

Second Sunday in Lent – February 21, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Philippians 3:17-4:1 (NIV)

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. 18) **For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ.** 19) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. 20) **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21) who**, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, **will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

My brothers and sisters in Christ, whom I love and labor for, my joy and my crown; stand firm in the Lord; my dear friends:

Parents try to impress good judgment and values on their children in the hopes that when they are on their own that they will make proper God-pleasing choices and decisions. We might urge them to stand up for what they believe in and to follow the example of others who share their values. We would want them to understand that there will always be those who seek to undermine their values and faith. Finally, we have to encourage them to be patient in the face of the many difficulties and injustices that they might encounter in their lives.

Our text for this morning displays that same kind of parental concern. Paul's epistle to the Philippians has been described as a "letter of love" which includes an expression of his concern that they now that they had been called to faith in Christ Jesus that the Philippians would be able to stand firm in the Lord in the face of any faith threatening influences. He calls them brothers and sisters, whom he longs for. He regards them as his joy, his crown his friends and as such he wants them to stand together in the Lord with him. His encouragement is also appropriate for each of us who are children of the heavenly father through faith in Christ Jesus, who sacrificed his perfect life for us to rescue us from our own sinful nature as well as from the power of death and the devil. This is Paul's encouragement to us:

Theme: Stand Firm in the Lord

1. Follow the example of those who live according to God's Word
2. Understand that there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ
3. Wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to transform us to be like him

After carefully explaining to the Philippians the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ and his righteousness, the Apostle gives them this encouragement.

Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. "Do as I say and as I do," That was the encouragement Paul shared with his beloved Christian friends in Philippi. It's clear that Paul does not have an inflated value of himself from everything that he has previously written to them about regarding everything but Christ and his righteousness as rubbish. His encouragement was given out of a sincere desire to help them avoid walking down the wrong path in life. Like a loving Father, he wants them to follow good examples in their living.

Paul understood that his example was good, only because of his connection with the Lord Jesus Christ. He told the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV) **Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.**

Paul didn't want anyone to think about how great he was. Rather he wanted them to focus on how greatness of the Lord as his power was displayed in Paul's life. It was the Lord Jesus who had so dramatically rescued Paul from his previous life of bragging and boasting in himself and who had set him apart as a messenger of the cross of Christ. And it was the Lord who kept him on the paths of righteousness.

Paul's encouragement is an encouragement to seek out proper role models and examples from within the family of faith. His encouragement to follow the example of those who live according to God's word and promise is similar to the encouragement contained in Hebrews 11 & 12. There the inspired writer includes a long list of individuals who lived by faith in God's promises. And after calling attention them he writes: (Hebrews 12:1-2 NIV) **Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2) fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

Ultimately, following the example of those who live according to God's Word means living in faith, as we trust our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for his forgiveness. The value of this advice becomes extremely clear to us when we understand that there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ. Understood in that light, Paul's encouragement to follow the example of those who live according to the Word of the Lord is a warning to avoid the temptations posed by those who reject the Lord and his promises.

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19) Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things.

There's a real intensity in Paul's words as he warns us about those who live as enemies of the cross. Tears well up in his eyes as he thinks about them. In order to understand the reason for this intense emotion we need to understand where Paul is coming from. At one time Paul, too, lived as an enemy of the cross – persecuting those who confessed their faith in Christ Jesus – the one who was put to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification. Once Paul was headed toward destruction – that is until Christ Jesus called him to repentance and faith and assured him of eternal life.

The amazing grace of God that reached out and claimed a sinner like Paul becomes overwhelming at times – especially when we are forced to recognize that there are others who stubbornly resist that grace. Paul's tears were most likely a combination of tears of joy and sorrow – shed by a sinner who has been turned from the path of sin and destruction to a life of joy and forgiveness. The shameful direction and folly of those who persist in their sins filled Paul with extreme sorrow and despair because he so desperately desired their salvation. He loved Jesus and his gospel so much, so deeply that he is unable to restrain his sadness and grief over those who live only for themselves and the things of this world. By ignoring God's condemnation of sin they have become an enemy of the cross – rejecting both God's condemnation of sin and his forgiveness of sin.

Such individuals are common place today – individuals who live their lives with reckless abandon – eat, drink and be merry -- tomorrow we'll do it all over again! That's their motto. Past and present advertising slogans have appealed to this sense of living for today with no real thought for the future: Grab for all the gusto! You deserve a break today! Have it your way! Just do it. And so, people do it – thinking that it makes no difference how they live their lives or what they do. By exercising their freedom to do their own thing, they actually become slaves to what they do. Oh they might try to cover over there obsessions and lusts with a coating of Christianity but it is to no avail. It's only lip service. Their destiny is destruction – their real god is their stomach – the word Paul used here was a word used to describe the seat of sinful passions and desires. The destruction Paul speaks of is the eternal condemnation that awaits all who continue to live such self-serving

sinful lives without repentance. His words are a powerful reminder to understand and avoid all that is in conflict with Christ and his cross.

Stand firm in the Lord, Paul encourages.

1. Follow the example of those who live according to God's Word
2. Understand that there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ
3. Wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to transform us to be like him

In contrast to those whose destiny is destruction the apostle Paul describes the blessed joys of remaining true to the Lord. **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21) who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** As Christians we live in the world but the world doesn't live in us. Frequently the Scriptures describe believers as a people on a journey, a people who are strangers and pilgrims in this world. That's what Paul has in mind when he reminds us that our citizenship is in heaven. That's our real home. That's where our permanent residence is. That's where the Lord Jesus is as he himself has told us: (John 14:1-2 NIV) "**Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2) My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?**

That is reason enough to stand firm in the Lord. This world and all that is in it will pass away but the word of the Lord will never pass away. And that word promises eternal life to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so as we stand firm in the Lord we will be a people in waiting – waiting for our Lord to come down from his throne in heaven once again – not to live here in this world but – to take us to be with him as he has promised. And as we wait – each passing news report of wars, famines, and earthquakes will be a reminder that his return is near at hand.

And on the day the Lord Jesus comes again in power he will change our lowly bodies into glorious bodies fit for eternal life with him. Now our bodies feel and experience the devastating effects of sin. We have to endure pain and sickness. With each passing day we grow weaker and more weary – we groan under the load as we long for our deliverance. But we do not despair because we are confident that the Lord Jesus does indeed rule over all things for the benefit of his church and that he will bring us through much tribulation into the kingdom of God.

And so together will all creation we eagerly wait in expectation for our deliverance confident that if we share in his sufferings we also share in his glory. And our confidence will not be disappointed as Paul assures us when our Lord comes he will give us glorious bodies like his – free from sin and imperfection, perfect, holy, fit for eternity.

With the words of Paul, I encourage you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, you whom I love and labor for, my joy and my crown, my dear friends Stand Firm in the Lord~! Hang in there even in the face of Satan and those who are enemies of the cross, even when we are confronted by a godless society and those who invite us to join them. Stand firm in the Lord.

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2. Understand that there are those who are enemies of the cross of Christ
3. Wait for the Lord Jesus Christ to transform us to be like him

Stand firm not with your own power or cunning but with the Lord Jesus at your side because heaven is our home. That's where Jesus our Savior is. And that is where by grace, through faith you and I are going, too.

Amen.