

Gospel reflections

Matthew 10:24-39

This week we have another challenging passage and message from Jesus. As the end of term 2 looms in what has been a diabolic year, the energy levels for some of you will be lagging and for others the adrenalin is pumping. It is hard to know how best to encourage you. However, as I delved into this passage, as always there is encouragement for today.

Fear. Is there any more pervasive or powerful motivating force in human experience? From the moment we are born, we learn to fear the world around us, certainly to fear the stranger, sometimes to fear even those who are closest to us. Political leaders have long recognised the power of fear. We only need to watch election campaigns to see how fear can be used to manipulate. Fear is the driving force behind vast segments of our economy, as well as, increasingly, our political priorities.

Fear impacts our school communities and leaders as well. Fear of falling enrolments, fear of declining government funding, fear of that parent taking legal action, fear of making an important but difficult change, fear of conflict with that group of staff, fear of speaking out against that issue in the local community.

In Matthew 10, Jesus shares with his followers that fear will be a part of their journey. Jesus' message of radical inclusivity, mercy and justice is very confronting for the predominant religious leaders of the time who were far more comfortable with messages of exclusion, religious righteousness, and oppression of the sinner. Jesus knew that they were set on a collision course with the religious authorities of the time. As Jesus prepares his disciples for their mission to the "lost sheep" he is very realistic about the threats they will face. It is interesting that in 10:34 Jesus identifies that although he has called his followers to be peacemakers (5:9), his mission does not bring peace, but a sword. The very act of peacemaking, as Jesus' ministry demonstrates, will bring conflict as it threatens human powers and priorities. At the same time, he builds the case for why they should not let this fear hinder them. He says; "What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops." It is no wonder that the phrase 'Don't be afraid' appears three times in this gospel reading.

The passage has me thinking about our Christian witness in Lutheran schools and ECSs and how we speak the good news of God's love for all people. Perhaps there are times when fear has us questioning whether open days need to include anything about how the Christian faith shapes the educational experience of children or students, how fear has us considering whether we really need to make those changes to Christian Studies because it doesn't really count and parents don't care anyway, how it might quieten us when a colleague suggests there are more urgent priorities at this time of year than devotion or worship. These challenges are real and occur daily as we live out our mission as educational and Christian communities.

Jesus promises that those who "lose their life" for him will in fact "find it," while those who "find their lives" in the world will lose them (10:39). I have been thinking about this verse in terms of those who 'lose their life'. Is Jesus setting us free from life as we know it, setting us free from all of the fears of conforming and living a life based on the agendas of others? Is this a different way of imagining Jesus' phrase of having life in all its fullness. A life that will engage us in challenging times but will set us free from fear and provide a security of identity and purpose. Secure in our relationship with God, we are free to attend to the needs of the world around us and the people right in front of us. I'm not saying that it is going to be easy but I wonder what might happen if we boldly lived out our identity and purpose as Lutheran education communities? Would we be so irresistible that most of our fears might fade?

Adapted from [Stanley Saunders](#)

[I will fear no more](#) The Afters

Prayers of the People

Servant God,
be with those who are not seen and heard in the world,
because of their gender or age; their caste or race;
their sexuality or lifestyle; their poverty or history.
Open our ears and eyes, to hear and see all people as yours.

God of little children,
be with all children, wherever they live,
whoever their parents are, whatever their needs,
that they would all be welcomed and nourished,
enabled to be all you want them to be.
Open our hearts and arms, to welcome all your children.

God of love,
be with all who live with fear,
fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of being labelled,
fear of themselves or others, fear of you.
Open us all to your endless love, that it might drive out fear.

Teacher God,
be with us all, as we struggle to make sense of your world and your word,
as your church, in our communities, as your disciples.
Open our minds and hearts, to learn from you.

God of all,
Father, Son and Spirit,
hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken,
offered from the darkness and hope of our hearts,
Amen