

Pentecost 18 10/13/19
2 Timothy 2:1-13 23C

YOU THEN, MY CHILD, BE STRENGTHENED BY THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS

How does that saying go? “There are no atheists in ...” “There are no atheists in the boat when the walleyes are biting?” “There are no atheists in the stands when your team is winning?” “There are no atheists at the Thanksgiving table when your plate is overflowing with food?” What a minute! That’s not how it goes! “There are no atheists in foxholes!” That’s how the saying goes! There are no atheists in foxholes because foxholes -- hard, trying, difficult tough times -- make us see our weakness, our helplessness.

Using the example from earthly life of a soldier fulfilling his duty, an athlete competing for a prize, and a farmer who patiently waits for growth after planting his crops, Paul teaches us about living the Christian life. No, it is not a rose garden. It is a struggle; a challenge, Paul teaches us. But, the GOOD NEWS IS THAT GOD STRENGTHENS US WITH THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.

I. We are strangers, aliens, Israelites here. Our home is in heaven. True to His Word, Jesus will come and take us to be with Him. In the Church Triumphant, we will rest from all of our earthly struggles, and wipe all the tears from our eyes. But, for today, we live in what the Psalmist calls the “valley of the shadow of death”.

Look at Paul. “I am suffering,” he writes, “bound with chains as a criminal”. Paul was not suffering because he was a murderer, thief, swindler, anarchist. Paul was suffering because of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By his own words, Paul tells us that he was beaten, stoned,

shipwrecked, in danger, in hunger and thirst. And now, he is imprisoned in a cold dungeon in Rome, knowing that the end of his life was near (cf. 2 Cor 11).

Dear Saints of Concordia, we are not imprisoned for confessing Christ, but we have struggles. The Christian faith is not a magic wand that we wave to make everything our way. Health and loved ones fail us. Evil hands steal and vandalize our property. Lying lips says things about us that are just not true to destroy our good name and reputation. And always, always, there is the father of all lies tempting us to doubt the promises of God's Word, to doubt the forgiveness and life that is ours in Christ.

II. As we feebly struggle in the Church Militant, what are we to do? "Remember Jesus Christ," Paul writes (v. 8).

Specifically, Paul writes that we are to remember that Jesus is "risen from the dead". Jesus has destroyed our last and greatest enemy, death itself. And, in the resurrection of Christ, we see the order of the Kingdom of God. We all want Easter, with the loud "Alleluia's" and lilies. But, you cannot have Easter Sunday with Good Friday. It was true of Jesus and it is true of us. Yes, the crown of glory awaits us. But, today we wear a crown of thorns, following in the footsteps of our Savior Jesus.

Paul writes that Jesus is "the offspring of David (v. 8)". Our Old Testament lesson is from the book of Ruth. The Evangelist Matthew records for us that Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David, and hence, an ancestor, a human ancestor, of Jesus. The Holy Spirit very carefully recorded these words to teach us without any doubt that Jesus really, truly, was a man. He was not some kind of "ghost;" He did not put

on a costume and pretend to be a man. He was a true man, receiving human flesh and blood from His mother Mary.

And here is the point that Paul is making in our lesson today -- Having lived on this earth as a man, He understands the temptations, the struggles, the tears that we face in earthly life. Jesus endured poverty, contempt, rejection, great agony of body and soul, and, finally, death itself, as the wages of our sin, so that we would be forgiven.

And because Jesus suffered His humiliation, the book of Hebrews says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin (He 4:15)." Jesus knows. And, Jesus understands.

III. And, because He knows and understands, God strengthens us with the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

In our Gospel, Jesus, passing along between Samaria and Galilee, "was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us'". Jesus had mercy on them, and healed them. The Good News of the Gospel is that God has mercy on us in our struggles, our weaknesses, our foxholes.

One of our distribution hymns today was written by a man named Horatio Spafford. In the 1800's, Horatio Spafford was a successful Chicago lawyer, a rich man with many real estate holdings. But, earthly wealth is fleeting and the great Chicago fire of 1871 wiped out Spafford's wealth. It was not a good time for the Spafford family. But, they had just enough resources for a good vacation. So, they planned a trip to Europe. When the time came to set out on their vacation, some last-minute business detained him, so his wife and four daughters sailed ahead of him. Then, disaster struck. Their ship was struck by another ship and sank

almost immediately. The four daughters were lost; only Mrs. Spafford survived. When Horatio Spafford sailed across the Atlantic to join his grieving wife, the captain called him to the bridge and reported that there were at the place where his daughters had gone down on the ship. Can you imagine the feelings? And yet, it was shortly after this that Spafford wrote his famous words,

“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;
When sorrows, like sea billows, role;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul” {*LSB 763:1*}.

Horatio Spafford knew that even in the depths of grief, it was well with his soul. He knew that it was well with His soul, because God was at work. Paul tells us in v. 9, “The Word of God is not bound”. Not the depths of hell, not all the lies and fury of the evil one, nor all the works and words of a sinful world can bound the Word of God. Through that Word, the spoken Word and the Visible Word of the Sacraments, God makes everything well with you soul.

This morning, we rejoice that BRIDGER has died to sin and been raised to a new life in Christ Jesus. He now lives Christ and Christ lives in him. What is true of Bridger is true of all who have been baptized into Christ. Our sinful flesh, with all of its unholy desires, has been buried with Christ and we have been raised to a new life in Christ.

In the hearing and learning of the Gospel, we hear Jesus say, “Son, Daughter, be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven”. Listen to His Word, for they are the words of eternal life, giving us forgiveness, comfort, and joy.

As God fed the Israelites with manna from heaven to keep them alive, He feeds us with manna from heaven, His Son’s own Body and Blood. We

eat and drink at the Lord's Table for the forgiveness of sins and strength to live a holy life, that we may live and fulfill your own vocations.

In His mercy, God strengthens you with His grace through these means – these means, by the way, that He Himself has bound Himself to -- so that you may walk by faith; that you may be like the soldier enduring the hardship of the battle knowing that victory waits; the athlete who competes with self-discipline and struggle to win the crown of eternal life, the farmer, patient, hard-working, knowing God is at work in us, for our good.

Strengthened by God's grace, we have confidence and the comfort to say,

“If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him;
If we endure, we will also reign with Him;
If we are faithless, He remains faithful” (vv. 11-13).