**June 23rd 2024 Fourth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: Matthew 5:11-16** 0726

**Theme: Salt and Light.**

May the Lord give strength and hope unto all of you, that being the salt and light of the earth we may glorify our Lord through our suffering and trials. Amen. Dear Christians: Of all the things that a Christian might face in their life, probably the most difficult is the endurance of suffering. There are many different types of suffering that we might endure, but near the top of the list would be bodily pain and grief over the suffering of a loved one. Bodily pain coming from injury, disease, or sickness is debilitating, not just because of the pain itself, but largely because of the emotional and physical drain on a person who endures it. It is not just a brief moment of pain, but the ongoing continuous pain which wears on a person physically and emotionally, to the point where they can’t go on anymore, or think that they can’t. A Christian will pray to God, will beg God to remove the ailment from them, but often to no avail. Often the pain continues, it goes on and on and on, with no relief in sight. A Christian might then wonder if God is punishing them for some sin or another; the Christian might desire to die, and be removed from the pain. This can cause guilt in the Christian’s conscience because they think that they should be strong and enduring, that they should be thinking less about themselves, that they should be able to overcome the pain by faith. The Christian under such will desire to die, then feel guilty because it is sinful to commit suicide, and they do not want to sin. In short, when in the midst of these things the Christian is battling not with the pain only, but the same spiritual battle that all men must face at some point, and yet through the pain, that battle comes to their very doorstep. The apostle pain, addressing this very topic said: *For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And He said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong.” (2 Cor. 12:6-10)* These words are somewhat curious, for how is weakness, strength? And further is the theme for these passages glorying or suffering? Here then is where we find a unity. A unity between heaven and earth, between God and His people, between suffering and glory.

It is no secret that quite recently I endured a bout of crippling migraines, a type of migraine that has been dubbed ‘suicide headaches’ due to the amount of pain associated with them. Now I mention this not because I want or need sympathy, but because through these bouts I have learned a couple things, both as regards those who endure the pain and those loved ones who must watch them endure the pain. Now I believe the Lord wanted me to go through it so that I might be able to preach such a sermon, and help to offer guidance to any who might endure something similar. Let us then look to our text, and the very words of our Savior, to learn of being salt and light. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew beginning at verse eleven.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most glorious Lord God in heaven, as we come before Thee in our daily lives, praying about our many troubles and trials, we ask that Thou wouldst remind us continually of the purpose of those things. Keep us from faltering and falling from the faith, but thereby strengthen our faith, strengthen our reliance on Thee, and being thus strengthened, help us to be salt and light unto the world through our patient endurance under suffering. Help our witness to do good, and to glorify Thee alone. Keep us from glorying in ourselves, in medicine, in any other thing, but in Thee alone, that thus giving glory to Thee, others may see and believe that Thou art merciful and gracious to those who trust in Thee. We ask that Thou wouldst look in kindness upon all who endure bodily suffering; relieve them of their pain according to Thy will. However, if Thou wilt that they must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God, keep them from despair, but give them a full measure of Thy Holy Spirit, that they may endure it patiently unto the end, giving Thee glory in their infirmities, and witnessing of Thy strength in their weakness. O Lord Thou art gracious, O Lord, Thou art merciful, O Lord, thou art glorious. In Thy name do we pray. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn to be salt and light:

1. **During trials.** We read verses eleven and twelve of our text: **read verses here.** As we have done several times over the past several weeks, our text is drawn from the sermon on the mount, and are among the greatest of Jesus’ words unto us. Now what we have here in our text is the end of the beatitudes portion and the beginning of the similitudes portion, but that does not mean that Jesus intended the two things to be separated from one another. Instead they go hand in hand with each other as we shall see. Our Savior speaks of the blessing of persecution and ties it directly to the portion of Christians being salt and light to the world. This means that in the midst of our sufferings, like the bodily pain spoken of earlier, a Christian is bearing witness of the strength that is within Him, which is the very strength of God. Remembering Job, who endured great suffering at the hands of Satan, which is truly the origin of all suffering and pain, we remember that Job endured not by his own strength, but by the grace of God in Christ, and witnessed to his friends and his own wife that God was great and glorious and helps those who cry unto Him. Now Jesus’ teaching is directly about persecution, and so many pass over these words of Jesus, thinking that they are not persecuted and so Jesus does not speak to them. Yet we must remember that like Job, bodily suffering comes from Satan, and although allowed by God, and used by Him for good, Satan designs it to cause our fall from faith, by despairing in our suffering and is indeed a persecution. Now Jesus is addressing this as a suffering that is not relieved at least for some time. He makes no mention of the persecution ending, nor of relief given to those who endure it. And this speaks directly to the point of today’s sermon. Now this is not to say that no relief will ever be given, but that to one who endures it, it seems to be without end. We hear in Psalm 13: *“How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me.” (Ps. 13)* These words strike directly at our heart, for they speak to much of what we feel and think during very difficult times. Is it sinful to desire to die? No it is not, for the Christian desires to die, not because he despairs of God’s grace, but because he looks for relief in the glory of heaven as he has been promised. Now we want to note especially that in our text Jesus desires that we let our light shine, and that we be salt to the earth. Now here are some of the things I was taught by the God through suffering. To be salt means that a Christian adds flavor, so to speak, to that which is salted, in this case life on earth. When a Christian suffers bodily pain, for example, someone else can see their suffering and learn of God’s strength in our weakness. Very often the suffering sent is not always just for those who endure it, but for others as well. In patiently enduring we can be a strong witness of God’s grace in Christ, mission work done by God’s strength shining through our suffering.

Now there are also those who must watch their loved ones go through something like this and they suffer with them. They feel helpless, hopeless even, and they have nothing to offer which gives any measure of comfort, or so it seems. Now if you are one who is watching a loved endure these things, remember that prayer, and gentle reminders of God’s grace go a long way in helping to endure, and to avoid despair. However, we should be aware not to push our loved one, out of pity, to depart from the Lord, but encourage them in the Word and in prayer, and much good can come from it. Thus have we seen that Christians are to be salt and light in the world of sin during trials:

1. **To glorify God.** We read verses eleven through sixteen of our text: **read verses here.** We saw before Paul’s words about the thorn in his flesh, and that it was brought to him by the messenger of Satan, lest he should be exalted. Now no one knows just what that thorn is that Paul endured, but many have suggested cancer, or something very painful to endure, something which God allowed so that Paul would not trust in himself, nor glorify himself, but that God would be glorified thereby. As Paul explains it is in the weakness of Christians, that God’s strength is made manifest, for who is able to endure such things save those whom God upholds by the might of His hand? Not one. Imagine enduring some of the things you have endured or are enduring without God comforting and guiding you through them? It would be impossible. Despair would overtake us, suicide would be the only option which would offer relief. So it is that we can see the scourge of suicide, for those without God cannot endure for too long, for they lack strength. Can you then see how that God is glorified in our suffering? Perhaps you have a friend or coworker who witnesses your suffering and suffering in some way themselves learn of God, and thereby God is glorified. I can say for certain that without God, and without my wife encouraging, I could not have endured, but with those things, strength is granted which you do not have. In weakness we are made strong. Have you ever wondered how the Christians of old accomplished the things they did? Men like Abraham, Moses David, Eljah, Paul, Peter among many others, dd those things not through the strength proceeding from themselves, but through the strength granted them by God’s grace.

Now to be a light unto the world, to let our light shine before men, refers to the good works of a Christian wrought by faith in Jesus Christ. In this context however, it is giving glory to God whether we are in pain, or have been relieved from pain. Praising His name in spite of whatever we might be going through. To glorify God means that we worship and praise His name, trust in Him, and hope in Him whether we are enduring pain, are relieved from it, or have none. We are His children in good and bad times, and as the old Christan song says: “The God of the mountain is still God in the valley, the God of the good times is God in the bad times.” This Paul says again: *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing s God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home n the body, we are absent from the Lord. (For we walk by faith, not by sight) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:1-8)*  Let us then, dear Christians be the salt and light of the world, reflecting to the sin-darkened world the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost. Let us take comfort in Him and Him alone, and let us give glory to His name forevermore. Amen.