

May the grace, mercy, and peace of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour be your today. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “Don’t Run!”, and is based on today’s Epistle text, from first St. Peter chapters 4 and 5. Let us pray...Amen.

A number of years ago I was hunting deer with a friend out around Hinton Alberta, a little ways outside the Jasper National Park boundary. While walking down a cutline we heard a rumble and the cracking of branches coming up at an angle beside us. We stopped in our tracks, took the safety’s off our rifles, and waiting to see the fortunate deer who was about to run out in front of us. To our shock and surprise, instead of a deer, or moose, a pair of two year old Grizzly bears ran in front of us from one side to the other and disappeared into the trees. They were big. The sweat began to run. We looked at each other and before we could say anything another sound followed pair and mom followed them on the same path. Forget the cub being big, mom was huge. All that ran through my mind was “don’t run” because if you do, that bear’s instincts will kick in and both of us will be dead.

Standing one’s ground has its advantages, mainly if you are somewhere secure. You know where you are and what’s around you. But running can send a person or animal into harms way. I was reading an article recently about hunting habits of lions. It explained how lions hunt in a very organized way. One or two lions prowl around and roar to get the prey to focus on them. As the prey gets nervous it, or they, take off in haste away from the roaring lion and smack into the ambush of the stalking lions waiting to devour them. Then the lions together share in the feast.

Peter explains the devils action in today’s Epistle. Peter warns us—you, me, and all Christians—to be aware of this roaring lion, Satan himself who is prowling around. Peter explains how we will have struggles and persecutions in this life. Peter doesn’t sugar coat it or beat around the bush, following in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus warned Peter and the rest of us when He said, **“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”**(John 15:18-19) Let me be blunt and phrase it another way: if the all the world loves you then you are on the wrong side of salvation. Jesus never said it would be easy in this life. Instead Jesus said, **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross DAILY and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”**(Luke 9:23-24)

This is the reason for Jesus praying in the Gospel reading. He was praying for us, and continues to intercede for us with the Father. Why? Because we are still in the world. The devil is still prowling around, seeking someone to devour. Satan is not alone in hating us, the world by and large also hates us. As a result we are going to face various crosses, challenges, and at times share Christ’s sufferings in this life. They will take on many different faces. The devil

would love for us to run for the hills whenever they happen. The devil salivates at the thought of us just throwing up our hands and say; "I give up! I just can't hang on. The pain is too great and the suffering too long. I'm out of here!"

Now, it's important to identify there are two main causes of trials and suffering. Scripture reveals that "God does permit suffering in our lives for a variety of reasons. Sometimes suffering comes as a direct result of something we have done, as a result of our sin, and it comes in order to disciple us. Other times suffering is an effect of being a Christian in a world that wants absolutely nothing to do with God, and who wants to crush His Church. Although we do not know God's hidden will, we can trust He only has the best in mind for us. He will strengthen, uphold, and bless us in the midst of our persecution and suffering in His Name. He will use any affliction we face for our own good or for blessing others. With our eyes on the cross, we can endure. Our God will preserve us, and He has prepared an eternal home for us in heaven for the sake of Christ."(*TLSB, 1 Peter 4:12-19*)

And so, if our suffering is a result of our own sinful actions, there is no blessing and no reward from God. Yet, if we suffer for the sake of Christ and His Word, then God promises to be here with us.

The sin here is that when we face various kinds of trials and suffering we often want to run away from Christ. The roaring of the devil can scare us out of the stronghold of Christ and His Church in hopes of finding some other form of deliverance and hope. The problem is, apart from Christ there is no real hope, no deliverance, no grace, only sin, death, and the devil waiting to devour us.

When Satan roars we are not called to run, we are called to stand firm in Christ, resisting Satan, not by our own power, but firm in faith and in God's Word. This can be done because Christ has already come in our flesh. He has taken the full punishment for our sins. Christ intimately knows our persecutions, our trials, and our sufferings as He also went through them. On the cross He died for you, me, and all people and there he crushed the head and power of the devil. He descended into hell to proclaim the victory to those in hell. On the Third Day, Jesus rose from the dead proclaiming His victory over sin, death, and the devil to those still alive. Then, as we remembered this past Thursday, 40 days after Jesus' Resurrection, Christ ascended into heaven and cast out Satan for there was no longer a place for him to accuse us. From heaven Christ sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Helper, into the world. Now Jesus stands in our place before the Father. The victory complete. Satan defeated in eternity, but still prowling here in time. So don't run. Stand firm in Christ.

Going back to the hunting habits of lions; the prowling and roaring lion is usually the most feeble and toothless in the pack. That lion, the one making all the commotion is the least dangerous, yet still very noisy. The same is true about the devil. Since Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension you are safe from the devil as long as you are in Christ. He many

make a bunch of noise, but in Christ and through Christ you can resist him. The devil is still a crafty and powerful enemy. This is why Peter cautions us saying: **“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”**¹⁰ **And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”**(1 Peter 5:8-10)

In this life there will be sufferings. This is nothing new for Christians. Sometimes we are called to share in Christ’s sufferings for the sake of the Gospel. Sometimes we will be insulted for our faith and trust in Christ. But sufferings and trials can be a gift. In them and through them God does work for our sake and for those around us. God does not abandon us when bad things happen. We can stand firm in God’s Word which reveals Christ has already suffered for us and knows our every suffering. We can cling to His final words before His ascension Jesus said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”**¹⁹ **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,**²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**(Matthew 28:18-20)

I am with you always. Even in suffering, Christ preserves us and helps us stand. When our lives and reputations are on the line, Christ preserves both in heaven and eternity. He has already fought and defeated the devil in your place. The reason why the devil is prowling and roaring is because he has no power over you as long as you are in Christ. Satan wants to scare you so you run and flee from Christ because then you are dead.

Now, this is not to say we will not have any suffering, trials, or persecutions. Instead it is saying that by the grace of God, Christ will carry us through them. In the words of Paul to the Romans, suffering can be a blessing **“since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**² **Through Jesus we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.**³ **Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,**⁴ **and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,**⁵ **and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”**(Romans 5:1-5) No matter what you have faced, are facing, or will face in this life, Christ is with you each and every step of the way; from Baptism, when you receive the Holy Spirit, to eternal life, where you will share in Christ’s eternal glory. His gifts are not based on your strength or resolve but entirely based Christ, His strength, and victory on the cross.

We need this comfort at all times, but even more during times of suffering and despair. Christ brings His gifts to us where He promises to be: In His Word and Sacrament. Here God

comes to us, He saves us, He washes us, He teaches us, He absolves us, He feeds us by His means in Christ. Everyone has different afflictions but Christ remains firm in His promise. **“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**(Romans 8:38-39) In Christ we have this promise. In Christ we have salvation!

We don’t have to flee from Satan or the trials, persecutions, or suffering in this world. Instead we can rest secure in Christ and the ark of His Church where His Word and His Sacrament are present and knowing here He keeps us safe now and for eternity. **“To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.”**(1 Peter 5:10)

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