

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 16, 2012

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

Hymns: 394, 367:1, 423, 414, 409.

Lessons: Psalm 1, Romans 10:4-13, Luke 12: 16-21.

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 4:1-6.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday we talked about the unjust sufferings of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Now Peter makes even more application of what that means for us, even here on earth.

We need to be ready to sacrifice earthly gain and physical desires in order to place spiritual priorities first.

Our sermon text continues the idea that Christ's successful work and triumphant ruling at the right hand of God provide the basis for hope and confidence in our lives. We see here

A CONTRAST BETWEEN EVIL HUMAN DESIRES AND THE WILL OF GOD

- 1. Unbelievers follow evil human desires.**
- 2. The follower of Jesus lives for the will of God.**

Our text begins with the word "*Therefore*", a word used to draw a conclusion. And this conclusion has great words of encouragement for us. "*Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude.*" Christ suffered, not only mentally and spiritually but physically. And because he endured that and came out the winner we, his followers, find inspiration for our lives. Peter says "*arm yourselves also with the same attitude.*"

Surely you are aware of how the attitude with which you approach something helps overcome a difficult situation. You are preparing yourself from the inside out. And inside of us, inside of the Christian, in the heart, mind, and attitude is where the Holy Spirit did his work first of all in bringing us to faith in Jesus Christ.

We are to use that attitude as a tool and as a weapon, both defensive and offensive. Peter later will warn us about the devil, who like a lion is looking for someone to devour. In 1 Peter 5:6-9 (KJV) we read: "*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*"

Peter points to Christ, the one "*who has suffered in his body [and] is done with sin.*" Jesus did not sin, and now that he has completely conquered sin he is in heaven at the right hand of God ready to judge all mankind. He has nothing more to do with sin – he is done being tempted by sin.

Peter applies this to the Christian: The one who has suffered in the body – either as the results of sin or as a result of persecution because of believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and seeking to live a God-pleasing life is done with sin. He or she – the Christian – doesn't want anything more to do with sin – in the new man, in the new person. That shows itself in our outward lives.

We know, of course, that our personal sufferings do not bring about forgiveness of sin. Our text does mean that persecution and suffering can have the beneficial effect of stripping away sinful distractions from our lives and bringing our focus more clearly on to what is really important: eternity.

Peter makes application to his hearers, many of whom had been out-and-out pagans before hearing the Word of God spoken to them which worked repentance, conversion and faith in their hearts. "*For you have*

spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do." But even if we think of ourselves as "Christians", not pagans, we need to take these words to heart. You see, Scripture says *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8) And when are we not sinners? God's Word reminds us *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* (Romans 3:23)

OK, so you have heard those words before – perhaps many, many times before. We admit that we are sinners, BUT we think that we aren't as wicked as what Peter talks about here: *"living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry."* Satan would love to have us think that we aren't as bad as other people. Yet we must confess that when we look into our lives and hearts we are all sinners. Make no mistake about that.

But by the grace of God who worked faith in our hearts, faith that Jesus Christ came to earth to take away our sins and to take us away from sin – something that finally will happen when we leave this earth – we now have a choice to live lives that are pleasing to God. The one who is a prisoner of sin has no choice but to continue sinning, just as one in prison has no choice but to stay in prison. But those who have been redeemed by Christ are free to choose to live God-pleasing lives – with the help of God and by the grace of God – as well as free to go back and be immersed in sin again. Peter exhorts us to choose to flee sin.

People in the world today encourage us to "live life to the fullest", to get all we can out of this life, to acquire possessions that will make us feel great or look great in the world. We are encouraged to gratify our senses and our bodies, to enjoy what pleases our eyes, to think of ourselves first. That's not just advertising. That is the way of the sinful world, which is controlled by Satan himself.

Peter lists quite a catalog of sin: *"debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry."* That seems to be a brief listing of what appear to be the most wicked things in the world. But when everyone looks at the mirror of God's law, we must admit that we are guilty at the very least of such sins in thought and maybe our words, too, if we should think we are not guilty of the deeds.

He uses the words *"detestable idolatry."* We think of out-and-out paganism as being terrible – you know, worship of the golden calf or bowing down to some statue of wood, stone, or gold. But secret idolatry is just as damning – and perhaps more so because it tries to remain hidden, and "out of sight, out of mind". And you learned from the catechism that people sin secretly against God's will when someone or something takes first place in their hearts instead of God. Think about that for a moment. That means anything or anyone displacing God in their hearts in any way, at any time!

But the Christian, Peter says, *"does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."* That's the daily struggle of the Christian, to drown the old Adam in us by daily contrition and repentance, so that a new person should daily arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

And when we say "no" to the desires of the flesh when we are tempted, isn't it true that *"They – the world – think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation"*? How often have you been made fun of, mocked, ignored or worse, for choosing to obey God and seek to follow his will? Peter says *"they heap abuse on you."* Sometimes they do that to our faces, and you can be sure that they do that behind our backs.

A Christian life goes against the flow of the sin-filled world. Peter wants Christians to know that the resistance they are facing in trying to lead a Christian life is not a sign that something is wrong. In fact, it is a sign that something is right. We should expect resistance, disapproval, scorn, abuse, and even persecution when we dare to resist sinful living, because people whose lives are enmeshed in sin want others to join them. They want others to join them, because it eases their feelings of guilt and makes their sinful activities seem normal.

But Peter reminds us and warns them: *"they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead."* How often don't we see people – and some of them are very close to us – who live as if today were the last chance, and they want gratification today, right now! Or, they see no end to their lives on earth, and plan and scheme to acquire wealth and possessions and maybe even prestige and power thinking they can enjoy them forever here on earth. They are looking only for earthly pleasure, forgetting God's Laws – if they even ever learned of them – and also forgetting man's laws and what is called 'simple human decency' in their quest for pleasure, for this life, for self-gratification, for things that won't really matter after they are dead.

All people, not just Christians, are accountable to God. God is really ready to judge the living and the dead and that judgment could come at any moment.

There seems to be great admiration in the world for people – especially celebrities – who live lives that are detestable to Christians. The foul language, the immoral lifestyles, the self-seeking gratification – and can't you name some such people from the entertainment world, from the sports world, even from the world of politics? – all are so prominent – and their wickedness so ignored or overlooked by the world – that the Christian gets caught up in that kind of hero-worship and self-gratification and self-glorification, too. The world forgets that there is a price to pay. Whether it is the intentional unmarried mother – celebrities can afford to raise their children alone – or the abusers of alcohol and other drugs – they are famous, so they think people will overlook any possible shortcomings or flaws or weaknesses or foibles in them (They are too important!) – or the people who choose to live their lives the way they want and try to hide their sins – don't political figures in recent years come to mind here? All these public sins don't transfer well to the lives of ordinary people. Poor unmarried mothers must still care for their own children. Abusers of drugs must still suffer – sometimes even in prison – and the people around them must suffer. People who try to hide their sins are fooling themselves. God knows. And other people find out.

But to the unrepentant God says ***“But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.”*** There will come a time – much more serious than any time of reckoning here on earth – when God, in the person of Jesus Christ, will come to judge the living and the dead, as we confess in the creed. No wickedness endures forever. Wickedness and unrepentant sin will be punished, eternally, in hell.

And for believers, we are reminded ***“For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.”*** Here is the good stuff – the good part of this sermon. Here is the good news. Here is where we get to proclaim the gospel. In its simplest it is ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”*** Acts 16:31

Peter is saying that the impending judgment on all sin and all sinners is the reason why the gospel of salvation was proclaimed – to lead people to repentance and faith in the Savior.

Believers who have already died – especially if they were being persecuted – would not lose out on this great reward, a reward of grace.

Believers may indeed be ***“judged according to men in regard to the body,”*** that is, be subject to human authorities, police, courts, and jails, and even wicked, sinful human opinions but that involves only temporary external matters. What really matters is that we ***“live according to God in regard to the spirit.”***

Men may judge Christians harshly. They may look at the Christian and think “that stupid person doesn't have any fun in life”, or “that poor sucker doesn't know what is good for him”, or “they don't know how to have fun” or some such slander. God definitely judges men – all men – harshly, too. There is no second chance after death.

But God has given humans the opportunity to come to faith in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from all their sins. You yourself are hearing today both law and gospel. The law of God shows your sinfulness. The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells you that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for sin so that you may live eternally just by believing that Gospel.

And as a result, even believers who are now dead ***“live according to God in regard to the spirit.”*** The souls, the spirits of those who died in Christ, in faith in Christ, are in heaven awaiting the resurrection and reuniting of soul and body, which will happen when Christ actually comes ***“to judge the living and the dead.”*** We, God's people, rejoice that we have opportunities to live for Christ, and even, if it is God's will, to suffer for Christ. Amen.