

“Fear, Love, and Trust in God above all things”

I often wonder how those of you with marketing backgrounds (either through formal training, or real life experience) – how you hear these words of our text for today. I suppose like the rest of us – cringing when we hear Jesus say that family members will rise against one another – and that Christians will be hated by all.

Not much of a sales pitch for Christianity – is it? Who in their right mind would want to be a Christian, join a Christian church, follow Jesus?

This past week at Tuesday bible study I mentioned that the LCMS might be in trouble – that our days might be numbered. If one dares to be faithful to God and His Word – then persecution will come – from the world, from other religions, from our own family members.

To speak of fathers as the head of the family – as God’s representative for the family – given authority, not to take, not to demand obedience, but to serve – will be met with resistance. To point out the problems that arise in fatherless cultures is to open oneself up to protests and charges of racism.

The recent Supreme Court ruling does not bode well for those who follow God and His Word rather than the LGBTQ agenda. Congregations and pastors who preach and teach such things are not only open to community and family backlash – but now may face legal charges and be drug before kings and magistrates.

To highlight that the Fourth Commandment includes the honoring of “other authorities” in addition to “father and mother” – to honor our police officers, to honor our president – well, people are cringing already.

In these days, the temptation to change – not just the marketing, but the product, the teachings of the Christian Faith – will be ratcheted up with increasing intensity. But did you hear the promise of our Savior? “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Hear that again – “the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master.” We hear these words and nod our heads in agreement. That makes sense. That seems reasonable.

So, why then, are we so surprised when we suffer and are hated like Jesus our Teacher and our Master? Every year we walk with Him through His passion – His suffering and death. To look at His life is to see your life. After all, it is for this reason that the Son of God became flesh – to take your place – to walk in your shoes, to live in your flesh the life that you failed to live.

You are His disciples, His followers – baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He is your Master, your Lord. Such persecution, and hatred, and maligning – should not be unexpected.

Again, great advertising, right? “Be a Christian and suffer like Jesus!” Not too appealing. Not what we desire. It’s no wonder we confess in the Small Catechism that I believe “I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.”

God the Holy Spirit keeps you in “the true faith” – even though the temptation is to flee the tormenting that comes from following Jesus. The enticement is to adapt Christianity. If Christianity means being like Jesus, following Him, enduring what He endured – then let’s recreated Jesus into a Lord who will be loved by all.

In truth, such attempts are not as much about Jesus, as it is about us – trying to save our own skin – trying to eliminate suffering at all costs. Thanks be to God that Jesus would not be deterred from following the path set before Him – He does not flee the cross, forsaking the wounds by which we are saved.

In good times or in bad – in the midst of a pandemic or social upheaval – we are to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” Today, Jesus tells us – “So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be

known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.”

His words are not just for the future – for the last day – but for His disciples living in these days. Yes, we will “win in the end” – when the enemies of Christ will be revealed – when the enemies of the Gospel will be put down eternally. On that day, those who are Christian in name only – will be revealed. Or as Warren Buffett likes to say – “Only when the tide goes out do you discover who’s been swimming naked.”

Already now, the hiddenness is revealed – including our sinful desires. Today, before God and man, you confessed your unrighteousness – that you have presented your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness. But already today, the Gospel is proclaimed to you – and by you from the housetops. Jesus declares, “Your sins are forgiven” – and you boldly proclaim, “Amen, it is true.”

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Though surrounded by those who malign you, persecute you, and deliver you over to death – you “fear, love, and trust in God above all things.” In repentant faith, you’ve begged the Lord to be merciful to you – and in Christ, His mercy is not only revealed to you – but delivered to you.

Today, in your ears, and in tangible forms – God’s mercy is bestowed on you. You are more valuable than the sparrows – you are MOST valuable – so much, that God would shed His holy, precious blood to redeem you.

Even now, Christ your Savior is acknowledging you before the Father in heaven – sitting at His right hand, declaring, “this is your beloved child ... I died for this one ... my blood covers all his iniquity” – even now, presenting you to the Father as one who is holy, and precious in His sight.

God grant you the Holy Spirit – so that you may “fear, love and trust in God above all things” – in all times and circumstances – for in Christ, by the Holy Spirit, you endure in the one true faith unto the end – and you are saved.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.