

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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October 30, 2005

1st Sunday of Endtime: Reformation Sunday

Galatians 5:1-6

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Daniel 6:10-12,16-23

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46

Second Lesson: Galatians 5:1-6

Gospel: Matthew 10:16-23

Stand Firm!

Maybe it feels like it to you in here this morning since the furnace isn't working, but can you think back to those days when you walked across the parking lot and it had been pretty icy? You had to kind of watch your step. Those days are coming soon and hopefully there is enough sand and salt so that you don't hit that icy spot because if you are going to step on that icy spot without preparing for it and without watching for it, you are going to end up leaving the imprint of the seat of your pants on the ground, aren't you? It is pretty hard to stand firm on something like ice. It is pretty easy to be moved one way or the other.

As we come together this morning and as we celebrate the blessings that our God has given to us through the Reformation and through faithful servants who have stood firm, one thing you notice is that they didn't stand firm on things as tenuous as ice. When the church was reformed, those men stood firm on the truth that scripture alone is the ultimate authority, because you and I can be wrong. You and I can even mishandle scripture. But scripture remains God's Word spoken to us through the Holy Spirit. So scripture alone remains the thing that we must take our stand upon. As we dig into scripture, we see these truths that are put in front of us this morning—when you are going to stand firm, make sure you are very clear that you are standing firm on God's grace that is revealed in scripture. Don't try to stand firm in anything else. Don't try to stand firm in your trying hard, in your having a good attitude, in your trying to be nice to people that you really don't like, take your stand in Jesus Christ alone because that alone has made us free. That is his grace. His grace has given us the gift of faith. We stand firm in grace and we stand firm in faith.

Also this morning we are reminded by the Holy Spirit of a truth that we need to know. Faith takes its stand in the Gospel of Jesus alone, but faith never stands still. Stand firm does not mean stand still. As we take our stand in Christ by faith, we live in hope and love and that shows itself in our actions, in the things that we do. Make sure you are standing on what is solid in scripture, not on something as shaky as ice.

That is what Paul was writing to the Galatians about. He had written to the Christians in Galatia. If you remember, he writes and talks real clearly about how we are saved by grace alone, not by the things that we do. He does that because there was a group of people there that was threatening the churches in Galatia. A group of people that wanted them to say, "Jesus died for your sins, but you still also need to follow some of the Old Testament regulations. You still need to be circumcised. You Gentiles that are coming into the church have not been circumcised. You can't be a part of God's people

unless you do this one thing.” To people who had grown up all their lives with circumcision, it didn’t seem like it was that outrageous of a statement. To those that had come in from outside of the church, they saw that it was what the Jews had always done. It might not have seemed like much to make this one condition, but Paul writes to them and says, *“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm in the freedom that is Jesus Christ, that he lived perfectly in your place, that he died in your place, and that is the only thing that takes away your sins.”* Don’t put a comma and then a “but” after that statement. Don’t say, “But now you have to do this or that as a part of salvation”, otherwise you are throwing away the freedom and you are putting yourself under a yoke of slavery again. You are laying the bar across your neck that is the yoke of slavery. Now, even if you say, “It is just this one thing that you have to do and then you will be saved”—he says, *“if you let yourselves be circumcised...you are obligated to obey the whole law.”*

The only way that we can be right with God is to be perfect. There are two ways to that perfection. Either you and I do everything that is in the law perfectly—which means we never screw up, we never get upset with someone and are proud of ourselves because we only did it in our mind and didn’t actually say what we were thinking, because God tells us if you hate your brother in your heart you are already a murderer—either we have got to do every last bit of the law absolutely perfectly, not just pick and choose the things that we like out of it—for those Jews it was circumcision, for us it might be something different. For us maybe we say to God that we have always been in church every Sunday. Then we think that he must love us more than those scoundrels that don’t come all that often. God must love us more than those people because of what we have done. You and I might pick out various things that we do that are enjoyable for us to do, easy for us to do and then say to God, “God, you must love me more than others because I have done that.” What Paul reminds us of is that if we want to take our stand in anything that we do, then we are obligated to obey the whole law—not just the fun parts, not just the easy parts for us, but the whole law. You and I can’t do that.

Be honest with yourself, how many times since I started speaking has your mind already wandered to what’s for lunch or something else? We don’t love our God with our hearts and our souls and minds perfectly. We don’t have a perfect love for his Word. We don’t have a perfect worship in our hearts. We let our minds wander and drift and we don’t give God the type of love that he deserves or the kind of love that he has asked for. That is why we want to stand firm in Christ alone because in Christ, we are told that we have this righteousness that God demands. You can either be righteous before God by being perfect—you and I can’t do it—or you can be righteous before God because Jesus was perfect in our place. His mind was totally devoted to his Father’s will at every second of his life. Don’t ask me how he didn’t get bored listening to sinful humans, but he had a perfect love for God as he listened to others teach the Word. He had a perfect love for God as he dealt with people that attacked him. He had a perfect love for God and for those who attacked him at every second of his life. That perfection comes to us because that is what we are baptized into. We are baptized into Christ and his perfection is given to us as a gift by God’s grace alone. Not by our decision to accept it, not by our decision to be baptized, not by our decision to put our trust in God, it is the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is grace only. It is his gift, full and free. We are free in Christ alone, so don’t go back to the burden of slavery. Know that God

has made us righteous and has made us perfect in his eyes because Jesus was perfect in our place. That punishment that our sins should have because of all those times that we have done all those things that haven't loved God or each other perfectly, Christ carried them all to the cross and he screamed out, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" because of each time you and I have sinned. The punishment that our sins deserve was put on his back and by his wounds, we are healed. Not somewhat, not most of the way, but completely and absolutely healed. His freedom has taken away every last one of our sins—guilt, control, punishment—they have all been removed by grace—the undeserved love that our God has for us and for the world.

Luther taught this and it got him accused of teaching a cheap grace. He was told that if he told people that, they were going to sin all they wanted and then just ask God to forgive them and they wouldn't be doing what God wants them to do. But Luther went back to the same words that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write in places like this and in other places, because never has the Lutheran church taught that grace is cheap. It cost Christ his life. Never has the Lutheran church taught that although works don't save us, we have never said that works are unimportant. Works are important, but they are not important for our salvation—that is fully and completely Christ alone. But faith alone that is not accompanied by works is dead. This is what James wrote and it is actually what Paul is saying here.

He says, "*in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.*" If you are in Christ, believing in him that he is your personal Savior, then what you do doesn't save you. You should know that. But then he also goes ahead and says, "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*" Stand firm in this hope that we have of this righteousness of God, but know that *stand firm* doesn't mean standing still. We should live our faith and express that hope that we have through loving actions towards one another. Faith alone saves, but faith always acts, always does, always looks for ways to show love to others—not as a way of getting into heaven, but as a way of thanking God for heaven.

We look at what the law says to us and the new self in us, the Christian in us that loves God doesn't say that it is a pain or a burden or that it takes all the joy out of our lives. It says that we want to do it because that is how we thank God for our salvation. We want to put others interests ahead of our own. That is what we want to do as the Christian that is in us, the faith, expresses itself through love. The problem is that you and I still have a sinful nature and the sinful nature doesn't always want to do that. It wants to look for ways out of doing that.

Even though faith is being sure of things that are hoped for and positive of what we can't see, the sinful nature tells us that we should only be expressing love in ways that we can see it. Instead of trusting that God is going to take care of the things that we do to serve, we want to see the result. If we express this faith in actions of love and share Jesus with someone and they don't immediately convert and become a Christian and serve in offices within two weeks in the church, we say that it wasn't worth it because we didn't see any results. We decide we aren't going to do that again and risk putting ourselves on the line and be rejected.

Or we say that faith expresses itself through love and we have a lot more comfort level doing it where we can see it, so we decide if we are going to give our offerings to the Lord, we are going to give them where we can see what they are doing and we can keep track of how our money is spent. We have a tendency to forget that it is not our money, it is God's, and we don't give it to a church. We give it to the Lord. We trust that the Lord is going to produce results through it because we give it to glorify him.

Faith trusts that the money that we give to the Lord produces results even if we don't see them. We support two different high schools. We aren't there every day to see how these children are being shaped and molded by the Gospel, but we trust that God will do it. So we support these high schools. That is why this afternoon we can gather together and rejoice that for 50 years God has been doing that even if you and I can't see it. We have been expressing this faith through acts of love as we provide the school in Manitowoc. Faith expresses itself through love even when we can't see it. That is the nature of faith. So we support the work of the church at large. We might not see the results until we see a teacher in a classroom or a pastor in a pulpit, but our offerings go to support our worker training system. Our offerings go to support the spread of the Gospel in the whole world. We might not see the results of this until heaven. But faith expresses itself through love by trusting that God will produce the results and that we simply serve in ways that God has called us to and then joyfully trust him to produce the results and not demand that we see them or else we won't express our faith anymore.

Faith—being certain of what we can't see—always acts. If we don't want to act, if we don't want to do what God has said, then we have to ask ourselves if we really believe that Jesus is our Savior or are we just kidding ourselves. When you and I see what Jesus has saved us from—how he has taken us from the open gates of hell and given us peace, freedom from guilt, hope, confidence, purpose even now, let alone when we get to heaven—even now we have all these blessings that so many people in the world are searching for. We have them. When we understand that, then nothing can stop us from serving God. When we are standing firm in that truth of what Jesus has done for us, we can't be pushed aside by people questioning us, people attacking us, people rejecting us, because we know just how important it is that Christ is our rock and that when we stand firm in him, God will do great things through sinful people like me and like you.

So stand firm, but don't stand still.