

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the Name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord and Saviour. The title for today’s sermon is “Stand Firm” and is based on the Epistle reading, Galatians chapter 5:1. “For in freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.” Let us pray... . Amen.

Stand firm: What does this mean? In this changing world it is an interesting question? What does it really mean to stand firm in something? What if something more interesting comes around the corner? But to take a stand means to stand for something and thereby also against something else. Now, as Christians we do need to stand firm, but what does that exactly look like.

We are called to stand firm for things that are right, but how do we do that. Do we fight for what we believe in? Often people take the model of a William Wallace in the movie Braveheart for what we are to do. Toward the end of the movie there is a dramatic scene of a whole bunch of Scotsmen staring down the English. Lead by Wallace the Scots stand shoulder to shoulder bearing arms and ready to fight and die for their freedom. The battle has been set, those desperate for freedom staring down the evil English king and his army. The Scotsmen are ready to give their lives so they, their children, and their children’s children may be free from oppression, from servitude, from the bondage they had lived under.

But is this model we are called to follow? Are we to fight tyranny with sword, rifle, and missiles, or are we a different model? Our pride often tells us to prepare, to bear arms, and fight if needed. We can stand with the glorious leaders and fight tooth and nail for what is right, for what we deserve. We are free—free to choose our side, free to pick what is right and wrong. We know what we want, we know what we need, and we know how to get it.

We come by this honestly; we’ve learnt this from our parents who learnt it from theirs, all the way back to Adam and Eve. From them we inherited Original Sin and are guilty of it. We cannot choose and our will is in bondage to sin and under the Law. Paul tells the Romans “**For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.” (Romans 7:14-18)**

Every minute or every hour of every day there is an enormous battle going on in each and every one of us. This battle is NOT with the world, it is NOT with death, it is NOT even with the Devil as much as many would like to blame Satan for all our problems. Instead, this battle is within you and what is at stake is your very real and eternal salvation. This battle is titanic, and is by nature is set against you. The battle rages, the combatants clash, and in the end only one can win. For the battle to be good for you, and for you to receive your freedom, first, YOU MUST DIE.

Yes, it sounds strange, but for your freedom your life must be slaughtered, your desires massacred, you yourself must be crucified. It sounds gruesome, it sounds horrible, but it is absolutely necessary because as strange as it may sound, your natural self must die for you to be free. In this daily, hourly, and every minute battle, your natural self must always be crucified for you to be free.

Paul tells us, “**But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the**

flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.”(Gal 5:16-17)

Inside us our sinful flesh struggles against the Holy Spirit. Our sinful flesh has its own idea, yet the Holy Spirit has other ideas.

This battle comes down to Free Will. BUT, Free Will is a myth. Free Will in regards to spiritual matters is a theological unicorn. It does not exist and it never has. Free Will is Original Sin. Free Will is what Adam and Eve were chasing in Eden. As a result our natural works are none other than “**sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.**”(5:19b-21a)

You have one insurmountable problem, your natural self, your Old Adam wants to be in control; he wants his own way; and he doesn't want to lose control. Some blame the devil for this but it is your Old Adam who is your worst enemy. Your natural self, your Old Adam wants to win, he wants to be victorious, he wants to show off what he can do, but his works are evil and following them you eternally DIE and condemn yourself to hell. In Paul's own words “**I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**”(Gal 5:21) Yet, as long as you try to please God in and through your actions you are still bound under the Law and ALL its demand. As long as the Holy Spirit is not guiding you, as long as you are not trusting entirely on Christ, you are still dead in your sins because on your own you can never please God.

But what then does God call us to do? If our natural works are evil and can only condemn us, what can we possibly do to free ourselves? ... Nothing!

God has already taken care of your freedom. Christ's priceless gift of freedom for you is what Paul is talking about in the Epistle reading today. It is not about you what you do, because if you make it about your works, you are lost. It was never about what you could do for God; it was always about what Christ has already done for you. Through Baptism God gave you the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit continues to work through the Word and Sacrament to make you His own, “**to crucify your flesh with its passions and desires**” and keep you into Christ.

You are free in Christ because He has fulfilled the Law for you and in your place, He has broken the bonds of your sin, the shackles of Satan, and freed you from death's eternal claws. Christ made you free in and through Himself. He delivered you from your slavery to sin and your evil and sinful desires. God continues to “**lead you by the Holy Spirit, so you are not under the law**”(Gal 5:18). Instead God works in you “**the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law**”(Gal 5:22-23) so you are free!

Paul calls you, me, and all Christians to stand firm in this freedom. We are called to stand firm on the Rock of our salvation, namely Jesus Christ. We are not called to run off in every, or any, direction, but we are called to stand firm in the God given faith we received through the hearing of His Word and strengthened through the reception of the Sacrament. We are not called to look at ourselves or our works, but to focus strictly on Christ and His salvation.

In faith and through God’s Word, the Spirit guides us, leads us, and directs our life in Christ and in our service to our neighbours.

Since you were given freedom from the shackles of the Law, Paul tells you not to throw it away. Instead Paul tells you to live in Christ’s freedom. And what a glorious freedom it is. You are free from the Law, you are delivered from death, and you are free from Satan. Do not submit to a yoke of slavery again. **“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”**”(Gal 5:13-14)

Luther explains Paul’s words saying. *“I first lay down these two propositions, concerning spiritual liberty and servitude. A Christian man is the most free lord of all, and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all, and subject to everyone.”* (Luther, Christian Freedom, 10)

Christ through His death and resurrection freed you from having to earn your way into heaven or to keep you there. Jesus did it all; your salvation is completely and entirely secured in Christ. There is nothing left for you to do. So don’t throw it away by trying to add something to it!

So, instead of trying to earn a spot in heaven, we have the blessed opportunity to freely share Christ’s life saving Gospel and gift and to stand firm in it.

This coming week 8 of our youth will be traveling to Winnipeg to take part in Lutheran Church Canada’s National Youth Gathering. The theme is ‘Stand Firm’ based on Exodus 14:13-14—when God’s Word came through Moses to the Israelites when they faced down the Egyptian army sent to retrieve them at the Red Sea. They were called to stand firm on God’s Word and trust His promises. They were not called to gather arms and fight, but to remain faithful to the One who chose them, who called them, and who was in the process of delivering them in the penultimate way—through the waters of the Red Sea.

At the National Youth Gathering the youth will also be encouraged to stand firm with all of us in God’s Word and promises, and reminded how Christ has already delivered them in the Ultimate way—through Christ’s life death and resurrection along with how God has already chosen them, called them and made them His through the waters of Holy Baptism, and continue to be with them in their life.

In addition, they will be encouraged, as we all should be, to trust God at His Word, Stand Firm in His promises, and trust He is always with us in this life. Jesus gave His life for you. There is nothing you could ever do to repay Him. Now you are blessed with the opportunity to share God’s love with all those in the world around us.

You have the greatest gift of freedom the world could ever know. It is recorded plainly in the inspired Word of Scripture. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For *you* are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that *you* should walk in them.” Amen.

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