Proper 7 A 2020 In the midst of our fears,

we are unafraid for Jesus has delivered our souls from death

As we gather as God’s children again, fear and joy are found in our hearts. It may seem inconsistent to have both within us since they are opposites, yet we know as Christians that it is possible.

The joy of meeting again in worship and of visiting dear Christian friends beyond our bubbles is offset by the fear of coming into contact with a carrier of covid 19.

There is another fear that the world has crossed a threshold of which there is no going back. Fear of the unknown is most unsettling and presents a challenge to our faith.

When Jesus sent out his twelve disciples into the world, he does not sugar coat the fears that they would meet. He does not dismiss them, nor downplay them. They are real. For bringing the good news of salvation to people, Jesus prophesied that they would face rejection, persecution and execution.

Such things are never pleasant. The natural response is to avoid and escape them, yet Jesus says they are inevitable for his followers. Why? Because they all happened to him first. How it goes with Jesus in the world, is how it goes with his followers. It makes sense but it doesn’t make it any easier.

The easy way out of suffering for being a Christian is not to be one. But such momentary avoidance of discomfort never lasts. Escaping persecution and running with the world will come to an end. What will happen when fallen Christians hear Jesus say to them, “Since you denied knowing me, I now deny knowing you before my Father?” These words are permanent. There is no undoing them. The suffering they bring is eternal.

Of all our fears, losing Jesus is the worst. Losing him is death, now and forever. Contracting covid cannot be our worst fear, for then we make a god out of it. We all must die since death is what we deserve because of our sin. Yet in the midst of our deserved death, Christ Jesus has given us the free gift of eternal life. As He says it means gaining our souls for eternity.

The disciples did face rejection from their own people, imprisonment and beatings for preaching the gospel, and all but one faced execution for not denying Christ. To say that they did not fear such things would be to deny their humanity. Yet in the midst of these real fears, they were given a peace that comes from Christ Himself, who remained near to them and for them until the end.

They did not sugar coat sin, nor did they preach in such a way to gain friends with the world and to get rich. They remained faithful to the words given to them by God. We have the same task. We serve the same Lord. His words do not change. He remains committed to marriage of one man and one woman only, which He instituted in the garden of Eden but the world finds reprehensible . He remains committed to saving each one of us by the One Saviour of the world and no other, to which the world decries as narrow minded and ignorant.

Yet in the face of opposition, when we are called to give an account of what it is we believe, it is not easy to stay committed to what He said and who He is. Pressure mounts in the moment when all eyes are on you and everyone is waiting to see if you give what the world wants to hear. If not, there will be dire and immediate consequences. You will be cast out of social circles. You may lose you job. And in the days ahead you may even lose your life as the disciples did.

Is it worth it? Have you caved in to popular opinion and tried to save yourself and your reputation with silence instead of a courageous witness? For such denials, repent. Have you feared the covid virus more than upsetting your heavenly Father? Then, receive Christ’s forgiveness and know this. Christ remains committed to you. He will not forget His promises to each child baptized into the holy name. He will be with you in the fire of trial and will not turn away.

It is not even a matter of us choosing him. It is a fact that Jesus has delivered us from death to life. He rose from the dead and ascended to the highest honour of God’s right hand. We breathe the air of his mercy and fill our lungs with his steadfast love and then give expression to our gratitude with songs of thanksgiving.

God has taken the time to count the hairs on your head. He has shown His undying love to you. He will certainly stand beside you in the moment of trial when called upon to give an account of who He is and what He has done for us all.

God’s baptized children are worth more to Him than birds. If God knows each bird that falls, He is committed to forgive each child that sins.

We can acknowledge the Lord before men without fear, though we may be very much afraid, because the Lord has delivered our souls from death.

Together with that suffering and wailing prophet Jeremiah, we can therefore say:

The Lord tests the righteous, He sees heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.