

Sixth Sunday of Easter + Rogate

May 9, 2021

John 16:23-33 & James 1:22-27

Jesus says, *"You will have tribulation..."* The world is full of tribulation.

Tribulation is seen as the inward infliction of distress, affliction, or oppression. Many Christians believe we are living in uncharted times and experiencing oppression like no other moment in history.

In Finland, Rev. Dr. Juhana Pohjola, Bishop Elect of the Lutheran Church in Finland was charged by the government for incitement against a group of people. Similarly, Päivi Räsänen, a member of Parliament (also a Lutheran) is facing charges of hate speech for comments made on a television show regarding her belief in traditional marriage. What did these two Lutherans do wrong? They confessed – they confessed what God's unchanging Word says regarding marriage.

Should we be bracing for similar fates as the world surrounding us evolves?

The nature of the pending Equality Act in the United States, the repeal of laws protecting the unborn, the aged, and the orphaned cause many of us distress - tribulation, don't they?

What do we do? How do we respond?

The trouble for you and for me and how we respond runs deeper. How we respond to these actions facing us as a church is really rooted in how we respond to oppression, anxiety, and tribulation within the daily events of our lives. How are you conditioned?

How do you respond to the rush of getting children out the door on a Sunday morning to be on-time for church? What about those drivers on the roads of D.C.? Or how does your heart respond when you see someone with whom you disagree, someone you begrudge, and disdain as you approach the doors of the church?

As long as you are in the world, Jesus says, *"You will have tribulation."* Tribulation does not discriminate between your relationships or a culture that rages against the Church.

So, what are you to do in these gray and latter days?

Today's epistle from James calls us to *"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."* But, it's easier to keep your mouth shut and your head down isn't it? (In all aspects of life...)

The epistle calls for a change in the heart of man once they have heard the Word of God. In fact, it says the person who only hears and does not "do" (or put into action), deceives themselves and his faith is dead.

Hermann Sasse wrote;

"We know the hearer of whom our text speaks, the hearer, who one likens to a man 'who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like' [James 1:23-24]. And this man is not some neighbor of yours in the church or your opponent. No, 'you are the man' [2 Sam. 12:7]! When you leave your house you steal a quick look in the mirror, a fleeting glance, to see if your hat and tie are in the right place. And then you sit in the church and hear the Word of God, hear the Scripture readings, hear the sermon – and the impression remains as superficial, as transitory as the impression of the quick look in the mirror before. It is hardly remembered. It doesn't bring any deep experience, at least not a serious, deep experience that shakes one's being. It brings no joy for the Gospel, which is really the source and zenith of all true joy in the world." (118)

To ***"Be doers of the word, and not hearers only,"*** calls us to remember the word of God is ***"living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword."*** (Hebrews 4:12) The Word of God calls you to repentance – causing a deep change within your heart toward God and toward man.

Sasse goes on to highlight in a sermon on our epistle today how after we have said "Amen" or sang "Alleluia" we are united in our confession of faith (and I would add our confession of sin as well), how can we depart the Divine Service not changed, not having bridled our tongue? The same tongue we go out into the world to lie, slander, or speak words of abuse and oppression? (125)

When this occurs, you depart unchanged and still under the belief that you are bound only to this world and to yourself – this is a religion of oneself, the belief you are Lord and God over your life.

But, true religion calls you to obedience to God the Father. In James, the religion spoken of calls for your words and deeds to reflect your faith and what is the object of your faith.

The aspect of deeds or works for Lutherans has long been challenging for us to comprehend – we are saved by faith, not by works. Paul writes, ***"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast."***¹

This is true, but James also reminds us that ***"faith apart from works is dead."*** (James 2:26) Good works flow out from faith, from a heart that has been first reconciled with the Father through the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

¹ Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). [*The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church.*](#) (p. 42). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

The waters of baptism continue to confess this reality within you as you continually drown the old prideful Adam that resides in your heart in order that a new man may arise – forgiven and reconciled – not to the world, but to the Father.

The pure religion of reconciliation and forgiveness is now what goes forth into your life.

The whole Divine Service is the Father's ongoing act of reconciliation, the temptation is to believe everything stops with final "Amen." But, the Divine Service is to carry-on throughout the hours and days of the week until we gather again. Then it continues again and again and again...

Historically, the service never ended, once those people gathered were communed – then it was time to take the flesh and blood of Christ Jesus to the sick and homebound, the orphans and the widows.

The Lord's Supper - it is the medicine of immortality, it is the medicine for souls that are oppressed, for those suffering tribulation within in their hearts and within this world, for the repentant who look to the life to come.

Ever since Adam and Eve took of the fruit in the garden – God said life would be hard, it would be toilsome and you would experience pain, oppression, and tribulation.

How do you respond to this pain, oppression, and tribulation rooted within your daily life? Do you seek to control it or do you run to the Sacrament and where Christ has promised to be present for you? Do you permit your hearts and minds to be conformed to the world or transformed by the will of God proclaimed in His Word?

My friends, hard times may present themselves in the days ahead when you are required to give a good confession as the faithful few are willing to do in Finland today.

But don't deceive yourselves – the days of tribulation and oppression are already present in your hearts. Don't look past this reality for a fight in the world. Instead, pray for the Holy Spirit to work within your heart of stone to transform it into a heart of flesh.

And then be of good cheer – for it is not you who must overcome this world, but it is Christ and that sweet Gospel He speaks to you and leaves you with this day, ***"In the world you will have tribulation. But, take heart; I have overcome the world."***

For all the toils of this life, the difficulties, the oppression, and assaults - the victory is won, the strife is over, go forth in the reconciliation and forgiveness of Christ Jesus – confess Him now and forevermore. +INJ+

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!*

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