Matthew 10:31a. So do not be afraid.

Have you ever sat down and worked through exactly what our faith is about? Seriously, sometimes we bebop through our lives, being involved in this or that, and yet we have not really sat down and figured out exactly what it is we are doing. I wonder (it’s my nature as a Pastor) if that isn’t so when it comes to faith. Just what is your faith and just how does your faith play out in your life?

 So how would you answer the question of “What is faith?” If you were to tell me that faith is something that helps you live right and to be a better person and so forth, I might be inclined to scratch my head. If you were to tell me that faith provides an outlet for caring about people and provides a better social experience in your life, again I might just sit there and scratch my head. Perhaps you would just say that faith provides a foundation for hope, so that no matter what is thrown at you in life, well, faith lets you know that you can win the struggle and life will get better. You might even add that you learned such things in stories like David and Goliath or childless Abraham and Sarah or (about the only New Testament possibility for this lesson) how nasty old Saul turned around and became faith builder Paul. And again I am going to sit there and scratch my head. Because while to some degree, a very lesser degree, what you are saying could be a minor role of faith it is not, did you catch that, NOT what the Christian faith is about.

 Today we are going to take an interesting look at what the Christian faith is. What is most interesting about this text is that Jesus gives us insight into what to expect when you are a Christian and yet this text occurs before the entire revelation of what Jesus is all about happens. This text occurs at the beginning of the Christian faith and I personally think that what it says is going to knock your socks off. Our theme will be: **I WILL CONFESS AND NOT BE AFRAID!**

 So as I said, please note that this text occurs right at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus has picked out most of the men who will be his disciples and Jesus sends them out into the world to begin to preach and teach the message of Jesus. Last week in our Gospel reading we heard the beginning of this chapter where some of what I reference took place. We heard how Jesus was going about teaching, preaching the gospel and healing every sickness and disease. We heard how Jesus had compassion for the people because they were troubled and downcast and as the text said, **“Like sheep without a shepherd.”** We heard Jesus lament the absolute shortage of workers to go into the harvest field. Then we heard the names of the 12 Jesus picked to be his disciples and his representatives of faith.

 And yes, Jesus sent them out. Really, at this point they had little to no training but he sends them anyway. They had two tasks to perform. To preach loud and clear: **“The kingdom of heaven is near!”** What they were also to do is to heal the sick, raise the dead. Cleanse lepers, and drive out demons. The disciples return from this ministry at the death of John the Baptist and it is when Jesus tries to get them alone to speak with them of this ministry and faith, well those events lead to the feeding of the five thousand. I submit to you here, that the words of Matthew are a compilation of the various points Jesus made to the disciples concerning ministry and faith. And they are important points.

 How are these points presented? First point, **“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor is a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the master of the house was called Beelzebul, how much more the members of his household!”** I want you to know that at this point opposition to Jesus isn’t full blown yet. People were still flocking to see and hear him. Things looked great. But down the line Jesus will be accused of being a minion of Satan and it was said that his miracles were done by the power of Satan. And might I remind you that in the end, despite his good and love, Jesus is going to end up on the cross, unjustly killed because he taught the truth of God. Now go back and read those words and ask yourself what they say about being a follower of Jesus?

 Our prayer is that we be just like Jesus! Yet the world hated Jesus and still does! If in our lives we can just humbly be recognized as Christians and clearly teach what Jesus taught, that would be awesome! But do recognize that you will be hounded, scolded, accused and abused because you follow Jesus! The world will accuse you of being evil and doing evil just because of Jesus! So what does that tell you about faith? What does that tell you is true when you compromise and change your faith because of the world?

 But let’s go on. The next point Jesus makes is this: **“So do not be afraid of them, because there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, and nothing hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, fear the one who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”**

 Here is what I consider a big lesson. If you are being like Jesus you will have difficulty and struggle. For that matter note that this verse clearly states that you need not fear those who kill the body. Just contemplate the implication of that…you just might have to die because of your faith! But we are told, **“Do not fear.”** Please note that your fear is to be of the One who rules all things and who determines the issues of heaven and hell. That is none other than God himself. Your calling as a believer is to proclaim God’s Word, everything in every way, truthfully and boldly. There will come a time when all the falsehoods, all the lies, all the destructions that the Devil and the world foist upon the children of God will be made known and dealt with, but for now, it is clear that our calling is to uphold the message of Jesus, the message of God and eternal life, which in the end will prove to be true and factual, uphold that perhaps even to death.

 Wow! Note that Judas would betray Jesus and not uphold these words. His fate was horrid and sad. Note that of the other 11 (12 if you want to count the Apostle Paul) only John will live to a ripe old age and die naturally. All faced persecution and hardship and in fact all but one died because of their faith. Or think of the early Christians and the vast persecutions that would break out in just a short time after the ascension of Jesus. People lost their homes, jobs, family, and lives for the name of Jesus. It still happens in the world today. For that matter, how many of you have children who no longer really care about the Church and Jesus? Are our households divided because of Jesus? Has the world and its ways gotten to them? And yet, note the strong way Jesus speaks: **“So do not be afraid of them.”**

 Dear people, we have been blessed to be raised in a country founded on Christian principles but please note that is rapidly changing. We have been blessed to freely worship, preach and teach for quite a number of generations but indications are that is changing. Many of us will be called to our heavenly home before it gets even more horrid, so pray for our children and their children. Note we are told not to be afraid. All they can do is kill us. Stick to the Lord God and his marvel, wisdom and promises! Now what does that say of faith?

 Into this tough message Jesus then interjects this: **“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.”**

 I thank Jesus for these words. If God cares deeply about sparrows and even the hairs on your head, then what could possibly be our problem? Aren’t we worth more than sparrows and hair? And again note the strong words: **“So do not be afraid.”** It is with these words that Jesus calls forth the greatest fact there is in faith. Faith without a proper object is really worthless faith. If your object of faith is your good works and smooth life, it is worthless. If your faith is about happiness and the good life, respect, love and family, it is worthless. If your faith is centered on the idea that “I am blessed because I am pretty good”, then your faith is worthless. Because the object of your faith can never be this world or the things of this world. The object of your faith must be the Lord our God and his undeniable, reliable and absolutely truthful revelation, the Bible.

 How can you believe in God without the Bible? How can you know of God’s love, care and mercy without the Bible and its truths and promises? How can you know truly that God loves you unless you grasp and understand the love displayed in the life and message of Jesus? What good is it to talk of Jesus unless you grasp his atoning sacrifice and how He won for you eternal life and salvation? What good is our faith without a sure and awesome grasp of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, God’s Son who suffered, was crucified, died and rose from the dead for our eternal life and salvation? That is to be the heart of your faith. Nothing else, nothing less, and nothing more. God so loves us that He sent his Son. That God knows all, sees all and is over all! Isn’t that what we are told the message of the Ascension of Jesus is about? Our entire lives are in the hands of the Lord our God who has done everything for our eternal salvation and who tells us that everything revolves around God working to make sure we get to heaven as his gracious children. If God knows about sparrows and hairs, then you need to grasp He knows and is working in your life.

 And that is why once again we are told, **“So do not be afraid.”** Do you realize that in this short section the word fear is found three times in the context of “Do not fear.” The world is going to do everything it can to destroy your faith and the souls of God’s children. The world is going to try to make you think God doesn’t care, is powerless, or that God is so namby pamby that anything goes. The world will tell you the Bible is not God’s Word and work hard to prove it. The world will be in your face and attack your faith from every side. But we are told, “**So do not be afraid.”**

 Don’t be afraid to speak up for God’s truth. Don’t be afraid to confess Jesus Christ as God and Lord, the one who gave his life that you might have eternal life. Don’t be afraid to stand firm and say, “The Bible is God’s Word and true in everything, I will not yield one truth of God’s Word though the world stand against it.” Here is the true measure. Is your faith about God and his revelation that is His Word or is your faith something short of this wonder of God for souls? I can’t answer that question, only you can.

 Then comes the last point of this section that I think stands out the most. Again, remember these words were given in the earlier ministry of Jesus and yet here is what Jesus says: **“Everyone who confesses me before others, I will also confess before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father who is in heaven.”**

 Can you actually “confess” Jesus and live opposed to Him? Can you “confess” Jesus but only believe a percentage of what the Bible says? And if you agree you can deny a percentage, then at what point is your faith null and void: at 99, 90, 75, 60, 50, or 40%? What, you say, “I agree with 40% of what the Bible says!”

 Would we play ball with a team that only followed 40% of the rules of playing ball? I always find it interesting that when it comes to things like that we know that 100% is needed but we bail out when it comes to our faith. So please, take deeply to heart what these words say and mean. You cannot pick and choose what to believe and not believe. Jesus gave these words even before most of what He was about would be revealed and yet He spoke knowing all that was to be taught, believed and held firmly by those who would be his followers. You cannot claim faith and not confess 100% in Jesus.

 So again, Judas denied. What is his fate? The others died for the name of Jesus and were happy for it! It is clear that to stand firm in what Jesus is about is an absolute necessity of faith. Jesus is the Son of God who served to atone for our sins by his suffering and death and who rose from the dead to make sure we understood that his Word from beginning to end is trustworthy and true.

 So on your wedding day, if your spouse was asked: Do you promise….til death do us part”, and they replied, “No, I only promise until I am tired of it all,” would you continue the service? Are you going to hire the person who says to you, “I want full pay but I will only do what I feel is right for me.” Do you see what I am getting at? Confession is 100%, never a bits and pieces kind of thing.

 I pray our confession is that of Christ our Lord. I pray we hear and firmly believe all that the Bible says from beginning to end, no matter how the world reacts to Christ’s truths. I pray furthermore that our confession is also founded on the simple fact that we will not fear. God is with us. God for Jesus’ sake forgives us and loves us. He watches over sparrows and hair, and you are so much more valuable. Our trust is in God’s grace and love found in Jesus and nothing else. That is a 100% confession. Amen.