

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 2, 2012**

✠ ✠ ✠

(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 409, 34:1, 498, 27, 50.

Lessons: Isaiah 8:11-17, Hebrews 12:28-13:6, Luke 12:1-12.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 3:13-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

God here reminds his believers that he will take care of them. Christians may sometimes have to endure evil, but in reality all things work together for good to them. Peter asks by inspiration of God: Who will do you wrong if you are zealous for that which is good? If Christians at all times are eager for what is right and good, if they have a true passion for those things which have the approval of the Lord, then nothing can really work lasting harm in their lives, for they are under God's care and protection.

The only things which really will hurt us, in time and in eternity, are disobedience and deviation from God's Word. But no enemy can take away from us the true, eternal blessings: God's grace and mercy, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace with God, joy in the Holy Ghost.

As believers in Christ we certainly have our fears. We always have and will have our sinful flesh, the devil, and the evil world – its people, its powers, its temptations always around us, trying to frighten and harm us. But Peter asks ***“Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?”*** Christians, all those who are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ, are those who are eager to do good.

Even under pagan codes of conduct, no one would harm someone who is doing good. Even the unbelieving world wants people who are doing good, not those who are doing evil. Oh, yes, there will always be some people who want to harm others. Call it terrorism, gangs, enemies, whatever. Even living good lives in deeds, words, and thoughts – though who can live a perfect life? – will not always prevent suffering. There will always be twisted people in this world who just can't stand someone doing good. There are even those who want to attack people – sometimes especially Christians – just for doing good. But God says ***“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.”*** Peter is echoing Jesus in Matthew 5:10-11 ***“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”***

Then God goes on to tell us why we are blessed, even if we are persecuted for our faith. Until we are taken to heaven, either on the last day or through earthly death, we want to

**LIVE IN THIS WORLD AS GENUINE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST**

- 1. Do not fear what unbelievers fear.**
- 2. *“In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”***
- 3. *“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”***

If you were to ask your neighbors about all the things that they are afraid of, you would probably get many answers. These would surely include such things as the economy, wars, diseases, burglars, natural disasters, and the list could go on and on. But God says ***“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.”***

But, in contrast to fearing what others fear, we must come back to one of Peter's starting ideas in this letter. Our home is in heaven. God's elect, his chosen ones, are strangers in this world. This world is only a temporary place to live, when we consider the light of eternity.

It is true that the enemies of Christians can do much harm to them. They can even, with God's permission, take the life of the believers, but they cannot harm the soul, so long as the Christians cling to Christ, and sanctify Christ in their hearts as their Lord and Master, put their trust in Him and wait for Him to repay the wicked in His good time. Jesus himself said in Matthew 10:28: ***"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*** Remember, God is the only one who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

***"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord."*** This is to be done in your hearts – the core of your being. The New International Version says "set apart" but the word is much stronger than that. It means to "sanctify, to consecrate, to make holy". And the phrase ***"Christ as Lord"*** reinforces the idea of making Christ holy in your heart. He is not just a great prophet, as the Muslims believe. He is not just a good teacher or a good example or a good person, as many believe. He is the Son of God who conquered sin, death and the power of the devil when he rose from the dead. He is the Lord, the Master of all who believe. All who believe sanctify Christ in their hearts as the supreme Lord of all.

People hate hypocrisy and can easily recognize it. When your heart is full of Christ, your words and actions will be consistent. Your words and actions will reflect what is in your heart.

Because Christ is central in the hearts of believers, they will be prepared for anything, because nothing can harm them. He is the one they seek to serve, and Peter gives a specific way in which they can serve Jesus Christ, their Lord and master. ***"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."***

The world may ask of the Christian: Why do you think or believe that? Why do you do that? Why do you not want to go along with us? The question may come when you are doing what is right and pleasing to God, when you state a truth from God's Word, when you refuse to join in wickedness or things that set a bad example – offenses.

Somehow, I think we all feel or think that it is hard to stand up for Jesus, to speak up for Jesus.

We think that some great speech must come out of our mouths. But sometimes a simple answer can be the start of witnessing out loud for Jesus: 'I don't want to do that', when we are pressured to go along with sin. Stating 'I don't believe that' when presented with ideas that are contradictory to the Word of God. Now, of course, this assumes we have learned the Word of God. But as I look around this room, I believe you HAVE learned the Word of God. You may have spent time in Catechism Instruction – you know, all those passages and parts of the catechism that the pastor wanted you to memorize? You may have spent time in adult instruction classes learning the fundamentals of Christian doctrine. You have spent time in Bible classes and in worship services, hearing sermons. But how often doesn't Satan snatch the Word of God out of our minds, so that even on our way home from church, we might ask – now what was that sermon about? If you are 4 or 5 years old, you might say "God" or "Jesus". But those of you who are much older should be able to take home much more. I would have no difficulty with you having a Bible with you and looking up Bible passages during sermons, if it didn't distract you. I would have no difficulty with you making notes on the back of the bulletin during sermons. And children, there comes a time when you will stop drawing pictures on the bulletin or playing in church and really listen to the sermon and what is going on in church. Parents, the younger you can teach your children to listen and pay attention in church, the more they – and you – will be blessed. We don't have special play rooms for children during church. One pastor once told a visitor who asked where the kiddie room was 'we like to have children with their parents listening to the Word of God during church'. So we need to learn of Jesus to tell about him.

And believers must ***"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."*** It doesn't have to be a comprehensive answer. But it should be a truthful answer. I might compare this idea to "defensive driving". Every time a driver gets behind the wheel, he or she must be prepared, – prepared for the child who will run out into the street, or the car that will stop suddenly, or the wildlife that will run into the road, or the vehicle that will pull out or turn suddenly. But this sermon isn't about defensive driving. This is about being prepared to witness to Christ. Surely you can be prepared with a half a dozen or more things you'd like to say to people about what God has done for you, and what he has done

for all mankind. Remember, there are two chief doctrines in the Bible: Law and Gospel. You know the gospel and what Jesus did for you. Don't be afraid to tell people how it is they can get to heaven. You know the commandments and can apply them to your life. Don't be afraid to apply them to the lives of others.

Just tell the truth. Just tell what happened in history and how you know those things – the Bible tells me so. Just help people find the Bible's message for themselves and let loose the power of the Spirit. The reason for your hope is found in the Bible. You may even invite them, as Philip did Nathanael, ***"come and see"*** John 1:46 and invite them to hear the Word of God with you. Later in this letter Peter writes ***"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*** 1 Peter 4:10. What hope do you have? What reason do you have for being happy? What do you have to rejoice over? With the psalmist we can say ***"happy is that people, whose God is the LORD."*** Psalm 144:15, King James Version. The New International Version there uses the word "blessed" for happy.

Peter also says ***"But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."***

It is easy, when we are angry or upset to speak out harshly. And doesn't sin upset the Christian and make him or her angry? But we are told to give our answers for what we believe ***"with gentleness and respect."*** We may be dealing with people who have never heard any of what it is you believe. Our words can be gentle and respectful, even if those asking us aren't very respectful of our ideas.

We can take comfort that Jesus said to his disciples – in our gospel lesson – ***"When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say."*** Luke 12:11-12. We can all think back to when we were confronted with an opportunity to say something and now say to ourselves "I should have said this, or that". But if we think before hand about what kind of answer we can give when someone asks any kind of question about our faith, about our Savior, we will be better prepared. Instead of "defensive driving" think about witnessing for Christ in positive terms. And so in this way we won't miss any opportunity to speak up for Jesus.

Peter says we are to speak up for Christ ***"with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."*** The people of the world are quick to spot hypocrisy. We want to keep a good conscience, so that anyone who speaks falsely about our good way of life in Christ may be ashamed of their mocking and slander. Just as we sometimes regret things we have said, so those who slander Christians – particularly in front of others, may have reason to be ashamed of their evil words.

Through all of our living as Christians and witnessing, telling others of Christ and what we believe, Peter reminds us ***"It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."***

Christians surely don't want to suffer for doing evil. In the world, just as in God's sight, that is plainly deserved. But undeserved suffering – even if this is what God wills and permits to come upon us – does sometimes come our way. It is better to endure that, God says. For we must remember that our home is in heaven, and we have waiting for us a place of no suffering and no pain and no sadness. Believers have died here on earth for witnessing to Christ and his mighty deeds, but that just got them to heaven sooner. That may yet happen in our lifetimes, and in our land. We just don't know. But we commend all things into God's hands.

As encouragement for standing up under persecution, Peter then points to Jesus himself. ***"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."*** 1 Peter 3:18. Next week we shall look more closely at Jesus, who suffered for us. Amen.