

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Remain Steadfast in the Lord

1. by humbling yourselves before him
2. by trusting in his promises

Today marks the conclusion of the season of Easter. For the past seven weeks we have celebrated how our Savior Jesus has risen from death, conquered our enemies, and ascended into heaven to rule over his entire creation. During this time we have heard a number of messages from Peter's first epistle. They are lessons that are most fitting for this Easter season because they are all about living our lives in the joy of the resurrection. Today's lesson is no different. In fact, this lesson from 1 Peter 5 could really serve as a summary of these lessons from 1 Peter. Here Peter urges us to remain steadfast in the Lord. We commit ourselves to our Lord in this way by humbling ourselves before him and by trusting in his promises.

Living with an unwavering faith in our Lord, however, is no easy task. The resurrection joy of Easter stands in sharp contrast to the trials and struggles of our everyday lives. As Christians, we know that Jesus lives even though he died. We know that means that we also will live with him forever even though we will die. We know our eternal home in heaven is going to be a great deal better and happier than anything we experience in this life. This knowledge causes us to yearn for our heavenly home right now, to leave this trail of tears behind to be with our Lord in his glory. And that is a healthy desire to have. In fact, our Lord urges us to set our minds on things above, not on earthly things. Our Lord wants us to desire to be with him in heaven. That's the attitude which the apostle Paul had. He wrote to the Christians in the city of Philippi: **"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."**

It's good to desire heaven. But it is equally important to recognize that the Lord has a purpose for us while we are here in this world. As his chosen people, the Lord has appointed us to be his representatives to the world. As Jesus said to his disciples just before he ascended into heaven, "You will be my witnesses." The apostle Paul applied those words to his life. Although he desired to be with Jesus in heaven, he went on to tell the Philippians: **"But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body."** Paul had a single interest in life. He wanted to make Christ known to the world. We want to embrace that same attitude. God is extending his heavenly invitation to people everywhere. And he is extending that invitation through us. God wants us to make it known that it is in Christ alone that our hope is found. And we do that in many ways. We do it when we share the message of our faith in Jesus with those people whom the Lord has placed in our lives. We also share Jesus with the world by living a life that reflects the love of Jesus. God wants us to make it very clear that we march to the beat of a drummer that is out of step with the ways of this world. God wants us to live everyday of our lives as if it were Easter.

But there are many days that don't feel like Easter, aren't there? There are many days that we don't feel like reflecting resurrection joy because we ourselves don't feel resurrection joy. Our lives can be filled with trials and struggles. We experience the pains which sin brings into our lives. In fact, as Christians we are going to face many trials precisely because we are Christians. In the first half of this lesson from 1 Peter 4, we are reminded that we are going to be insulted and mistreated because of our connection to the name of Jesus. Now in reality, we aren't the ones being rejected; our Savior is being rejected. Furthermore, the persecutions we face give us an opportunity to demonstrate the very heart of Christ. He loved the people who hated him and abused him and put him to death. Through those persecutions we are Christ's witnesses. On top of it all, Jesus assures us that our peace and comfort lie in heaven, not in this world. Nevertheless, in spite of our Savior's promises, we are sometimes tempted to lose our focus. We're tempted to think that trouble comes into our lives because God is out to get us. It can lead us to resent our Lord and his Word. It leads us to complain to God and to doubt that he ever truly had our best interests in mind.

It is at those times when we must remember Peter's words of encouragement: **"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."** Our Lord has not allowed trials and tests into our lives to crush us under a burden we cannot bear. We are talking about the God who had such great love for us that he

did not spare his only Son, but gave him up for us all. Jesus paid the price for all the doubt and anger and resentment against God we have ever or will ever feel. Our God is not a God who has abandoned us in the struggle and turmoil of this life. He is right here with us. He knows what's best for us. And sometimes, what is best for us is a struggle under a difficult circumstance that will ultimately bring us closer to our Lord.

How, then, shall we conduct our lives? With humility. We aren't the ones in control of our lives. Christ is. He is directing all the affairs of our lives with his mighty hand. We can entrust all things to him. And we can be sure that a time is coming when God will lift us up from the darkness of this world. He will take us to be with him in his wonderful light.

In fact, he has given us more than a promise of what is to come. He gives us promises to comfort us right now. Peter says, "**Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**" We can come before our Lord's throne of grace with all our doubts and fears and concerns. Our Lord is there to help us through the day-to-day struggles of our lives. That is one of the great comforts of the ascension of Jesus, which we celebrated on Thursday. Just because Jesus isn't visibly present on this earth anymore doesn't mean he is absent from our lives. Jesus now sits at the right hand of the Father and intercedes for us. He has opened the lines of communication between us and God. So we can be sure that God hears us and is answering our prayers in the way that is best for our eternal good.

Peter goes on to offer more guidance on how we remain steadfast in the Lord. "**Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.**"⁹ **Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.**" Our enemy the devil is a cunning and intelligent foe. He works to bring about our downfall in any way possible. There are times when we are driven to the edge of despair by the troubles of our lives, and the devil is there to try to push us off the cliff. But there are other times when life seems to be going so smoothly that we begin to rest on our laurels and think that nothing could ever go wrong. It is the latter case that Peter warns about here. Peter had a firm grasp on who the devil really is. I think we can easily be misled about what the devil is all about. Today the devil is pictured as a silly little cartoon character sitting on your shoulder telling you to eat that second piece of chocolate cake, or as the cute little girl in the red outfit with the horns and the pitchfork on Halloween. These pictures make the devil come off as something harmless, almost as a myth.

But Peter tells us just the opposite. The devil is real, and he is a ferocious lion who prowls about seeking to prey on God's children. The devil is out for blood. He is looking to destroy our relationship with God in any way he is able. He'll shame us into despair like he did with Judas. He'll trick us into arrogance like he did with the Pharisees. He'll convince us God is keeping good things from us like he did with Eve. We need to be in a constant state of vigilance in order to ward off the devil's attacks.

Peter tells us how we do that. He says, "**Resist him, standing firm in the faith.**" We remain steadfast in our faith in the Lord by staying connected to that which the Lord uses to strengthen our faith. We need to stay connected to his Word. Jesus is present with us today when we gather around his saving promises. Through Word and sacraments, Jesus comes to us with power that saves our souls. He gives us the ammunition we need to send that roaring lion wimpering back to his lair to lick his wounds.

Listen again to the promise which the Lord extends to us in his Word. "**And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.**" Here in God's Word we are reminded of the undeserved love which our Lord has showered upon us. Here we are reminded that the Lord chose us to be his own before we came to be, before the creation of the world. He has called us to share eternal glory with him. Here in God's Word we see the price our Lord was willing to pay to make us his own. We see how Jesus gave up his own life to free us from sin and the devil. Here in holy baptism we experience how God personally sought us out from the darkness of our sin—the miracle of spiritual restoration, the drowning of a sinful nature, the raising to life of a new creation, the pledge of being his very own. Here in the Lord's Supper we receive very personal assurance that what God says in his Word is true. The body and blood of Jesus, shed for you, the pledge of forgiveness, the feast that celebrates that salvation is ours.

These are the things which make us strong, firm, and steadfast in the Lord's promises. Stay connected to them. Trust in your Lord. He will sustain you as you struggle for this brief time until we reach eternal life with our Lord. "**To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.**"