



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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July 1, 2007

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Zechariah 13:7-9

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Zechariah 13:7-9

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 22

Second Lesson: Galatians 3:23-29

Gospel: Luke 9:18-24

Have Confidence in Affliction

Do you have a person, a friend, a relative, a neighbor that you have every confidence in and no confidence in at all at the same time? You might think “how can that be?” How can you have every confidence in someone and have no confidence in them at the same time?

I have a relative who, if I had things threatening me and worrying me and troubling me and there was something he could do to take care of it, I think he would drop everything and do it in a minute. I’ve seen him do it for other people. I’ve also been with him when someone calls and talks to him on his cell phone and he says, “Yeah, I’ll be there in a minute.” And he closes his cell phone, so I get up and say, “We must be leaving, huh?” And he says, “No. I’m not going there. I have no need to go there now.” If he tells me he is going to be at my house for dinner at 6 o’clock, I don’t wait around and keep the food warm for him because I figure he probably isn’t coming. In little things, I have no confidence in him whatsoever, but in big things, I have absolutely every confidence that he’ll do what he can to help me if I need it because I’ve seen him help people he doesn’t know.

That sounds odd, but I would venture to say that at times in your life and in my life, we approach God the same exact way. We have every confidence, as Christians, that God has taken away our sins and that the gates of heaven are wide open for us. We trust him in the big things. But when we face difficulty, trouble, worry, anxiety in this life, there are times when we want to throw up our hands and say, “God where are you? Don’t you love me?” We have no confidence in him. Did you ever experience that—confidence and no confidence at the same exact time? I think sometimes we all have that when it comes to God because Satan is working hard on us.

This morning, through the Words that God spoke to Zechariah some 2,500 years ago, he reminds us that when it comes to times of affliction in this lifetime, we can have confidence in God. We can have absolute confidence in God because he is a gracious God. We can know that his grace surrounds us and we have that reminder that we heard this morning. But we can also have confidence in affliction that God will use it to refine us, to burn away the impurities, and as we continue to look to him, he’ll help us to have a firmer focus on him, a stronger trust in him—which leads to blessings for ourselves and for others.

I don’t know how well you know Zechariah the prophet. You are probably familiar with some of his prophecies. We hear them every year, like on Palm Sunday, that the

Messiah would come on a colt, on the foal of a donkey (see Zechariah 9:9). We had the prophecy about Holy Week that was in our text, in what I just read to you, right? *“Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered”* (Zechariah 13:7). Jesus himself quoted this on Maundy Thursday telling them that they were all going to run away from him later that night just like Zechariah said.

Zechariah was born in Babylon during the Exile. He came back and helped to rebuild the temple and the people got kind of frustrated and tired and worried with doing it, so he had to use the Word of God and the promise of God to instill hope in the people so that they would continue to serve God and be moved forward. One of the ways the Lord had him do it was by pointing ahead to the Messiah—the Messiah who would come and what the Messiah would do for us. That is what is pictured in this last section of Zechariah—one of the visions that the Lord had given Zechariah—familiar words, at least in part. *“Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.”* But here God is telling the people some 500 years before it happened—almost 600 years before it happened—that God would raise his sword against himself. God would send the Messiah. God would become man. He would come to live in our place to be perfect in our place because we are so far from perfect you can’t see it from where we are at. Then he would *“Awake, O sword, against my shepherd against the man who is close to me!”* (Zechariah 13:7). The Father would raise the sword, raise his wrath against sin, against “the One whom he loves, with him he is well pleased, listen to him” (see Matthew 17:5) as he said at Transfiguration and as he said at Jesus’ Baptism. And the only reason he raises his sword against the shepherd and strikes the shepherd so that the sheep scatter is because the sheep are sinners.

You and I are sinners and just like so often we doubt God, we don’t have confidence in God—that is because of what we are by nature. We are sinful. We don’t always trust God perfectly. We don’t always love God perfectly. We worry and get anxious about so many things that we don’t need to that God has said, “I will take care of for you,” but we still doubt it. We sin. We sin in our doubts. We sin in our uncertainty. We sin in our blaming God. We sin in so many ways, shapes, and forms that we have to say with the Psalmist, “Lord, forgive my hidden faults because I can’t remember them all.” But the shepherd was struck. The Messiah was betrayed. The Messiah endured the agony of hell on the cross because you and I are sinners.

But do you notice what God said he would accomplish through striking the shepherd? He said *“I will turn my hand against the little ones”* (Zechariah 13:7), against the sheep. “Turn my hand” there doesn’t have to mean to turn the hand against them to strike them down, but turn the hand to them to help them. But then you notice the kind of depressing picture he paints, the kind of sad picture he paints. Even though the shepherd would come, Jesus would live and die for all people, he says two-thirds are still going to be destroyed, which literally means the majority. There is going to be more people that reject Christ than listen to him. Even though you and I know who Jesus is and what he has done for us, even though we’ve been baptized into his name like we saw happen this morning, even though God has clothed us with his righteousness, there is always the danger that we can fall away from faith because we get caught up with the things of this world that we think are more important than God. We have

troubles come and then we blame God instead of fleeing to God. There are always those dangers. God tells us to expect it. It is a reality.

But then he does say that the one-third that is going to be left in the flock, those sheep, God will take care of. God's grace surrounds you and me. God's grace has made you and me part of his flock. But he doesn't tell us, "Boy, now that you are a Christian, you are never going to have troubles in the world and everything is always going to go right. You're as good as gold now." God never says that. We live in a world that still is infected by sin. We still face disease. We still face heartache. We still face trouble. We still face anxiety. We still face worries. Sometimes that is how God refines us. Those difficulties he allows into our lives—he wants us to flee to him and say, "Lord, take care of me. Lord, I know you love me enough to take away my sins. I know you are going to help me through whatever it is that worries me or troubles me."

But God never tells us it is going to be easy. He describes it as a purifying fire, a refining fire that burns away the impurities of our faith. Think about yourself. Think about your life. Think about your love for God. Think of how many impurities there are in it that need to be burned away. Think of how often you love yourself or pleasure or someone else or something else more than you love God. Think of how often in your life you have said to yourself, "You know, if only I had more money, things would be better." Then put it on a scale and on the other side of the scale put on all the times that in your mind you said, "You know, if I was only closer to God, things would be better." Which way is that scale tipping? It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

As Christians you and I have the answer. We have what the world is looking for. The world is looking for ways to deal with guilt, the way to have confidence, the way to know that we have something bigger than us taking care of us. You and I have it. Yet, so often, we still fall short and we chase after the things of the world to make things better. We chase it in the bottom of a bottle. We chase it in something that we think is going to excite us, like an affair. We sin against our God.

But our God is so gracious. Our God is so loving that he uses his law to knock some sense into us and say, "You have sinned against me." And when we fall to our knees and say, "Lord, I have sinned. Forgive me," the God of grace lifts us up. He refines us like silver and he says to us, "You are my people. I have made you my own. Not only did I create you, but I have redeemed you and I live in you through the Holy Spirit—you are mine." Then our response, through the work of the Holy Spirit is "the Lord is my God." Then I want to live for him. I want to know him better. I want to worship him. I want to serve him. I want to say, "Lord, chase away my worries, my doubts, my anxiety, and fill me with your peace and your joy and your love and your forgiveness. Fill me with the fruit of the Spirit."

God does do that. Yeah, we still might wander away from time to time, but Lord willing, we continually learn to come back to God sooner and cling to him tighter and then the Lord helps us through that affliction that he allows in our life to achieve his good purpose—not our earthly happiness, but our eternal joy. And even though you and I might doubt it at times, God has good in store for us and God will help us through all difficulty. When we doubt it, all we have to do is look at the cross and see his love for

us—what he was willing to endure. If he loves us that much that he would leave heaven, live in our place, die in our place—he loves us that much that he would give us Baptism, the Word and the Lord’s Supper so that the Spirit can work in us—he isn’t going to leave us as we go through difficulty. This is our confidence.

As we lean on God, it becomes our stronger confidence and our more certain joy!