. That is why we continue to confess. We hold fast to the Scriptures and our confession of them. Because it is His Word that comforts us and teaches our hearts to believe in Him. It is His Word that fills you with godly fear, not terror of Him, nor of any earthly power, but the confidence of the kind of faith that prays the words of the Introit: **“In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea.”**

Or as we sing in Luther's paraphrase of the psalm:

*Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpower us.
This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none.
He's judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.*