

Go!
Part 5 – We Should Expect Opposition. What Then?
Matthew 10:16-33

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ November 9, 2025 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

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¹⁶ “I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸ and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the gentiles. ¹⁹ When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you at that time, ²⁰ for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. ²¹ Sibling will betray sibling to death and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, ²² and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in this town, flee to the next, for truly I tell you, you will not have finished going through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

²⁴ “A disciple is not above the teacher nor a slave above the master; ²⁵ it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

²⁶ “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷ What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, fear the one who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹ Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰ And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹ So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

³² “Everyone, therefore, who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven, ³³ but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. (Matthew 10:16-33, NRSV)

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How many people have ever played Monopoly – perhaps the most classic game in all of history. Tell me if your experience is the same as mine or if I’m just not playing the game right. At the beginning of the game, you can’t wait to roll the dice, to find out what properties you can buy, and start collecting things along the way, drawing cards to see if you can get a bank error to work in your favor. The idea of “Going” starts out like such a good idea.

But there comes a point in the game when houses and hotels start popping up on other players’ spaces, and the likelihood of avoiding them gets smaller. At that point, the one space that I always want to land on is what? GO TO JAIL. Because if you land there, you can sit there for three whole turns, not paying the \$50 to get out, not using your “Get out of jail free” card, not rolling doubles, all while still collecting rent from other players! Sometimes it feels safer to be locked indoors than to face the trouble that you know is waiting right around the next corner – probably on Illinois Avenue. It’s always Illinois — \$1100 for a night in that hotel! I want to design a new monopoly game that has Vrbo’s and campsite options. It’s stressful! Better to stay in jail!

It is interesting that one of the new places to go this church has been finding a new presence is into the jail, with several people feeling called into that environment to see what God might do there.

These past several weeks we have been walking through passages in Matthew 9 and 10 in this series called “Go!” This is the unmistakable calling by Jesus to all who have believed the Good News to “Go!” and take that Good News out to every place.

To think of where God may be calling us out, like a grand adventure, is exciting. Of course, it’s right that it starts off that way.

A few weeks ago, Jeff began the series talking about *preparation*. Before we go, we start with prayer – for forgiveness, direction, compassion to see people the way Christ sees them, and for open hearts to this message. It’s a blank game board, and we’re allowing the possibilities and our attitudes to be shaped by God.

Then, Jesus addresses the fear of disciples that they may not have what it takes for the journey. And Jesus promises that they will need very little. They are to trust God that He is the one who will equip them for the journey and promises to join them on every step.

In the last two messages we are reminded that we have been freely given every grace by God. We in turn are invited to freely give to others right where we find ourselves – with joy, and it doesn't have to be forced. We can simply extend Christ's peace as we build relationships with people, keeping an eye out for the open door to share.

So then Pastor Jeff thought, "The instructions to the disciples are about to get a little darker. Brett, why don't you preach the next one?" So here we are deep into Matthew 10.

Last week's passage ended with a warning to all of those who don't welcome us with our Good News to share.

Today, Jesus continues with a warning to those who are going out to *share* the message. And the message is this: *It's not going to be easy*. That's the short, euphemized version. He doesn't sugarcoat what they will face. He starts off with a promise of physical pain: you'll be handed over, dragged, flogged, beaten, you might lose your life. They'll make an example out of you no one will want to follow.

But, "sticks and stones..." right? No, it's the words that hurt the most, and that's coming, too. Words that will tear families apart because of the truth of a God who loves us wholeheartedly and demands the same in return. Some of you in this room today have faced this kind of opposition. It may sting to hear that Jesus seems to be allowing that to happen in his promise of trouble this morning.

But hold on. Another promise is coming.

One fact about these troubles not to miss here. The trouble Jesus is talking about is not just trouble that we all face in this life, like natural disasters, financial or health challenges, relationship difficulties. The rain falls on the righteous and wicked just the same, right?¹

No, this trouble is the kind brought on when we choose to follow Jesus at his word and GO – when we move from simply sharing God's *love* into sharing God's *truth*. It's repeated here that the trouble comes *because of* Jesus.

One commentator writes, "The disciples are sent by Jesus to face the wolves; they will be hauled before the

authorities *because of me*; and what they say will take the form of a *witness* to Jesus and his message; the hatred that they experience will be specifically *because of my name*.²

Jesus is trouble.

Let me insert here another anecdote from the continuing saga of church bus mishaps from ministry through the years. As I've told most of you, I'm working on a book called, "We learned it all from Bus Breakdowns." I even have a cover for it now. I haven't actually written a word, but the chapter titles are numerous – some hilarious, some sobering.

We took our church bus deep up into the Washington Cascades for a backpacking trip. The road became rougher than expected as we approached the trailhead, and just before we parked, the interior dashboard lights and the radio began to...flicker. But we parked and didn't have to worry about it for the next four days out on the trail. I was hoping it would fix itself.

By the time we returned, I'd forgotten about the power issue. We were just in a hurry to get down to where we knew greasy burgers and homemade shakes were waiting for us. But as soon as we started down, the flickering came back. As we bumped down the windy mountain road, cliff on one side, it was not a big problem that the lights were flickering. The big problem came when it started affecting the power brakes, and then the power steering. I knew we were in trouble when I needed to stand up off the seat to push the brake hard enough to actually stop.

Stopping was good. But we had no cell phone service. We could walk to call someone, but then we wouldn't have the bus to do anything helpful to it if someone had a suggestion. So, we crept the bus down, in neutral, coasting a mile down the road till someone yelled, "I have a bar." At that point, we found out from a helpful mechanically inclined parent that the bus had two batteries, one for the engine, and one in a side compartment for all the accessories (radio, intercom, lights inside). And that second battery had gotten bounced out of its housing with the bumps on the road and was barely connected.

The voice on the other end of the line guided his own son ("in case something goes wrong", he said – that's another sermon) to disconnect completely that part of the battery and then as he was saying don't put the cable down on anything metal, he had done just that, causing an impressive spray of sparks, but luckily no harm to this student except for his hair a little frizzier. We later nicknamed him "The Conductor".

¹ Matthew 5:45.

² France, R.T., *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 389.

In the end, the bus ran just fine with the engine battery alone, to get us home.

It was stories like this that came up when it was time to part with that old bus and look into getting a new one. There were so many stories that the obvious objection was raised:

Is it really a safe idea to invest in another bus?

Now, I do want you to know that I have raised the question lately about the possibility of a church bus here at Faith with a few people. This sermon is certainly not a campaign for a bus. This church has its own history with church buses in the past that makes the conversation hesitant. Still, I haven't finished trying. Here's why:

When you head out on an adventure on a church bus, it has been my experience that regardless of how you prepare and the precautions you take, you have to go with an expectation of trouble. But I ask the question as we look at this passage today:

Is that a reason not to invest?

Because it has also been my experience that mis-adventures in a church bus also come with an expectation of community-building, unforgettable memories, problem-solving, a need to practice trust in each other and a God who leads us out on the adventure. It's just a vehicle, but I'm telling you, deep things can happen. Like getting stuck deep in the sand at the ocean with the tide coming in. Next sermon, I promise.

Following Jesus is not safe. But it is sacred.

So, back to these words of Jesus.

Jesus opens with, "I'm sending you out as sheep among wolves." Those words are not really a message of being on the right side of power. He could have said "lions among wolves" or "bears among wolves" but he always seems to go back to this image of sheep, an animal that has no ability to fight back or make any real effort to resist, and is sure to become a meal for any willing predator. But here, Jesus is setting the stage for the kind of resistance to power that he intends for his people for as long as we occupy this planet. It's a way of non-violence, humility, non-retaliation in the face of persecution, but going a step further, and *expecting* the opposition to come – knowing it will come.

Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Before we get to a place of expecting the world's opposition, we prepare by embracing a new kind of disposition. Throughout history, present day included, so many followers of Christ seem to have reversed the animals, and appear to

have been sent out as *wolves* among *sheep*. It is so natural and tempting to go out with an expectation of victories and successes and conquests in our sharing of the gospel.

But that is not the environment that Jesus is portraying here. If our disposition is the same as Jesus, then our expectation of the eventual end should be the same as well. The cross that was at the end of Jesus' life should not be seen as the exception in our own story, but the rule. It should be our expectation.

When we recognize that as sheep our chances of success are statistically bleak, that the trouble we face will lead to very little visible reward, then we *have* to put it all back on God, each one of us simply being vessels, and continuing to preach Christ with our lives and words right to the end of the trouble that is promised.

I love the way Dale Bruner sums up this entire passage. Brilliant. He says about this journey of *GOING* that Jesus calls us out on:

Trouble is the habitat.

Trouble is the habitat. But trust is the habit.

The sheep have something the wolves don't have. What is it?

The sheep have a shepherd.

*So hold on. **Another promise is coming.***

If you have time with a life group or a friend this week, I'd love for you to take some time to talk about what *habits of trust* have been important for you that we can learn from. What habits do you need to lean into again?

We've all seen the devastation that the people in Jamaica have faced. At the same time, it has given the entire world a chance to see the character of deep belief and faith that the Jamaican people possess. Can you imagine the days leading up to the hurricane – what that must have been like? One article calls Jamaica *A Country of Faith and Fortitude*. Let me read a paragraph:

It's a sentiment familiar to every Jamaican — not superstition, but a reflection of how faith and practicality coexist. Jamaicans prepare earnestly, but they also believe deeply. That belief, for many, is the unseen force that steadies their hands when they hammer down hurricane straps or pack away food and candles.

Their history has taught them some things about how to prepare. Did you know that the second half of a hurricane is worse than the first? After the center of the storm passes over, the strong winds reverse, and

destroy everything that the first winds weakened in one direction. We will continue to pray for that country in the coming months.

It's one thing to be told that we will face ridicule and even physical pain from people outside of our lives. But to be told that it will rip some families apart from the inside. It's the wind coming stronger in the other direction. That's worse news than the first. It's hard to prepare for that.

Still, another promise is coming.

I will be honest for a moment as a pastor among you. I have to ask myself from time to time, why I have managed to avoid most of the trouble Jesus talks about. I hate to even say it aloud. Because it either means that it just hasn't happened *yet* or I've chosen for the most part to not fully trust Jesus into the bus of "*going*" that he's calling us to here. It's a question for all of us to wrestle with that have lived relatively peaceful, safe lives as Christians. But I sense that all of us are going to need the wisdom of serpents and innocence of doves to face these next years.

As an aside, I need to mention how important it is to know ourselves. Some of us were born ready to GO! You long for the adventure, ready to take the trouble that comes. When Wendy and I were in high school, we went on an 11-day backpack trip with our youth group. I was sad when it ended, and I've always wanted to return any chance I get. For Wendy, she loves to hike, but that trip was about 10 days too long without a shower and a toilet. We know ourselves, and so we plan accordingly. I try to encourage her to go on short trips and she reigns me in so we can be out and about together.

When it comes to sharing faith and serving the world, some of you have shown yourselves to be living this series no naturally. You spur the rest of us on to Bethany campus, Kennedy high school, into the jail, even your own work places. As for me, I know that I love the safety of the walls of this church. I need to partner with people groups and individuals that are ready to GO. We have to know ourselves. Some of us need to be stretched. Some of us need to be reigned in so we can do this...together.

And together, we need to hammer down the hurricane straps knowing that *the other promise is there*.

Let me just pause here and say that when Jeff split these passages up, I'm so thankful he included this final paragraph. The one that starts with, "So have no fear of them..." It's a change of tone.

The other promise is here at the end of the paragraph.

We can speak boldly. From the rooftops. In the light of day. On social media. Out our car windows in rush hour traffic. The only one to fear is God. And when we know what that God is like, *fear* translates to *trust*. We have this final verse in this part.

So do not be afraid, you are more valuable than many sparrows. The tenderness and care that our God has for each one of us, individually, and as a church family, cannot be given a value. It's too great.

Jesus the man, familiar with suffering, promises we, too, will know trouble.

Jesus, the Son of God, reminds us we have a God big enough to be feared and trusted that walks with us right into the fire.

All of us will have moments of decision in our lives. It might happen today. We'll have to decide if we're going to stand up for Jesus. We may have to accept abuse from others with a sense of poise. We may have to put in a good word for him when we're confronted. It may be a simple opportunity to offer help to someone the world has turned its back on.

More often, our standing up for Jesus happens in little ways.

I think the young people, those of you still in school, may understand this better than adults. As adults, we've become really good at justifying why and when we stay silent. We can give excuses and reasons that we have avoided the trouble. We have a lot to learn from you about courageously facing trouble when it comes, about speaking your mind without worrying about the consequences so much, when we know it's the right thing to say. I just hope we can return the favor by encouraging you with this promise: That God is more present with you in those moments than ever, giving you the strength. He knows you and loves you more than we know how to express. Watch the way Jesus says it to us here this morning!

I've been watching a show in small increments about people stranded on an island, separated from the other half of their group after a plane crash. Maybe you know the show. There was a moment recently, where they are finally reunited with the other half after they thought all hope was lost. I was getting surprisingly emotional watching this reunion of husband and wife, friends, parents and children. The depth of the moment was heightened *because* of the struggle they all had gone through.

What if Jesus is inviting all of us into the struggle so that we can be reunited with our own true selves that desperately want to be able to share this great news of God's love. When we take Jesus up on this invitation, we catch a glimpse of who we really are. We set aside

the distractions and obstacles and fear of the world's opposition, and we lean into the promise that God...is with us.

Before we face the expected opposition...

...of the world...

We prepare by embracing *a new* disposition. We take on this attitude of humility and resignation that it may not end in success. But we take on a disposition of faithfulness.

The promise is that we get to hear again God's *composition*, his song of love always being written just for us and sung over us while we sleep and while we are awake.

I just taught our youth group an old song I know based on Zephaniah 3:17

*The Lord your God is with you,
the Mighty Warrior who saves.
He will take great delight in you;
And will rejoice over you with singing.*³

There is strength, and need of a strong and powerful God to go with us. But we hear it in the gentle promise of God's love – a song that is always playing around us.

It was precisely these words of Jesus that I think Paul was drawing from when he spoke these words to the Corinthians, words that sounded like an oxymoron:

*That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*⁴

So, get on the church bus and let's head into the trouble...together, sharing about the amazing grace of Jesus, and lean on the promises of God...together.

Amen.

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The Next Step

A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application

1. Read Matthew 10:16-25. Listen for what speaks to you or surprises you in this section of the Scripture this week.

2. When Jesus says he sends us out as “sheep among wolves”, how does that shape or change the way you think about following him in your life?

3. Has it been your own experience that trouble is the “habitat” of discipleship? Can you remember a time when sharing your faith or standing up for truth brought rejection or at least misunderstanding?

4. How might John 16:33 (on the front of the bulletin) be a helpful link in understanding this part of Jesus' words and introducing the next part?

5. Now read verses 26-33, the rest of this week's passage. Listen for the shift in tone and message of Jesus' words. What do you notice?

6. Dale Bruner said, “Trouble is the habitat; trust is the habit.” Are there any habits of trust that have sustained you when trouble comes your way? How might you lean into a new habit to build trust in this season?

7. Just as Jesus helped Peter reclaim his missionary heart on the beach in John 20, is it possible that Jesus is inviting you (and our community) into a grace-filled reunion of who we were meant to be in this call to missionary discipleship?

Table to Table Question *A question for kids and adults to answer together*

Do you think following Jesus is hard?
How does God help us when it *is* hard?

³ Zephaniah 3:17.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:10.