

The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost – 2021

Lamentations 3:22-33

2 Corinthians 9:1-9, 13-15

Mark 5:21-43

How many of y'all believe that Americans have grown soft? Soft; spiritually, mentally, physically – that we expect ease and comfort and shade to follow us wherever we go? These days versus times past – is there a greater or lesser expectation that life owes us, that society owes us, that God owes us? If you were to come across a person, male or female, who is clearly not soft, not entitled in either outlook or disposition – would that person stand out as odd, antiquated, a spiritual relic of a bygone era? Have you attempted to raise your children to be self-reliant, humble, prepared to sacrifice for others, prepared to suffer life's difficulties with grace? Have you raised your children with those things in mind because they are your personal ideas of virtue or because they are universal virtues, universal because it is God who engenders them in us, who calls us to embody these virtues because it pleases Him, because these virtues reflect His Son?

It has become patently obvious to me, tell me if you agree, that the spiritual pendulum has swung pretty far in one direction and it is a perilous direction. The worst wounds are self-inflicted wounds and we have taken big bites from the fruit of the tree of comfort. We have deliberately chased comfort and our pursuit of God has taken second place (if that). We have chased comfort, happy to answer the demands of our belly while following Christ with tepid, intermittent enthusiasm. As we people, we *have* become soft.

Christians live in the world. Christians are constantly in a culture that is not their own. The time in which *we live* is no different. Perhaps being Americans at this time of our nation's history is a blessing to us. It is certainly easier to distinguish between the church's culture and our nation's culture – more so than at any time in my life. The culture around us is attempting to have its way with you. Two ways come to mind; two ways that I invite you to analyze going forward. This is an attempt to bring clarity to the situation that we find ourselves in and to reinforce who we are, Whose we are, what our road forward is to be.

The first way that the culture around us is attempting to diminish Christ's church is to levy a threat. Christian ideals are out of vogue (which is nothing new). But more and more, the basic tenets of Christianity are labeled as intolerant, discriminatory, and there are powerful forces attempting to cancel those who articulate the truth unabashedly. Here are some of those truths. God is the Creator of heaven and earth. Man was created in His image – male and female created He them (Genesis 1:27). Sin is a universal and deathly disease that inflicts all humans – sin is to be recognized and turned away from. There is only one way of salvation, the blood of Christ, true God and true man, and outside of His forgiveness there is only just judgment, separation from God, and consignment to hell. We worship only the One, True God and our rights come from Him, nowhere else. All humans are equal. All humans are equally precious to God, all have had their sins atoned for by Christ's sacrifice on the Holy Cross. Life is inherently good. Life is His gift. There is a growing threat that holding to these truths because you are a devout Christian puts you in harm's way. Some Christians don't particularly care to be in

harm's way. The growing threat is proving to be effective, humanly speaking. Christians are choosing silence

The second way that the culture around us is trying to diminish Christ's church is to entertain you numb, to cater to your flesh's desire, to make you fall in love with Netflix, the alcohol in your refrigerator or the marijuana shop down the street. Comfortably numb; the culture wants to numb your senses so that your allegiance is to your comfort (your personal pleasure) and not to your God. Consumers; the unbelieving world wants you to indulge, to consume whatever it is they are shoveling. We are vulnerable. The sinful nature is predisposed to precisely this road. Remember, if we are to obey God, we are to disobey our sinful nature. How good are you at denying yourself? How good am I? What is it that is taking up a larger and larger part of your soul, your thought, your behavior?

One of the reasons God instituted the Divine Service was to remind you of who you are, Whose you are (to perpetually call you back to Himself). The woman with the flow of blood and both Jairus and his daughter are reminders of who we are. Do you know what they share in common? They are desperate. A twelve-year-old little girl is so sick that she is at death's doorstep. What effect does that have on a father? A woman who has been at the mercy of her malady for twelve years, rendering her unclean, separated from the worship life of Israel. Have you ever been desperate? Have you ever sensed that your personal power was nil and you scanned the horizon for hope? How low must that woman have felt? Insignificant, her resources spent on physicians who have long forgotten her. Her plan is be unnoticed because she thinks that she is not worth noticing. But it is God she seeks. In her cloudy sense of futility, she still has hope; and strength (God-given hope; God-given strength). She slips through the crowd and seeks only His feet, the hem of His garment. What faith!

We are desperate. By our own sin, we have wrecked ourselves. We have violated God's Holy Law. We have actively chosen death by aligning ourselves with what is unholy. Desperate, there is only One to whom we can turn. Christ only, Christ only, Christ the Lord and He only. He makes us well. The open wounds of our unchastity, our intentional deceit of our neighbor, our thoughts which are judgmental and Pharisaical, self-righteous and pretentious – He is the medicine for our desperation. The Lord Christ is open to us always. He is welcoming and generous with His mercy, generous with His forgiveness, generous with His blood. We are that woman. We always have been. Faith seeks the hem of His garment. Faith puts us at His feet. Faith dismisses the culture's cancel threats and the temptation to drain our gifts by turning comfortably numb.

He always had her. Jesus had her. Jesus has us. Jesus had Jairus. The messenger delivers words that are a switchblade to a father's heart. "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the teacher any further?" (Mark 5:35). Finality; death is the victor and a funeral is to be planned. In my mind's eye, I see the Lord take command of Jairus and his broken heart. As He takes command of death, so Jesus takes command of Jairus' heart. "Do not fear, only believe" (Mark 5:36). Eyes welling with tears, Jairus cannot look away from the One who speaks and His words bring what they say. Jesus breathes trust in the faint hearted. His Word has done it in your spirit, your soul. Jairus, desperate Jairus, hung on His words.

“Little girl, I say to you arise” (Mark 5:41). In that moment, the Last Day broke out in that little girl’s sick room. Resurrection! Life, not death, is the victor. Christ’s life enveloped that girl. That is the Lord who has called you. That is the Lord who rules His church with grace. That is the Lord who bled and died for you. All the powers of hell were unleashed against Jesus, all death, all sin, all sickness, all of this world’s brokenness – it was all put on Him and He died bearing it. And He rose again. He lives and reigns. His rule is from horizon to horizon – no sinner is beyond His mercy, no life is outside His reach, no turmoil can put our Easter King back in His tomb. He is risen. Christ and His Word elevates humanity and He can never be cancelled. Christ and His Word is a burning fire within our bones that cannot be stifled (Jeremiah 20:9). He is the Lord of this church and we are His people. He loves you. He feeds you with His redemption, giving you His body and blood. He will strengthen us all. Great is His faithfulness. “The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 103:17). Great is His faithfulness.