

Standing at the Cross

A Worship Series for Lent, Holy Week and Easter on Themes from Martin Luther

Week 2: Standing Unafraid

Sermon

- The **Sermon**, “Standing Unafraid,” is delivered by the pastor:

P The phone call comes from the doctor’s office. She has noticed something in your blood work and would like for you to come in to see her so that she can discuss it with you. The nurse who calls doesn’t tell you anything about the results. It’s Monday and the first appointment the doctor has available is Friday. Now you have to wait. That’s when fear sets in. You barely sleep all week. Your mind goes through every scenario. The fear seems to do nothing but grow as the days wear on.

It’s a fear that runs deeply. It’s a fear that we don’t even like to talk about. The fear is that the doctor will use words like cancer, or even worse. But the fear runs even more deeply than that. It’s a fear we can all pinpoint when we really think about it. If we’re truly honest with ourselves the fear that we deal with when the doctor calls with that kind of news is ultimately the fear of death.

In a sermon for the Fifth Sunday in Lent of 1533 Martin Luther said: “Even though death consume us, we yet shall not feel its sharp fangs, for Christ’s Word is our armor that supplies us with a confident life and a quiet, peaceful death and eternal life.” Isn’t that what we all long for almost more than anything else? We want to know, and trust, what Christ has demonstrated about death and what he has taught us about death. We want to believe in life after death with all of our hearts, but we’re surrounded by so much that makes us doubt. No one we know has come back from the dead to reliably tell us about what’s on the other side. So there are times we find ourselves lying awake in the deep dark of the night with the fear of death gripping our hearts.

Terrorism and mass shootings in our country have heightened our fears. We don't really know anymore where we can be completely safe. It would be nice to be able to walk around with some kind of body armor that we know would be one hundred percent effective against any weapon. But even if we could do that, there is no armor that can protect us from illness or disease on the inside. As St. Paul said, "the wages of sin is death." We know it all too well because we see it all around us.

But there is an invisible armor that protects us from something far worse than physical death. It is the armor of God's Word that defends us against eternal death. The armor of God's Word has protected all of God's people who have gone before us. It reminded Joshua that his God was with him wherever he went. It reminded Paul that the Lord would rescue him from all evil. It became flesh in the person of Jesus so that he could speak words out of his own mouth reminding us that he is our eternal Savior.

Watch your fear of death melt away when you put on that very same armor. Joshua was facing fearsome foes and the possibility of physical death as he and Israel stood across the Jordan and looked into the Promised Land. There were enemies there and they were great. But the Word of God came to him and wrapped him in its armor: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Are you traveling? The Lord is with you. Are you walking down the aisle? The Lord is with you. Are you going into surgery? The Lord is with you. Are you going to a funeral? The Lord is with you. Are you going to your own grave? Be strong and courageous! The Lord is with you!

As Paul defended himself in court he looked around and discovered that everyone who might be able to help him had abandoned him. Paul was in prison for his faith as he wrote to young Timothy. He didn't know how long he had left here on this earth. But the Word of God came to him and wrapped him in its armor: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Do you feel the strong temptation to return to a sin you thought you had abandoned? The Lord will rescue you. Do you feel alone and abandoned by people you thought loved you? The Lord will rescue you. Do you feel shaky in your biblical knowledge as you attempt to defend your faith? The Lord will rescue you. Do you feel the fear of death creeping in on you? The Lord will rescue you and bring you safely into his heavenly kingdom.

The greatest thing for us Christians is that God's Word became flesh and dwelt among us. From his own mouth he said: "Before Abraham was, I AM." The eternal God had put on flesh and now still lives and reigns eternally to be with us wherever we go and to rescue us from all evil.

But it wasn't enough for him to be simply eternal. The eternal God took on flesh so that He could go to the cross and taste death just like we do. The eternal God took on flesh so that He could rest in the grave just like we do. The eternal God took on flesh so that He could rise from the dead paving the way for us to do the very same. The Word made flesh speaks into our ears today: "Truly, truly, I say to you if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

So we keep his Word on our eyes, in our ears and in our hearts. Don't be afraid of what the doctor says. Your great physician has squashed the power of death and welcomes you to resurrection and new life. Live life and face death unafraid. Amen.

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