

October 31, 2021 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Stand Firm on God's Word!

It will not be easy

It will be worth it

We do not talk about Luther as if he was a cult leader. There were plenty of times when he said things that we wish he would not have said. He would be the first to admit that he was a sinner. We still talk about him, though, because the Lord used him to rediscover the rock-solid truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, as revealed in Scripture alone. This morning, like Luther, we want to stand firm on God's Word.

It will not be easy

When I was in elementary school, there was a game we played during recess in the winter time. We called it, "King of the Hill." The snow plow left large piles of snow at the edge of the playground. Whoever was standing at the top of that snow pile was The King of the Hill. Of course, everyone wanted to be king, so we all did our best to push each other off of the snow pile. If you managed to be King of the Hill, you knew that everyone else was going to try to push you down. It was difficult to stand firm on a snow pile. It is even more difficult to stand firm on God's Word. Instead of being attacked, by fifth and sixth graders, we are under attack by the devil and his evil followers.

In Mark 13, Jesus explained to his disciples that following him was not going to be easy. They were going to be arrested and whipped. They would be put on trial and condemned to death. Before the end of the world came, false teachers would misrepresent God's Word and mislead many people. There would wars and rumors of wars as well as earthquakes. It was going to be bad. It was not going to be easy to stand firm on God's Word.

Jesus told us we could expect struggles and suffering because he wanted to warn us. When we face tough times for our faith in Jesus as our Savior, God does not want us to think that he forgot about us or that he is punishing us. He already punished Jesus in our place as he hung on the cross. The Lord even uses these struggles for our good. For example, if you are taking a walk when the weather is nice, you do not even think about the hat on your head. But if you are walking through stormy weather, you make sure to hold on to your hat so it does not blow away.

In the same way, when we face troubles and trials for our faith, we end up holding on to Jesus even tighter. That's good for us. But, it is not easy.

It was not easy for Luther to take a stand against the emperor. He was condemned as a heretic and outlaw. His life was threatened again and again. It was not easy, but the Bible truth of salvation through faith, not by works, was preserved. And it's still not easy to stand firm on God's Word. The Roman Catholic church continues to promote work righteousness and leaves people uncertain about their salvation. Sad. Reformed churches (e.g. Baptist, Assemblies of God, etc.) continue to teach that if you want to be saved, then YOU have to do something. YOU have to make a decision for Jesus and live the right way. Again, people are taught to trust in something they do and the certainty of salvation is lost. Sad. Still other churches treat the Bible as just a bunch of Jewish folklore. They deny that Jesus was literally true God in the flesh and that any miracles could ever happen. If miracles can not happen, then there is no hope of getting to heaven. And then those churches call us close-minded, out of date, snobbish, arrogant, conceited and mean spirited when we do not join with them. It is not easy.

You know it is not easy because some of your friends and relatives, sometimes even members of your own family, have broken away from you and rejected what you believe and what our church teaches. After what Jesus told us, we should not be surprised that our world is such a mess. Not only is the certain of salvation hidden from many, but there are all sorts of sinful behavior. Sexual immorality, drug and alcohol abuse, abortion and other things are so common in our country and culture. And when you mention these things in as gentle a way as you can, they turn on you.

It is not easy to stand firm on God's Word. It is not easy

- to be rejected by people that you care about.
- to give your hard-earned money to keep this congregation going as a place where the certainty of salvation is proclaimed.
- for our synod to train the next generation of pastors and teachers.
- to get up and worship the Lord when we are exhausted.
- to sacrifice your precious time to help this congregation with its ministry.
- to open your Bible and devotion books when you have so much to do.
- to get your children to Sunday School.

- to avoid temptation and turn away from your pet sins.
- to show love to others all the time.
- to hang on to Jesus when you are hurting and brokenhearted.

Jesus told us that it would not be easy. But Jesus did more than just warn us. He also told us that the Holy Spirit would be with us. When we do not know what to say, the Holy Spirit will guide us in that moment.

Friends and family members may turn against you, but the same Holy Spirit who took up residence in your heart when you are baptized is still living in you. You have God himself on your side. You also have a congregation and whole synod of brothers and sisters who believe the same as you do. When you come together in worship, you are strengthening and encouraging each other to stand firm in the faith. Not only did Jesus promise you the Holy Spirit, he also carries your sorrows. He cries with you. Yes, you face troubles, but the Lord is an ever-present help in trouble. Jesus knows what it is like to be despised and rejected. He suffered the ultimate rejection as he suffered the reality of hell for you as he hung on the cross. His love endures forever. Your sins are forgiven. Your salvation is secure.

When your favorite football team gets ready for a game, they know it is going to be difficult. They know they are going to get hurt and bruised. They know that they are going to get pushed to the ground. But they accept that difficulty, because that is the only way to victory. Even though standing on God's Word is not easy, it will most certainly be worth it.

It will be worth it

Jesus told us that the end of the world would not come until the gospel was proclaimed throughout the world. The Apostle Peter thought that had already happened during his life time. How much closer are we to Judgment Day now. In our second lesson from Revelation, God promised that the gospel would be eternal. No matter what attacks the church on earth faces, God will make sure that the good news of salvation will continue to be proclaimed. By God's grace, we are rejoicing in it right here and right now. God has kept his promise to you again. He always does.

False teachers will continue to blow hot air. False prophets will continue to claim to be the Messiah, like Jim Jones in South America or David Koresh in Waco, Texas, who both died and stayed dead. All sorts of heretics are on TV or on the internet, especially YouTube. Just because somebody can quote the Bible does not mean they are telling the truth. Even the Devil can quote the Bible. Still, you have what you need to

stand firm on God's Word. Do not doubt your ability to recognize false teachings. All of you went through some time of instruction course before you joined the church. If you hear something a little different, check it out. Use your Catechism to check if someone is sharing God's Word accurately or not. You all have a Catechism, right? I know someone who reads through his Catechism for his devotions. What an excellent practice.

It was not easy for Martin Luther to stand firm in front of the Emperor, but it was worth it as the truth of salvation through faith by grace was preserved. It is not easy for you to stand firm either, but it will be worth it. Jesus compared the troubles in our world to birth pains. A few weeks ago, some friends of mine became grandparents for the fourth time. They told me that their daughter-in-law was in the hospital for three days before she gave birth. Labor is always laborious, but this birth was especially exhausting. But now there is a happy and healthy baby boy and everyone is smiling. It was worth it.

When you stand before your Lord Jesus and he puts the crown of life on your head and you walk down heaven's golden streets and when you are happy and home free forever with a glorified body, you also will say that it was worth it. God will grant you grace so that you will stand firm on God's Word and be saved. Amen.