

Epiphany 5

1 Peter 5:6-11

February 4, 2024 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

God Cares for You! Therefore...

You can endure difficulties

You can resist Satan

He was standing in the courtroom before the judge, who told him to say 3 simple words, “*Caesar estin kurios*,” Caesar is Lord. He looked the judge in the eye and calmly, but clearly, said, “*Christos estin kurios*,” Christ is Lord. The judge gave the order and soldiers and guided him outside as his wife and children broke down in tears. They forced him to kneel down and placed his head on a large, flat stone. With one swing of the executioner’s blade, he was in heaven. That’s the kind of persecution people were dealing with when Peter wrote to them.

Persecution of Christians is a little different these days. A girl is given detention because in her high school biology class, she said that there were only two genders that were determined by birth. A man is fired because on his personal Facebook page he expressed his belief, backed up by studies, that homosexuality and abortion are not healthy things. Jesus said that we would have to carry a cross.

And it’s not only persecutions that can make life tough. Your doctor runs a test and tells you that you have a tumor. You live on a fixed income but prices keep going up. Your job tires you out and stresses you out because you don’t know who will be laid off next. The house needs repairs and so does the car. The children and grandchildren don’t always make good decisions. The news bombards you with all sorts of negativity. You are surrounded by people and yet feel lonely as if no one really understands you and your situation.

The attacks on the Christian faith as well as the daily grind of growing older in a sin-infected world can leave us wiped out, worn out and, sometimes, wondering if God is there and if he cares. How many times have you asked, “Why God?” The faith of first century Christians was being threatened by painful trials of many kinds, but this did not mean that God abandoned them. Peter wrote this letter to encourage them and to strengthen their faith. This morning, we see that because God cares for you, you can endure difficulties and resist Satan.

You can endure difficulties

Sometimes, it’s just nice to know that someone understands and cares. A sympathetic ear, a pat on the back and an encouraging word can often make a big difference in our day. But our God does not just give us a warm fuzzy. He gives actual help. Peter wrote (:6,7), “**Humble yourselves under God’s mighty hand, that the may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**” Your entire life is under God’s mighty hand. He is sovereign, in control of all things in the world, including every detail of your life. He is the one who is driving the bus. Think of yourself as a small little person [hold fingers about 1/8” apart] and God as a huge hand over you. That’s a good place to be. As one children’s song says, “God is bigger than the Boogie Man.” He’s bigger and stronger than any issue that you face.

We know that we can not solve all of the issues facing us, but God can. We have a Bible full of evidence of God’s power. He created the world. He can split bodies of water. He can make bread appear on the ground. He can make it rain and he can make it stop raining. He can make the lame to walk and the blind to see. He can raise the dead. We can trust him. What a comfort to know that such a powerful God is guarding us. The CEO of Harley Davidson, or any large company, does not know the name of each employee and what his or her issues are. If money is tight, he lays people off without being concerned about how they will get food on their table. Our God is not a distant God who doesn’t really care about his children’s little problems. He is thinking about you all the time as if you were the only person in the world and is constantly concerned about you. He never even sleeps. What a blessing to have a loving God who is both powerful and deeply concerned about our daily woes.

Anxiety is a natural thing for those living in a sin-infected world. Peter expects that you will have anxiety, but a heart of faith recognizes that God is in control of all things for our good. We think of his powerful hand and are humbled. He’s bigger and stronger than you are and he invites, even urges you, to give him all of your anxiety, your worry, your stress, your concern, your doubt, your insecurities. He wants us to look to him for help so that we trust in him even more. We are honoring him and respecting him when we put all of our difficulties and concerns on him and say, “Here, God, you figure it out.”

Peter, however, is not encouraging us to be lazy, to quit our job and just “trust” that God will provide for us. No. God gave us gifts, abilities, opportunities and friends for us to use. As someone said, “God provides for the birds of the air, but he does not toss the worms into their nest.” God

gives birds amazing hearing and eyesight so they can find the worms. When you need a job, pray for God's blessing, but then fill out applications. Talk to friends and relatives to see if they know of any places that are hiring. Use the gifts, abilities and skills God gave you and match those with opportunities in the job market. Talk to trusted people and weigh your options. Then make your decision and let go. Don't worry. Cast all your anxiety on God and let him take care of things. The Lord does not bless you because you make the right decision. He blesses you because he loves you through his Son, your Savior, Jesus. Peter even adds that God will (:6), "**lift you up in due time.**" At some time and in some way, he will relieve you of your anxious situation. Instead of worrying, hand it over to God. Fall back into his arms and trust that he will work out all things for your eternal good. He promised. He cares for you. You can trust him.

You can resist Satan

Being concerned about which job to take is nothing compared to our greatest concern of all – our faith, our relationship to God. The devil is constantly trying to kill us spiritually. Peter explained (:8), "**Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**" The devil is constantly watching for some believer to let his or her guard down, someone who is spiritually weak because he hasn't gone to church and spent time with God's Word for a while. Every sin you commit also weakens your faith. The devil is always watching and is always ready to attack.

The devil is not just trying to scare you or hurt you a little bit. He wants to destroy you eternally. Maybe you have seen one of the movies or plays about the Lion King. The bad lion is called Scar – what a fitting name. He is the embodiment of evil. Everything he does is bad. If you get too close to him, he slashes at you with his powerful claw. The devil wants to drag you away from Jesus and take you to eternal suffering in hell. He wants you to doubt God's love and question his Word. He wants you to get you so addicted to a sin that your conscience doesn't trouble you anymore and you do not look to Jesus for forgiveness.

The devil is our old evil foe who is far more powerful than we are, but you have a God who cares for you. You have a God who sent his perfect, one and only Son, to be your Savior. To continue the picture of an attacking lion, in order to protect you, Jesus jumped in front of you as he hung on the cross. He took the punishment that you and I deserved for our sin. God is not going to punish you because Jesus was already punished in

your place. Your sin is forgiven. Your guilt is gone. He broke the devil's power to control you. And by rising from the dead, he broke the devil's power to hold you in the grave. You are going to go to haven.

In love Peter encourages you to (:8), "**Be alert and of sober mind.**" In other words, "Be on your guard for anything that goes against the Commandments and pulls you away from Jesus." Think clearly. Recognize the seriousness of sin and the reality of hell and then hang on to Christ even tighter. Peter continues (:9), "**Resist him, standing firm in the faith.**" Stay connected to Jesus as you spend quality and quantity time with God's Word. This is not just a suggestion. Your eternal destiny is at stake. And when Peter reminds us that (:9), "**the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings,**" he is simply reminding you that you are not being singled out for some special sort of torture. He's saying that every believer faces the same spiritual struggle. Every believer needs to focus on staying connected to Jesus.

Peter knows that when a person has suffered for being a Christian, he or she might be tempted to give up. So he reminds us that God (:10), "**will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**" Like an carpenter who fixes something that is broken (like a piece of furniture), when you sin, God forgives and will **restore** you. When your faith is challenged and you feel weak, God's Word will make that faith **strong** again. As exercise improves muscles that are weak, God **firms** up your faith with his Word. Like a house that is built on a rock so it can withstand the storms that blast against it, he puts a **steadfast** foundation under you. When all of society tempts you to turn away from Jesus and you face persecution, he will not abandon you.

Verse 11, "**To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.**" It does not always look like God is in control but he is. The same God who called you to faith is the same God who will keep you in the faith. He already has a lot invested in you. He cares about you so much that sent his one and only Son into this world to live, die and rise in your place. He sent the Holy Spirit to create faith in your heart. He is not going to abandon you now. Jesus heals and helps his people. He shoulders all the effects of the devil, from weariness and weakness to anxiety and stress to disease and ignorance. He strengthens you when the roaring lion prowls and anxiety looms. Your God saved you. Your God cares for you. Amen.