

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Pentecost 4 / Father's Day  
June 21, 2026  
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz  
***Whatever comes, don't be afraid***

—Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

Let's start with a simple illustration. You have someone you look up to as someone who is strong and capable. Since today is Father's Day, maybe think of your Dad. Here's the question: How do you know that person can pick up a 5-lb rock? Here's the answer: Because you've already seen him pick up a 50-lb rock! If he's strong enough to pick up a 50-lb rock, he is certainly strong enough to pick up a little 5-lb rock. Logical, right?

That's a simple analogy that ties in with what Jesus is teaching us today in Matthew 10. How do you know that God can take care of you when the going in life gets difficult? How do you know that God can work it all out when you face ridicule, opposition, or threats for your faith? The answer is: Because God has already taken care of our biggest problem. He solved the problem of our sins by removing the sins that separated us from him, by reconciling us to him and bringing us into a right relationship with him. God has washed our sins away in the blood of Jesus, he has opened the gates of heaven for us, he has given us eternal life in his Son Jesus. Threats and persecution? They might end your life. Our sins? They would send us to hell, if God hadn't taken them away. If God can and has solved the huge problem of our sins for us, he is certainly more than capable of taking care of every other problem that arises in our lives. So whenever difficult times come, remember: God's got this! Whatever comes, don't be afraid.

Jesus looked out over the vast crowds that followed. These people came from all walks of life. Thousands of them. They were farmers and fishermen, tradesmen and craftsmen, homemakers and housewives. They were coming to see him. To see Jesus! They came because they were hungry and hurting, sick, tired, sad and lonely and afraid—and also because they were curious. Jesus looked out at them, and he had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. These were the people he loved. These were the people he had come to save. These were the people who need him. So he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38).

So, what do you think the disciples did? The disciples did what Jesus told them to do! They prayed for workers, and the next thing Jesus did was to appoint *them* to be workers. He called them "apostles," and he sent them out. But the people Jesus sent out the apostles to meet would not be as friendly as the people who were coming to Jesus. Jesus told his brand-new apostles, "I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against people!" (Matthew 10:16,17). Jesus wanted his apostles to understand that a life serving Jesus would not be an easy walk in the park, a life filled with luxury and comfort and self-indulgence. It would be hard, but they would be blessed through the hardship. And in the end, the reward waiting for them was literally out of this world, a crown of life.

Let's dive a little deeper into what Jesus told his apostles, and let's take to heart for ourselves the warnings and the encouragement Jesus shared with his apostles. Why does the preaching of the Christian faith meet with such opposition? Whether it's the preaching of apostles or prophets or pastors serving in the ministry, or Christian conversations about faith and forgiveness that followers of Jesus have with their friends, relatives and coworkers, why is the message often met with hostility? Christianity is about love and forgiveness, peace, hope, strength, comfort, joy—those are all good things!—why do people sometimes react so negatively?

It comes down to several things. First, in order to hold onto Jesus, we must let go of ourselves, and that is not what we human beings naturally want to do. We naturally want to say, "I'm good, you're good! Of course, we're not perfect, but if Jesus polishes us up a little bit, smooths off our rough edges, we'll all be good." But it doesn't work that way. Jesus instructs us to repent, to let go of ourselves, to despair of our goodness, to recognize that we are by nature wicked, depraved, wretched, helpless, poor and blind. We don't need a little tune-up; we need a completely new heart. Instead of our own goodness, we need righteousness from God—righteousness that only comes from Jesus. Instead of trying harder and doing better to make God happy with us, we can only let go and say, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!" This is a hard pill for us humans to swallow. God does this hard, alien work in our hearts through the law that crushes and convicts us.

Second, there is something even more offensive about the Christian faith: Jesus is the *only* way. There is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Buddha cannot save us. Mohammad cannot save us. Our own best efforts cannot save us. *Jesus* saved us! Jesus Christ became your perfect righteousness, your perfect, obedient substitute under God's law, tempted as we are but without sin. Jesus Christ shed his blood and died on the cross to wash away your sin. Jesus Christ rose from the dead to declare death vanquished. Jesus is your Savior and the Savior of the world. There is no other. It's not, "Many paths lead to God." Jesus is the

Way. Jesus is the only one who says, "Take heart! Your sins are forgiven!" Jesus is the only one who wraps us in a gleaming robe of perfect righteousness, who dresses us up in beautiful garments and clothes us with himself. Jesus, Jesus, only Jesus!

And one more thing that makes the preaching of Christ offensive: Jesus doesn't lure us with empty promises about a life of ease and luxury. He doesn't say, "Follow me, and I'll make you rich. And prosperous. And popular. And comfortable." He doesn't promise those things. No, he says, "Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me." If they name-called and vilified Jesus, what makes you think you should be exempt from persecution? If they crucified Jesus, what makes you think you should escape with your life? Jesus promises a kingdom that can't be seen on earth because it lives in our hearts. He promises a heaven that is past this life and beyond this world.

So, it's no wonder people despise Jesus' preaching and ridicule Jesus' followers for dreaming of "pie in the sky in the bye-and-bye." Repent? Trust in Jesus as the only Way? Hold onto a future hope of heaven? It's much easier and completely natural for people to say to Christians, "Get off my front porch and go knock on someone else's door. You want to believe in your imaginary friends? I don't want your silliness! This life is all there is, and this life is where it's at."

The bottom line, it can be rough out there for you and me. We should expect that. But whatever comes, don't be afraid. Jesus sent out his apostles not just with a warning but with encouragement. *"Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body. Rather be afraid of the one who can destroy both body and soul in hell."* Don't worry about what men think or can do. Think about what God thinks. And thankfully, what God thinks about you is informed by Jesus' work for you. Jesus lived and died for you, so God considers you his precious child, holy in his sight. What's the worst thing they can do? They can kill you. They can take your life. Then you get to be with Jesus sooner. They can't take away your salvation. *A disciple is not above his teacher.* If they took your Lord and Savior, spit on him, beat him, and nailed him to a cross, can we expect better treatment? If they called Jesus "Beelzebub," what do you think they might call you? Can we expect better treatment than what Jesus got? Of course not! When these apostles were flogged for Jesus, they rejoiced that they had been given the privilege of suffering for Jesus. But even though you and I might—or might not—be given the privilege of suffering, in the end, we don't *have* to suffer for our sins because Jesus has already done that. We don't have to wonder whether God loves us because God has already told us he loves us in Christ.

Let me share a little ministry story. Years ago I was working with a family that was having some serious marital problems. One day I received a call from the husband. "Pastor," he said, "my wife's not following through, and the problems in our marriage are just getting worse." I said, "Well, we know your wife isn't perfect, but right now I'm not talking with her; I'm talking with you. So my encouragement to you is to look in the mirror. Repent! Consider how your attitude needs to change." "I can't believe you would say that!" he replied. "Nobody has ever talked to me that way before!" Click! He hung up on me, leaving me thinking, "That didn't go so well."

An hour later the phone rang again. It was the gentleman's father, who happened to be a retired WELS called worker. He said, "I just got off the phone with my son, and he told me what you said to him. I can't believe you talked to him that way! You have no idea what he's going through!" I said, "Sir, two things: First, I can't discuss with you a private matter regarding a member of my congregation, even if he is your son. But what I can tell you is that the counsel I gave him is from the Word of God, and it was what needed to be said."

Two weeks later, my phone rang again. It was the husband again. He said, "Pastor, I'm sorry I hung up on you. I've been thinking about what you said, and you were right. I've been a jerk. I'm looking at myself, and it's making a big difference in my marriage." There's an example of how the Word of God was met with resistance at first, but it made a powerful difference in the end. That couple is still married years later, and their marriage is stronger than ever.

All of this comes from God's heart of love. If we could only see how much God, our dear heavenly Father loves us! *"Are not two sparrows sold for a small coin? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground without the knowledge and consent of your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all numbered. So do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows."* Whatever happens, don't be afraid. Look at your life up to this point: God has a magnificent track record of bringing you safely to this day and keeping you in his tender mercy and care. God has been with you every step of the way. No matter how heavy your burdens, how overwhelming your problems, God has never left your side. Even when our rebellious nature kicked in, and we wandered and fell into sin, God did not abandon us; he gently called us and picked us up from the mess we'd made for ourselves, he cleaned us up, and brought us home. Just as here on earth a father's job is to protect and care for his family, God our Father in heaven perfectly protects and cares for us. He knows how many hairs are on your head. He takes care of the sparrows, and you're worth so much more than birds! You're worth the life of his own Son! That's how much he cherishes and values you!

The 5-lb rocks in our lives might seem to us to be a lot heavier in the moment. When the early Christians were told, "Sacrifice to the emperor or be thrown to the lions," that was a life-or-death choice. When we're facing ridicule and opposition and threats for our faith, it's hard. Whenever adversity comes our way—be it a job loss, a terminal illness, the loss of a loved one, whatever—in the moment it seems huge, overwhelming, insurmountable. But in that moment

remember that God our dear Father in heaven has everything in his hand. For him these big rocks are just pebbles. He's already taken care of our biggest problem. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:32) So whatever comes, don't be afraid. Amen.