

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Easter 7A
May 24, 2020
1 Peter 5:6-11

He Cares for You

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. 8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 10 And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. 11 To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ”
(1 Peter 5:6-11 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

On the night when He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus prayed for His apostles and His Church on earth. "The hour" had come when the Father would glorify His Son by the cross (John 17:1). Through the shedding of His blood, Jesus would bring forgiveness for the sins of the world, and in His resurrection and ascension He would unite all Christians with the Father "that they may be one" with God (John 17:11). Though the trial was hard, Jesus humbled Himself to the will of His Father and suffered death on the cross. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:8-11).

That's why St. Peter encourages us, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you." O how hard that is, though. Humble ourselves? We who want what we want, how we want it, when we want it. We who think we know best in all situations. We who suffer from the first sin – wanting to be like God. We who want to be exalted without humility. We who ignore our parents and other authorities and do what we want. We who too often look down on others. We who kill with our thoughts and words if not our deeds. We who covet what belongs to our neighbor. We who really do believe, "Oh Lord it's hard to be humble / When you're perfect in every way." (Mac Davis). We're supposed to humble ourselves? How?

Repent. Repent of it all. Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought (Rom. 12:3). Consider your neighbor and his needs before your own. And mostly "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).

Yet, even that is hard. So consider that we should humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God.” After all God created the world out of nothing by speaking. He provided for and protected His people Israel through their captivity and servitude in Egypt. He showed His mighty hand as He sent plagues upon Egypt to entice Pharaoh to let His people go. He delivered them from their servitude and those plagues. He sustained them throughout their wilderness journey by providing food and water. He parted the waters of the Red Sea so they could go through on dry ground. Then drowned Pharaoh and his army in the same waters. He finally led them into the Promised Land. Time and again God demonstrated the strength of His hand, even as Israel grumbled and complained and went after other gods.

But we aren’t like Israel, are we? When we consider God’s power and might, we might humble ourselves under it – but only because we’re afraid to do otherwise. Is it really enough that He could squash you like a bug? It didn’t work for Israel. Rather, we are to humble ourselves under His mighty hand “so that at the proper time he may exalt you.” It’s like someone who is drowning has to give up on his own strength and thrashing about and let the lifeguard pull him to safety. So with God. He often demonstrates this very thing. It’s the story of the ages. The high are brought low and the lowly exalted. Mary, the mother of our Lord, sang, “He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; he has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.” (Luke 1:51-53).

So we don’t humble ourselves before God because of coercion or threats. We humble ourselves before Him because of His grace, His mercy, His love, His compassion, His promises. We humble ourselves before Him because He doesn’t whack us, blast us, destroy us. No, He saves us by the power of His arm. He delivers us from captivity to sin and death and the devil. And all this in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. He who humbled Himself even to death is now exalted to God’s right hand. In His ascension Jesus was enthroned in glory. He is able to be with us just as He said He is. He who gave His life on the cross that we might live, free from our enemies, is with us to give us all things.

So how do you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God? By “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” All your anxieties. All your worries. All your cares. Your anxieties over COVID or other health problems. Your worry over not having enough money, food, or whatever. Your anxiety over your children and how they’ll grow up. Your worry over dying or living. Your worry when things might get back to normal, if ever, including when we might be able to gather together in church again. Your anxiety over . . . well you know what you’re anxious about and what you worry about. Cast it all on Christ because He cares for you. That is comforting beyond words. After all, He is the One who has taken it all on Himself. He’s made it His.

He’s overcome the devil who “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” That old evil foe will constantly and continually tempt you to worry – about anything and everything. He’ll do everything he can to separate you from Christ and His Father and from one another. He’ll urge you to think of number one and give in to your desires, passions, and lusts.

He will send suffering and hardship, though you may not recognize that they come from him. And when that suffering and hardship comes, as it has, it's tempting to chafe under it and pride may fill us with resentment and complaint. Yet no matter what the devil does to harm you, God has put limits on what he can do. This is where the account of Job is so helpful.

So Peter exhorts us to "resist [the devil], firm in your faith." You see, your faith is God's gift to you. As you read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's Holy Word, He strengthens you to recognize and repel the devil and his vicious attacks by directing you to Jesus and all that He has done for your salvation. As you give up all hope in yourself and your strength and look to Christ alone, He will protect and deliver you from all harm and danger and from the fiery darts of the evil one. For He has overcome the devil in every way. As much as the devil roars and threatens, he cannot harm you when you are in Jesus.

So "after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." Peter was originally writing to those suffering persecution for being a Christian to encourage them to remain firm in the faith. For us, the promise still holds. For while we may have to suffer for a while, there is an end to it all. God is in control. In Christ He will give you everything you need. And at the proper time, as He alone determines it, He will exalt you, restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. That is a promise to hang on to for it is established in Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension. And with a promise like that, you can humble yourself under His mighty hand with joy. God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener
Pastor