

The Comfort of Communion

One thing I'm pretty sure about this morning is that the Devil didn't like last Sunday's upbeat message about a conspiracy of hope. I had two funerals this past week, one for Ada Page who was 85 and one for McKenzie Lauver who was two days old. Two of our people have been placed on hospice care and Heather Sollenberger is still in the hospital. Besides all that, another part of the church furnace broke down which cancelled band practice and choir rehearsal on Wednesday.

On the one hand, all of these things are just a part of the natural cycle of life. People are born and people age and die. A fallen world allows for disease, death and unexpected tragedies. Furnaces, like people also age and systems fail. Nevertheless, the timing is suspicious. When too many troubles come all at once we begin to feel like we are being ganged up on, that we are under attack.

And this much we know to be true: The devil is an opportunist. He can smell our stress. He knows when we are weak, when we are feeling down. We can count on him to do all he can do to make things worse. He will shout discouragement, hopelessness, and fear into our minds. He will encourage short tempers, instigate family conflict and church division. He will promote feelings of self-pity.

What shall we do in times like these? How does the Lord instruct us to respond to the attacks of the evil one?

I Peter 5:5b-11 (NLT) say:

2

“And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.

In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power to him forever! Amen.”

We see all of this being played out in the life of our Lord as He approached the cross. The tempter, who had come to Him in the wilderness following His baptism and had left Him for a more opportune time, came back in Gethsemane with a vengeance. Jesus felt such stress that He sweat great drops of blood. Yet He humbled Himself, saying to the Father, *“If it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.”* After this, Jesus willingly braved the sufferings of the cross and all the humiliation that preceded it. But, then, the promise was fulfilled: The God of all grace and glory raised

3

Jesus from the dead, restored Him, made Him strong, firm and steadfast for us forever!

Thus, when we are in trouble we are not abandoned. When we are suffering we are not left to suffer alone. When we are knocked down the Lord reaches down to lift us up. When we are at the end of our strength and at the end of our wits, God sends His angels to comfort and protect us. We can count on it, for God has promised this to all who cry out to Him, to all who trust Him.

As we prepare to receive Communion at the Lord's table this morning I want to make a connection between this event and these words from 5th verse of the 23rd Psalm: In Psalm 23:5 David prays, *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*

We do well to meditate on these words as we receive the bread and wine from the Lord's table this morning. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*

This Communion is the sign of the covenant that God has made with all who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior. It is a reminder that although we all have enemies, such as: aging, failing health, grief, financial and relational stress, etc., the promise of Emmanuel is true. God is with us. He sets His table before us in the presence of our enemies. This is how much He loves us. He lays down His life for us. He feeds us the food of forgiveness and eternal life. He will never leave us or forsake us.

That conspiracy of hope we talked about last Sunday: Light increasing after the winter solstice, the

gift of Christmas, the promise of a New Year, the quieting and restorative work of snow, is not defeated by the Devil's mischief. We are more than conquerors through Christ Who died for us and now lives for us, in us and among us.

So let us come gladly to the Lord's Table this morning. This is our place of refuge and shelter. This is our home. This is the place where we know we are loved. This is the place where we reaffirm our connection with the Lord and with one another.

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Sermon for January 8, 2017

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Psalm 23; Luke 22:14-20

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