

Written: 2 Thess. 2:13-17 “Standing Fast in the Faith of the Saints”

All Saints Day Observed -Proper 27

Sunday, November 6th, 2022

Text: 2 Thessalonians 1:13-17

¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

The text’s intent

To encourage the Church to hold fast faithfully to Jesus promise that He will return in glory on the Last Day. And to prepare the faithful for a movement of falling away from the Apostolic faith that will culminate in the man of lawlessness-the antichrist, who will claim to be the voice and presence of God on earth. This movement and this man will come from within the framework of the Church and will lead those astray who have rejected the true means of salvation as presented in Scripture alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. And He will be supported by the lying and deceiving supernatural power of Satan. But for those who our Lord has chosen before the world began who have been sealed in baptismal faith of the Gospel, are being confirmed and strengthened by the Holy Spirit who moves them to stand fast and unswerving in the Apostolic faith and doctrines passed down. He will grant them comfort and hope despite the temptations to fall away and move them to do continue in the good work of the Church proclaiming the true Gospel witness

Focus Statement:

We have been chosen by our Lord from before time began to rest in His reign and rule now and forever. Out of His great love for us He has granted us salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and has given us the power of faith to hold fast and trust that Jesus’ work is for “me”. That faith was planted in my heart by His Spirit given in baptism who strengthens and grows it, keeping me focused on the Apostolic faith handed down.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

While we confess that our departed loved ones are now the saints in glory with Christ, we sometimes worry that we may not at life’s end be good enough to join them. And Satan is hard at work to move us away from trusting in the Apostolic Faith to follow after his plan of lying and deceit that will culminate in the apostasy of the office and finally person of the antichrist

What the hearer should do as a result:

Hold fast by the confirming and encouraging power of the Holy Spirit to the Apostolic Doctrine in our Confessions trusting in Christ alone.

Subject Sentence: Stand Fast in the Apostolic Faith of the Saints

Introduction

“For all the saints, who from their labors rest. Who Thee by faith before the world confessed, Thy name, o Jesus, be forever blest, Alleluia! Alleluia!”

Our opening hymn “For All the Saints” is a joyous hymn, meant to be sung in celebration of a joyous holiday in the Christian Church: All Saints Day. However, for those of us who are remembering dearly departed saints, perhaps some of those mentioned at the beginning of the service, or perhaps those who passed some time ago, it’s more of a bittersweet celebration. We gladly confess that they are safe and sound in the arms of Jesus, resting from their labors and awaiting the dawning day of Eternal Life. But at the same time, we miss them being here by our side, being an example in our life of a “saint yet sinner” in repentant faith. But our happiness should serve to override the sadness knowing that we will see them again; it should as long as our faith in our own rest from labor remains when its our turn to die.

It's not a given thing that all who confess faith in Christ always have the assurance that they too will join the departed saints at our Savior’s side. It may seem like a sure thing now as we sit and worship here. But it can be a totally different thing when we find ourselves laying in a hospital bed with only days left to live. There has been more than one member in good standing of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, baptized and Confirmed in the faith, regular attenders at worship and the Lord Table, who when I visit to do the Service of Commendation of the Dying, are not sure what’s coming next. There was one lady who in the course of two years I made regular home visits with, hospital visits with, and nursing home visits with. And during one of my final visits she told me “I think my time to leave is coming.” And so, I asked her, “When that moment comes that you draw your last breath, do you know where you’ll be next?” She responded, “I’d like to be in heaven, but I’m not sure I’ve done enough”.

It's one thing to imagine our loved ones who have gone before us safe in the arms of our Savior. But it’s another thing entirely when it’s our number that’s about to be called. Maintaining trust in a salvation that is entirely out of our hands is not always easy. And Satan knows that. And he is at work even now to try to move you off your foundation of faith just as he was in the Thessalonian Church of Paul’s day.

The Mystery of Lawlessness at Work

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 ³ **Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,** ⁴ **who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.**

In Paul's day Satan was at work through messages that seemed to come to the Church from Paul himself indicating that that Jesus had already come again to gather the faithful. and that those remaining alive had missed it. So, Paul reminds them of what he had taught them about Jesus' return when he originally planted that congregation. He told them that before He returned there would be a rebellion within the Church where many would fall away from the true faith. This would culminate in the revealing of the "lawless one", the one who will stand in opposition to the teachings of the Church and will exalt himself above everyone and everything else. He will be in the line of those the Apostle John called "antichrists", former believers who no longer confess the true divinity or humanity of Jesus. But this lawless one will go further. He will claim to be the presence and voice of God on earth, and not just for the Christian Church, but for the Jewish faith, for Islam, Hindu, and all other belief systems. He will attempt to unite all into one world faith. And he will operate through deceiving signs and wonders done by the hand of Satan himself.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 **For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way.**

Well, that should be pretty easy for us to spot, shouldn't it? You don't see many making those claims today, do you? Except it is the hand of Satan, the clever scheming liar and deceiver who is behind him. Satan is clever, too clever just to bring forth all at once a man who boasts these claims. That's why Paul warns us that the mysterious work of preparation for this man of lawlessness was already at work in his day. And it continues in our day too. What work is that? To slowly move believers off their foundation on the Apostolic faith handed down to us in order to prepare hearts and minds for the bigger falling away to come.

What might some of that work be? Maybe it starts with questioning a literal 6-day Creation of the world. It begins with regarding Genesis Chapter One as a wonderful piece of poetry but not fact, turning what the Bible describes as literal days to millions of years of evolution. Then it involves taking aim at God's design and purpose for the first two human beings: to have dominion and fill the earth through procreation. To fulfill this purpose, He created them male and female, and it is only when these two become one does He declare that everything He created is "very good". But now the Creation is no longer very good. It has fallen and we human beings have fallen with it. Adam and Eve fell when they desired to be like God and know good and evil. We have continued in that vein with our desire to declare that God's original design and intent for humankind is outmoded and outdated. We want the power to declare that despite the testimony of God's Word it is now permissible for marriage to be among the same sex.

And we want the power to declare that despite whatever our birth sex was that God gave us we can change it, since He must've got it wrong. We want to assume the power of life and death for an unborn fetus in the name of choice despite the clear testimony of God's word that life begins in the womb, and that God alone has the right to choose life or death, and when we assume that right it amounts to murder.

Now I know that for some among us these are hard things, if not for you then for someone close to you that you love. They are hard words for me to preach. But the answer is not to soften the blow or change what God's word says about them. We are to deal with them as with any other sin, through God's grace, love, and repentance. But to deny what God's word says or disregard God's word of instruction and law would be falling in line with this mystery of lawlessness that is at work, disregarding what God has stated as truth in Scripture.

And while none of these are in and of themselves issues of salvation, they do bring into question the truthfulness and accuracy of God's Words of Scripture. And when that happens denominations begin to look at God's Word differently than what has been the Church's confession since its inception. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod holds that all of Scripture is God's very word breathed out to us. But the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America holds a different view, that Scripture contains God's word, but is not 100% God's Word. So, they can regard those hard portions of Scripture that rub us the wrong way as not God's words of law, but man's word that can be changed or ignored. But once you start down the slippery slope of sinful humans deciding what is God's truth and what isn't, where does it end? How long before we begin to question Jesus' virgin birth, His incarnation-God becoming man? How long before we accept the antichrist's view of Jesus? And if Jesus isn't both God and man how long before we question His complete work of salvation for you, for me? How long before we are looking for another better answer, perhaps from someone who seems to do some pretty awesome miracles by the power of Satan, who through that power rallies people from all kinds of faith behind him?

That kind of confession would certainly be popular with our culture, but it will do nothing toward ensuring our future with the saints that have gone before us. As Paul tells us in **2 Thessalonians 2:9-10** ⁹ **The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,** ¹⁰ **and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.**

Chosen For Salvation Through the Gospel Faith

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 ¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But our Lord and Savior has not left you to fight this spiritual battle alone. The Heavenly Father, out of His great love for you, chose you to be His own before you were born, to be His firstfruits. He has called you into His reign and rule, His family, His Church through the Gospel. Those wonderful and true words that tell you Jesus Christ, true man and true God lived the life of perfect obedience to God's laws that you could not, and then gave His life over to suffering and death for your sins so that you would never have to suffer for them. Then rose from the dead so that you could know without a doubt that you too will be resurrected on the Last Day to enjoy eternity with all the saints that have gone before you.

He has given to you His Spirit in baptism, the One who plants that Gospel message into your heart and your mind, making it THE TRUTH for you. And He continues to abide with you, living with you day in and day out, doing the work of sanctification: growing you in that faith, deepening it even as you are assailed by the attacks of the lawless culture around you. He is at work showing you how you are sliding into lawless error and calling you back through His words of Gospel forgiveness. He is at work making sure you remain steadfast in faith and so obtain the glory of the resurrection of all the saints on the Last Day

Standing Fast in the Traditions of the Saints

2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

And what is that faith that the Holy Spirit is at work to confirm us and strengthen us in? It's not the new and hip teaching of those churches that change God's word of truth to please itching ears. It's the traditions that were originally taught by the Apostles. It's the doctrine we have that was gleaned from God's Word and organized into our Lutheran Confessions that we hold fast to. While culture and opinion change, God's word never does, and neither should our confession of faith. Through the Spirit's work of strengthening our faith and moving us to hold fast to God's very word we can stand firm.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

It is through this Apostolic witness of faith, the doctrine of our Lutheran Confessions drawn from Scripture, that our Lord Jesus Christ shows us how great is His love for us, even when we sin. It is through this witness that He speaks words of eternal comfort and hope into our hearts and minds. It is through His gift of grace that we can be assured we have life with Him now and eternal life to come. And it is through this witness that we can share that wonderful message of comfort and hope with those who need to hear it.

Conclusion

Let's close by continuing to consider the words of our Hymn of the Day today: "For All the Saints":

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, Steals on the ear the distant triumph song, And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong. Alleluia! Alleluia!

That triumph song that makes our hearts brave and arms strong is not the song of our lawless culture or the Church that bows to it. It's the Apostolic confessional song of the Church from ages past.

The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors cometh rest; Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest. Alleluia! Alleluia!

Through your faithful confession of the Gospel Message, by the powerful work your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has done for you, you can know without a doubt that the calm of paradise the blest is your future. That in the end the man of lawlessness and Satan who empowered him are destined for eternal destruction on the day of Christ's return

But, lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day: The saints triumphant rise in bright array; The King of Glory passes on His way. Alleluia! Alleluia!

How can you know on your last day on earth that you will be with all the saints that have gone before you in the eternal paradise? By the promise of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is the promise of your resurrection to eternal life. You who are saint and sinner now, but then glorious saint forever in the eternity to come. Amen