

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who makes certain not a single hair on your head is harmed, Jesus Christ Our Lord, amen.

Would you like to live your life boldly? Wouldn't it be great to live without worrying about the end, or fearing anything the world, the devil, or what simple bad luck throws your way? Who wouldn't, right? This morning I'll try to let you in on how living your life as a follower of Jesus can make that possible.

I have a friend who posts all the National Days on her Facebook page. You know like National Sister's Day or National Ugly Sweater Day... Well it turns out November 3rd was National Sandwich Day. I wish I would have known. Many restaurants had specials and even freebees on Sandwich Day. One such restaurant was Chick-fil-a. They offered a free chicken sandwich at many of their local franchises. Someone must have forgotten to look at the calendar because this year National Sandwich Day, November 3rd, 2019 was on a Sunday... Chic-fil-a is a Christian owned company and has chosen to remain closed on Sundays so their employees can attend worship and have the day as their Sabbath. So, they had to rescind their offer. I think they may have offered the free sandwich on the following Monday... A year or so ago Chic-fil-a was in the news for another reason. They came under fire from anti-Christian groups who protested at lots of the Chic-fil-a's around the country. They encouraged folks to boycott the Chic-fil-a franchises because of their Christian values. These United States of

America are supposed to be the land where we're free to practice our religion, yet here's a perfectly fine company offering great food and trying to live their Christian values, yet they are the target of persecution by these anti-Christian people, right here in the good Ol' USA. I read a lot of commentaries this week on the Gospel Lesson. Almost all of them said Jesus' comments about being persecuted would be the least relatable for modern day Christians, especially those of us in these United States where we, for the most part, do enjoy freedom of religion.

I wonder if we actually relate to any of the comments Jesus raises in the Gospel text this morning. I mean, who here truly believes the world could come to the apocalyptic end during your lifetime? Go ahead raise your hand if you believe you'll be alive when Jesus returns with all the heavenly host, riding on the clouds... Here's where I stand on this. I want Jesus to return and I hope Jesus will come while I'm still alive, but I don't really, down deep in my heart of hearts believe it's going to happen while I'm this side of the grave. When I receive Holy Communion and someone gives me the Blood of Christ along with the words "This is the Blood of Christ," I look around at the windows in this Sanctuary and pray, "Come Lord Jesus." Even so, I don't really expect it to happen.

There's an old story about a town that was experiencing a drought. It got so bad, all the area's crops were starting to fail. So, all the Christians decided to hold

a prayer rally to pray for rain. Almost every person in town, the farmers and the townsfolk alike, showed up at the Church for the prayer meeting. Hundreds of people came, but only one small boy showed up with an umbrella... I'm afraid, when it comes to the end times and the return of Jesus, most of us fall in with the townspeople who showed up with no umbrella. We believe in the power of prayer. We believe in the power of God's Word. We just don't trust it with our lives...

That being said, let's make Jesus' description of the end times a little more personal. I'm convinced extreme persecution *will* come to those who remain true to the Scriptures ... even here in our country. Take the case of Chic-fil-a... We all are aware that in small, and in sometimes big ways, following Jesus will often put us at odds with the values of this world. Like staying closed on Sundays... At times, our Christian faith can even put us at odds with our own family and friends. Like those times you came to Worship rather than attend a basketball, baseball, soccer game or practice, ballet performance or... well, you fill in the blank... The truth is, our faith is on trial every single day and we're most susceptible to fail when the temptation is family or when tragedy and stress come to call.

I believe that because you are here this morning and not sleeping in or doing something else, you think what we do here is more important. By being here right now you are witnessing to your faith and telling everyone your faith is the driving force in your life. You come to Worship to thank and praise the living God

because you love God and trust in God's promises... So much so, you're willing to suffer the hardship of going out into the cold November weather, putting aside all the other things you might want to do instead, just to hear God's Word and to honor the one who created and sustains you through all life's troubles. In so doing, you are witnessing to your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. When the unchurched drive by Trinity on their way to eat breakfast or to go shopping at Walmart on Sunday morning, they don't get to hear the Gospel of how much God loves them, but they see our parking lot full and our light shining. It's our witness that our Lord is so important in our lives, we're willing to sacrifice our time and effort to be the Body of Christ. Even on a Friday night when they drive by to pick up their pizza at the Grill and they see our full parking lot, they know something is happening.

It's true, none of us will likely be jailed, or brought before kings, governors, or even a Bishop or our own Church council because of claiming the name of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. That kind of persecution is not prevalent here. On the other hand, just claiming Jesus as Lord doesn't make everything rosy and your life trouble free either. I noticed Jesus doesn't tell his disciples they might experience trouble. No, he says you *will* be arrested, your families *will* betray you, and you *will* be hated because of the name of Jesus. My experience has been, the closer you follow Jesus the tougher your life *will* be. Not much of a marketing

scheme for growing the Church. Even though you probably won't be arrested, betrayed, or hated, your life isn't going to be perfect either, just because you're a Christian.

So, why should anyone claim Jesus as the Lord of their lives? Here's the good news for all to hear, you won't be spared from trials and tribulations, but you will have the one who created the entire universe and everything in it walking right by your side. You will have someone who loves you more than His own life protecting you and promising you that not a hair on your head will be harmed. No matter what load of steaming horse manure this world drops on your head or how badly you've messed up your life, the one who created you will never abandon you. You don't have to do anything to receive this grace, but once you do receive it your life won't be the same. The troubles don't go away, but they don't overwhelm you because you have the peace of God within your heart. Your enemies may not quiver in retreat, but the worst things they can do to you pale by comparison to what God has done for you. You won't suddenly become some perfect person who never sins again, but you will know the comfort and security that comes by knowing you are forgiven, even before you ask.

Without knowing the Grace of God, I'm not sure I could make any sense out of this life. Without the Grace of God, I am certain I would be spiritually paralyzed by my fear of how and when I am going to die. I'd be stuck in my fears

and chained to my sin. Thanks be to God for revealing his love and grace through Jesus Christ. I know we call Jesus, God's Son, and that is what he is, but Jesus is also and at the same time fully and completely God. Have you ever stopped to ponder what that means? God loved you so much he didn't just send his son to save you-God loved you so much He was willing to become human Himself to save you and me. Now that's a love bigger than your enemies. It's a love bigger than your debts. That's a love bigger than wars and earthquakes. It's a love so big, it's even bigger than death itself.

Sometimes when you take a stand for your faith in Jesus Christ things do work out. Remember Chic-fil-a? All those anti-Christian groups that protested Chic-fil-a were no match for the Body of Christ who showed up and bought food from them. During the summer when the protesters were trying to get people to boycott them, their sales went higher and they broke past sales records. At our best, the Church acts to defend our members when persecution, hatred and trouble attacks. In this way we help fulfill Jesus' promise to not let a hair be harmed.

May the love of God be so big in your life that you'll never be afraid of anything this world or the devil throws at you. May the love of God be so strong in you that you never shy away from taking your stand by proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ. May the love of God well up in you so big that your light is seen by others and our Father in heaven is glorified. Amen.