

Pentecost VI  
Text: Matthew 10:24-39  
Preacher: Jim Goodyear, Vicar

June 22, 2008  
St. Peter's – Lafayette Hill

### **“Have No Fear”**

For a number of years, my parents took the whole Goodyear family about 25 of us to Hershey Park a large amusement park located in Chocolate Town. It was an annual outing we looked forward to each summer. Upon arrival we gathered to enjoy a tailgate picnic lunch. Then we took the tour of Chocolate World anticipating the free sample at the end of the tour before going our separate ways to enjoy the park...namely riding the roller coasters. Today there are 11 roller coasters of varying sizes. I actually dislike roller coasters. I'm afraid of the sudden turns, the ups and downs and the quick back lash that the thrill ride offers. I prefer the water rides or to people watch in the park. Although I can't swim, I love the splashing water of the Coal Cracker, Canyon River Rapids or the Giant Flume. However, with two teenaged sons and a number of other family members who live to ride every coaster in the park, I found myself on most of the roller coasters, putting my fears aside. One particular year the Great Bear was the newest coaster attraction. A coaster where each person is strapped in a chair with their feet dangling. This ride takes many turns including spirals and complete circles over a two mile track weaving in and out of other park attractions. When the ride was over, I had to go back to find my stomach after that ride! Over time, I overcame my fear of riding roller coasters. I still am not wild about coasters, but at least I will try one. I had let myself get in the way of having a good time.

In March of 1933 in his first inaugural address President Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” It was a difficult time for the nation. The depression had wrecked the economy, the banking system was in disarray and the lives of nearly every American was turned upside down. Doom and gloom permeated society. Roosevelt recognized the situation and later said in the same address, “...We face common difficulties. They concern, thank God, only material things.” The soul of the nation was not taken away, rather only in need of encouragement and a look to see who is really in charge. I found it interesting to read Roosevelt's inaugural address. The economic situation of 1933 compared to today is eerily similar.

Jesus warned the disciples to expect the same treatment that he himself experienced. There will be people who will want to harm you because of him. There will be obstacles to overcome. You will be persecuted for going against the norms of society. You will face opposition. You will be afraid. But Jesus tells them; do not be afraid of those who can kill the body. The body is a material thing,

but the soul, where life is revealed to give true meaning cannot be killed except by God, our Father in heaven. We are God's own; A single part of God's magnificent work. Even the sparrow, a small creature by comparison is God's work. Don't you think you have more value than a sparrow? God knows all about you. Even the hairs on your head are counted. Those who know Jesus in their soul are recognized before God.

What are we afraid of today? How often do we let the material things of our living get in the way of true life? I remember when there was the fear that gas prices would go over two dollars. Now there is the fear it will reach five dollars by the end of the year. Think of the affect this one material thing, gas, influences our daily lives. It stifles our movement from one place to another. We might think twice about going on an extended vacation, or running across town a second time to pick up something for dinner. We use the excuse of rising gas prices for varied reasons. Yes, rising gas prices do affect our daily lives and we can make adjustments. I remember a similar situation in the early 1970's. Gas prices then were in the twenty to thirty cent range. When I started driving in 1973, gas was forty-seven cents a gallon. The fear was that the price would go over a dollar. Remember when your license plate number meant which day you could purchase gas. We were encouraged to take a coworker to work, to carpool so fewer cars would be on the road. High Occupancy Vehicle lanes appeared on highways. Mass transportation usage rose. The government wanted scientists and engineers to discover alternative fuels but by the mid 1980's we had reverted to our old ways. I heard this past week that for the first time since the 1970's there are fewer cars on the road. They attribute this to the rising price of gas. I wonder how long it will last.

The price of gas seems so meaningless though when we consider that there are people around us struggling to live. We live in a materialistic society. We seek to have the latest gadgets to make life easy or more entertaining. We are bombarded nearly every waking moment to purchase this or that guaranteed to enhance our lives. All of us are guilty of having too much and probably have more than we need. Yet even with all these 'things' there are many who live in our neighborhoods that struggle to satisfy the basic needs of life – shelter, food, companionship. Maybe you don't see them next door or even on the next street, but there are people who live in cardboard boxes, or rummage trash cans for a meal, or feel left out because of their clothes or looks or status. Sometimes, we are afraid of these people. I know there are times when I look the other way or wonder why they can't make it better for themselves. Forgetting that they too are a child of God, just like me. They may not have the material things I do, but God is present in them too. I wonder what roller coaster they have been riding. What twists and turn have affected their lives.

Being a Christian is hard work. As Christians we are called to live in ways that our culture rarely supports. Jesus calls us to take up the cross and follow him; to care and love each other all the time. Gods love for us calls us to love one another. To love is to be active in a relationship with other people. Love binds us together taking all our fears aside and bringing us together as one. Jesus warns us that he does not come in peace, but with a sword. We will be confronted with people who will not think like ourselves. Living in the cross of Jesus you may find opposition in your own family, maybe in our own congregation too. We do not all think or act alike. In my own family, we do not always agree, unless of course it is going to Hershey Park or participating in some other fun activity. There were times when I did not see eye to eye with my father. As I matured we have come to understand each other with respect and love. It was tough growing up in my family, with four boys, each of us with a different perspective on any given situation each with different talents and skills. We have learned to love each other. With my own sons who both serve in the military; I do not agree with their career choice; but I still love them. Sons against their fathers, daughters against mothers; children of God against their Father in heaven.

Here at St. Peters there may be a sense of fear. Last week we learned that financial giving to the ministry and mission of our church is down 40%. To hear that sends shivers up and down the spine. Immediately our minds go in different directions. What are we going to do? Will we have to make cuts? Its summer, attendance is typically down. I would encourage us to prayerfully consider how each of us might respond in whatever way possible to what God has given you. Take up the cross of Jesus; proclaim it as your own. Show how you have been loved by Gods. We are God's people brought together in this place to share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ, God's only Son. God has blessed us with more than we can ever use. Verse 32 in today's gospel says, "Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven." It is God, our Father in heaven, who takes away the body AND the soul. We are not to fear each other; rather we are to fear God.

The fear of the Lord is the fountain of life. A fountain that begins in the waters of baptism, called into the body of Christ. Everyday fears cannot destroy us. If we turn our fears to God, God who is merciful will see us through. The roller coaster of life takes us on an unexpected course filled with twists and turns, sometimes upside down and sideways but God is always with us. Thanks be to God! Amen.