

The Third Sunday after Pentecost – 2021

Ezekiel 17:22-24

2 Corinthians 5:1-17

Mark 4:26-34

I am tired of being depressed. Oh, I'm not "depressed" depressed. I'm not clinical, not in a psychological fog, and I haven't lost interest in daily activities but golly, there feels like a cloud is hanging over all of us. I'm tired of it. I suspect that you are the same. In fact, I can't imagine any sane person not being distressed by what we've gone through, distressed by what is continuing to happen around us. Crazy is all around us. Pandemic craziness; governmental craziness; educational craziness; lockdown craziness; economic craziness; health measure craziness; race craziness; riot craziness... I'm pretty well tired of it.

There's a classic scene from a movie in the '70s. A network news anchor describes all the unpleasantness of the times and he is in rebellion against the futility that he feels, the futility that everyone feels, so he tells his audience that they should all go to their windows, open them, stick their heads out and yell: "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore." Okay, so that response is neither particularly productive nor particularly Christian, but I totally understand the attitude. Something in my spirit is beginning to say: "Enough!" None of us chose any of this. God has seen fit that we should live at this time, under these circumstances, and I'm pretty sure that all of you here want to live well, you want to live as a stout believer, a virtuous follower of Christ, a vessel of light for a world growing more infatuated with darkness. That is *precisely* what I want. That is *precisely* what Christ the King Lutheran Church is to be.

So, what do you think? Should the church be on offense or defense? Here's what St. Peter writes: "In your hearts honor Christ as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame" (1 Peter 3:15). When your faith is attacked, you make a defense, a good one, speaking of hope, of Christ and His blood, of forgiveness and an empty tomb and heaven and God's endless love for sinners. What about being on offense? Do you suppose that Jesus was ever on offense? Light in darkness – that's being on offense. Healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, making the lame to walk, raising the dead – that's being on offense. Unleashing His holy Word to those who were forlorn, those who were mired in apathy or guilt or shame – His teaching lifted up the downtrodden – that's being on offense.

Here's what Jesus told Peter: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!... you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:17-18). Gates; gates are a defensive structure and Christ's church batters down the gates of hell – that's being on offense. The gates of hell are wicked teachings that are broken by God's divine Word. The gates of hell are when folks call good evil and evil good and that demonic confusion is dismantled by God's pure and inerrant and holy Word. The gates of hell are pornography and abortion and any attempt to rob free people of the rights which God Himself bestows on all His children. Christ's church is the most beautiful and forceful entity for good that this planet has ever known. And Christ's church is alive. Jesus calls you to trust this truth. In the midst of all this craziness, trust what Jesus says about His church!

Christ's church is alive and growing. The Master is engaging in ministry, calling young and old into His fold. He is searching for His own, blessing them with insight into His love, elevating them above the dismal outlook of this world, binding people to Himself and enriching their hearts with eternal truths. Trust! The Lord is actively calling on you to trust Him, regardless of what you see or don't see. In this life we walk by faith, not by sight. That is what it means to trust. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your pathways straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6). Trust; you haven't. Trust; you've fallen short. You've put what God has said on one side of your mental scale and what is going on in the world on the other side and found God's Word light. My trust has faltered. I focus on what isn't instead of what is. That's not trust. I have believed Christ's church to be back on its heels. That is not trust. My heart pines for a better time, an easier time, a supposedly more "Christian" time. That's not trust.

When Jesus healed the paralytic, He said this: "Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven." He didn't say: Be of good cheer, I'm about to create a workers' paradise on earth. He didn't say: "Be of good cheer, I'm going to rid this land of the Romans who are oppressing you." Your sins are forgiven, be of good cheer. I will sacrifice Myself to deliver you from sin and death. No real enemy will threaten you because I will crush your enemies under My nail-pierced foot. My blood will wash you and you will be holy. I will give you My Spirit. Life will sweep you up when you die and you will be Mine in My eternal kingdom – be of good cheer! That's what we trust. Trusting that is what makes us of good cheer.

Through Ezekiel, God said that He would take a sprig from the lofty top of a majestic cedar. He will plant that sprig on a high mountaintop of Israel and it will bear many branches, becoming exceedingly fruitful, a noble tree under which will dwell every type of bird. God took His Son and sent Him to earth. The tender sprig of the lofty top of heaven was first planted in the womb of the Virgin, conceived as a man by the Holy Spirit. On the mountain height of Israel, Mount Calvary, this sprig was nailed to a tree, crucified for our sins and planted in the earth as a corpse. The single seed of Christ fell to the ground in death; and He rose; victorious. Christ abides in His church. Jesus is the noble cedar in whose branches every type of human finds a nest. There is one race, the human race, God's creation, whose Savior is the singular Son of Man. The Word was made flesh. His glory is among us. His Word is having its way in this world and we see it by faith. Christians don't live for themselves. Christians live for the Him who died for our sake and was raised. Russians, Argentinians, Ethiopians, Australians and Americans – birds of every sort find shelter from sin and death in the noble cedar of Christ's life, Christ's church.

Trust – we trust in God and we are done being shaken by the winds of change in this world. He does not change. Where God's Word is taught in its truth and purity there is no craziness, no fog of moral ambiguity, no doubt as to who Christ loves – He loves sinners. Christ loves the lost, the fearful, the guilt-ridden and the weak-willed. The Kingdom of God is among us for Christ is among us. Trust. Jesus has sown the seed of His life in this place. The reign and rule of God, His advancing kingdom, is present here. You are maturing by way His Word. This blessed and holy Word applies to your life like nothing else you will ever encounter. God is still speaking and He is speaking to you – to call you to Himself, to infuse you with His grace, and to tune your heart to the music of the Gospel. Trust. Like a dear child trusts his dear Father. That is the

corrective for our times. Trust. Jesus is our mustard seed. In humility, in lowliness and poverty and shame He was sown into the ground by being crucified and laid in the tomb. His church, the product of His love, is large enough to hold every tribe, nation, language and people. At some point, the harvest will come. Trust. The harvest is our journey home, our venturing into God's mighty and graceful presence. May we ripen in faith, may we ripen in trust, may we ripen in love and virtue and fidelity to Him, more and more, until that glorious day.