

18th Pentecost Sermon
September 26, 2021 Sermon

Humanity has experienced the ebb and flow of tyranny and experienced those who support it. The pattern is set before us. One man desires to eliminate the Jews for his own reasons. He plots behind the scenes and comes close to accomplishing what he set out to do. There are those in power and those behind the scenes who abuse that power for their own ends. History is filled over and over again with this story. The Lord has a way of twisting it back into place so that the persecutor is overcome. From a time of relative peace for us to a rise again of people pitted against one another, we begin to wonder.

Is it any wonder there are a plethora of conspiracy stories that abound in our day? Perhaps the Lord might place you in such a place as Esther, but then again, perhaps He will not. If He places you in a position to do something, then be bold in faith and stand firm upon the Gospel which we have been given. There are stumbling blocks all around us in these days, but we have been given the hope of our promise through Christ our Savior. This age has experienced an ongoing battle against the principalities that war against the Lord, seeking to have us abandon the hope which is already ours by faith. Think about how many have fallen away in our day.

Let us think of the times that we have been tempted to be conditional in our faith. “Lord, grant me this and I will . . .” All that we need has already been provided for us. More than that, we have that part of what Jesus said that most of us do not like and that is that we will drink from the cup of suffering. Again, from history, we know that the saints have often suffered at the hands of those who, for their own reasons, war against the truth of God. Jesus is giving us clear warning both against being indifferent to the suffering that goes on in the world, or causing others to stumble because of our lack of action.

We are living in a time when people seem to be incredibly pampered. Even with the lock-downs of Covid, we were able to continue life if even in a somewhat truncated fashion. We had our comforts and could even *watch* services in the comfort of our own homes. But at what cost? We gather not for some time out for an hour each week, but to be rekindled in faith, recharged for the work to be done, and continue growing closer together as a fellowship of time and place appointed by Jesus. It’s not just here, but the core of our understanding what a fellowship seems to have been lost by many during a time of people wanting this or that, but also being unwilling to be whom Christ is making them to be in the midst of the fellowship to which they have been called. Amidst all the cries of equity and denouncing bigotry, we are seeing the creation of a very judgmental society, but we who follow Christ are reminded to not follow the crowds of this world, but the One who has saved (and is saving) us.

Some may remember the saying, “Loose lips sink ships,” in reference to being guarded about your speech and actions because there are enemies who await any information that can be used against you. So also, Jesus gives us a principle to live by and that is why we should be friendly to all others, even if they do not agree with us or we with them. The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Perhaps. As Jesus used this piece of wisdom, it refers to one who may misuse Jesus and His authority, but cannot long do so without being influenced by the Holy Spirit to come into the truth of the Gospel. You and I may not know what Jesus is up to in this world marred by conflict, but do live with the assurance that all authority does rest with Him. The principle of minding the business Jesus has given us is important to remember. Sometimes we can be so distracted by what others are or are not doing that we are influenced more by their action or inaction than we are by what the Holy Spirit is guiding us to do.

What can we learn from this? First, trust that the Lord is still leading. Second, that we each have enough to do such that our time needs to be spent doing the things the Lord gives us to do. If each faithful Christian would be committed to daily living out their life of faith through all of the actions, the witness would be strong. Rather than saying, “I go to this church or that church,” is it not better to humbly say, “Jesus is Lord and I follow His lead?”

James asks, “Is anyone sick?” In our day, I might ask, “Can you count how many are well in our community?” By this, I do not mean any of the physical infirmities that abound, but about the increasing hostility to the church and the things of the Lord. You believe what you want and I will believe what I want is giving way to, “You’re crazy if you actually believe that.” If I am the center of all things, I suppose I can say such a thing, but I know that we are to have no other gods before the Lord God Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. What then? Only this, that we set our priorities on following the Lord no matter what it takes – Jesus goes to the extreme of saying to cut off your hand if it causes you to stumble – rather than to settle for anything other than being saved for all time and eternity in Jesus. In very simple terms it makes sense because our eternal life depends upon it.

We should have a fellowship such that we can confess our sins to one another and receive grace. Sadly, too many are afraid to trust those in church. Unfortunately, I do understand, but it ought not be this way. What are we to do? Well, this is where I give you a challenge. Learn to be faithful and trustworthy. That’s it. If a piece of information goes out, be confident when you say, “Not from me.” The journey down the wrong road for a generation will take time to go back and begin again. We know this from living, that many good things take time, but there is no time like the present to begin again. Rather than living as the world does saying, “Everyone else is doing it,” live with the goal of “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

In so many ways, Scripture reminds us of how this works. Is it because we do not listen? We need to be saved, but it seems as though many jump in as if they need to be a part of the saving process. To be saved by another is to be acted upon by that other. You have been given hope in the promise of your baptism. Once baptized, if you will, having the promise given, then it is the time to act. You have faith that Jesus is Lord? Good. Now, step out and begin again living your life not with you at the center, but with Jesus at the center. Go in prayer. The prayers of the faithful are effective. Ask the Lord to lead you. He will. Live as if you already knew how to live the life that Christ is giving you. In an interesting way, it is only by first stepping out in faith that these things actually become a part of who we are. Perhaps this is what James meant when we were told that we do not have because we do not ask and we do not receive – my words – because we do not go out to get it. You see faith to be faith requires action and the action of our faith is living trusting that Jesus is good to His word.

Others may complain – Jesus, they’re not one of us – but if you are following our Lord, do not worry about the others, other than to love them as Jesus commands us. Yes, to live by faith is to be bold. Be on the Lord’s side.

It is better to live with the Lord leading than any prosperity that this world might tempt us with. The things of the world are temporary, but the Lord is forever. He has come that we may have a different and new life. He will guide us into that life and this is where our steps of faith are important. We are to walk, one step at a time, with the Lord leading us, so that we truly do grow in the likeness of Christ. May the Lord walk with You this week and show you the steps to take. Draw closer to the Lord and He will draw closer to you. Amen.