

Sermon for Second Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 6, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

First Reading: Acts 3:11-21

Epistle Reading: 1 John 3:1-7

Gospel Reading: Luke 24:36-49



Sermon Text: Acts 3:11-21

Sermon Title: Here I Stand

Introit: Psalm 27:1,, 4-5, 10, 14; Antiphon: Psalm 27:7

Hymns:

LSB 658 – Preserve Your Word, O Savior

LSB 587 – I Know My Faith Is Founded

LSB 548 – Thanks to Thee, O Christ, Victorious

LSB 655 – Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

Songs:

A Shield about Me

Doxology

Hear Our Praises

I Believe in Jesus

Liturgy:

Divine Service IV, p. 203

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Acts 3:11–21

While [the lame man who was now healed] clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's, astounded. And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.

"And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."

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Grace, mercy, and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

“Here I stand.
Gods help me.
Amen.”

Those words were spoken 500 years ago.

About three years ago we remembered the 500th anniversary of the start of the Reformation. The day Luther posted the 95 Theses, or statements, debating that forgiveness was not something that could be bought or sold.

Now we remember another 500th anniversary of the Diet of Worms. Which doesn't sound so tasty. Actually a “diet” is German for something like a court or trial. It was a formal assembly by the Emperor with the princes and bishops of Germany. At the Pope's urging, Luther was one of the items put on the agenda.

The Pope had already condemned Luther as a heretic and excommunicated him on January 3rd, but he needed the Emperor's help to enforce his edict. The Emperor, however, wasn't much of a theologian. He was a politician. He had other things to consider. The Turks had already overrun North-Eastern and Northern Africa. Great and ancient Christian institutions, churches, libraries, monasteries and the home to many of the ancient Church fathers, had been destroyed. Christianity had been nearly wiped out in these lands where Christianity had been planted and grown and flourished richly since the time of the Apostles.

Now the Turks were marching on Europe. Their threat was becoming more and more serious. The Emperor needed Germany to help him in the war. Germany, where Luther had become profoundly popular. Now was not a time for a divided kingdom.

So he summoned Luther to give him a chance to recant; to deny whatever it was the Pope didn't like. The problem is Luther would have none of it. Luther was bound to stand on God's Holy and Sacred Word, even if it meant death. A fate Luther was resolved to accept, rather than deny his Lord. It was on April 18th, 1521, when Luther uttered those resounding words, “Here I stand. God help me. Amen.”

While that's one of the best known things Luther ever said, he probably wasn't the first to say it, and he certainly wasn't the first to do it. The Apostles did the same thing. We heard in the reading from Acts that Peter had healed a man who was crippled from birth. The people were astounded. Peter took the opportunity to preach the Gospel:

‘You all killed Him, but God raised Him from the dead. What you see in the miracles which Jesus did before are now continuing, because He is not dead but alive. What the prophets foretold has been fulfilled. So repent, receive reconciliation: His forgiveness which is for you!’

Peter’s message was, “Here I stand.”

Now that’s only half the account. While Peter was still speaking the Temple authority came¹ and arrested them. You see, the Temple authority had the same problem as the Emperor in Europe. There Luther had become popular with the plebeian² people. In Jerusalem the people were believing the apostles. The group of Christians was now starting to get large and influential.

So they brought Peter and John before the Diet (well, they called it the Council) and ordered them to recant; to deny whatever it was they didn’t like. The Council ordered them to stop preaching what they were preaching. To stop preaching about Jesus and His Word and His resurrection and His forgiveness.

Peter and John responded in a manner very similar to Luther’s.

Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.³

Here we stand.

You might admire Luther, and Peter and John, and all the rest of the Apostles, and all the Christian martyrs of present and ancient times, for doing that, for standing firm in the face of danger and death, saying “here I stand!” We marvel at their strength, but remember the reason they could stand is the same reason we can. Because Christ is risen!

Because Jesus was the first to stand up against, and then rise up from, death. We heard what happened that first Easter evening, when Jesus appeared to His frightened and confused disciples and said:

Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I myself. Touch Me, and see.⁴

In other words, “Here I stand! Alive! What are you afraid of?”

1 Acts 4:1

2 Meaning: The regular every day working folks.

3 Acts 4:19-20

4 Luke 24:38

Are you afraid of your sins? I was crucified for them. Here I stand! They are paid for and you are forgiven.

Are you afraid of death? I died and now here I stand! I defeated death, so that though you die, yet you will live.

Are you afraid of Satan? He did his worst and tried to defeat Me. Here I stand! I have stripped him of his power.

Are you afraid of those who wield earthly authority? They tried to get rid of Me and yet here I stand! They will try to get rid of you, but all they can do is take your life. I have given give you eternal life, which they cannot take away.

Are you troubled or confused? This is exactly what Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms said was going to happen.

Scripture records, Jesus opened their minds to understand.⁵ So that they too could say, “here I stand!” So they could stake everything, even their life on Jesus’ resurrection, and they did.

Peter did, when faced with the gruesome death of being crucified upside-down. “Here I stand.” John who was with Peter that day when the lame man was healed and they were threatened by the Council, he was persecuted and exiled for his stand. Yet still, even after he received word of all his brother Apostles killed in violence, he could write the beautiful words:

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.⁶

That is, here I stand!

The love the Father has given no one can take away. We are His children now, and His children forever. We will not deny Jesus. We will not go back to the old life of sin. We will not recant. Here we stand!

Here we stand. On the death and resurrection of Jesus. On the empty tomb. On every Word, and every promise, of God fulfilled in Jesus. On the forgiveness of our sins that comes through repentance, by grace through faith.

Here we stand, because this is the Word of God, which is not just another holy book, or collection of wisdom, but the eye witness testimony of those who saw Jesus die on the cross and rise from the dead.

The witness of Scripture. That is the rest of Luther’s quote that is so often forgotten. What gave Luther such boldness? Luther said:

⁵ Luke 24:45

⁶ 1 John 3:1

“I am bound by the Scriptures... and my conscience is captive to the Word of God... It is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise...”

Conscience. You cannot go against conscience. You hear that a lot these days by people defending what they do and what they believe. The truth is your bare conscience is not a good and reliable guide. Your conscience, like the rest of you is affected by sin. Infected by sin. So when Luther said “it is not right to go against conscience” it was after he said his “conscience was captive to the Word of God.” A conscience formed and informed by the Holy Sacred Word of God is a good and reliable guide.

Which is why on that first Easter evening Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures. He opened their minds to clean out all the junk. Then filled them with the truth of Scripture. Once they had that solid foundation, once Luther had that solid foundation, they could all boldly say: Here I stand!

So, why, at times, are we not able to stand so firmly? Why is it so hard for us to say: Here I stand? Why do doubts and fears get the better of us? Is it because we don't have this firm foundation?

What junk has accumulated in your mind? What thoughts and so called “truths” of the world that contradict the Bible have clouded your thoughts? Fear of the world and the people in it, or of losing what you have. Have these things replaced the fear of God? What do you love in the world more than God, and cling to rather than the Word of God? When our fear, love, and trust is wrong, then where we stand is wrong, and may even be dangerous.

We need the firm foundation in God's Holy Word. It is no accident that the Reformation was launched after Luther became a student of the Scriptures⁷ and spent his time delving deeply into them. They, by the power of the Holy Spirit, changed him. That is what gave him a conscience “captive to the Word of God” that could say, “Here I stand!” Even in the face of all the powers of the world raging against him, and his own Church condemning him.

It is God's Holy Word, God's Holy Baptism, God's Holy Meal, and even God's faith gifted to you, that will strengthen and embolden you:

- To take your stand on your Baptismal identity. You are not who others say you are, but who God says you are. His child.

7 At the University of Wittenberg

- To take your stand, not on the wish that you are good, but on the full and free forgiveness of your sins that declares you good before Almighty God.
- To take your stand on the Body and Blood of Jesus truly present and given for you as food for body and soul, and the strengthening of your faith.
- To take your stand on the truth of God’s Word, knowing what God says is right, true and eternally reliable.

The ultimate truth of Scripture is becoming less accepted these days as tolerance is preached in the intolerance of Scripture. The truth of the Bible is becoming less accepted these days as popular sins are proclaimed good. The truth of God’s Word is becoming less accepted these days like calling Jesus the only true way to heaven. Still here we stand. Popular or not. Allowed or not. Tolerated or not. Legal or not. Our conscience is captive to the Word of God.

So what if your doubts and fears get the better of you? That’s why we come back here every week. To confess, to repent, and to hear Jesus say it again, “I forgive you all your sins.” We come here every week to have Jesus open our minds again, clean out the junk, and be filled again with His truth. We come here to receive His Body and His Blood to strengthen us.

These are the things that will carry us through another week of temptations, challenges, trials, dangers, needs, fears, and whatever else Satan will throw at you. Satan wants to make your life like standing on a ball! Always off balance, shaky and uncertain. Jesus lifts you up and put you on the unshakeable, unmoveable, reliable, and steadfast foundation of His Holy Word. So that you can say, “Here I stand!”

A lot has changed in 500 years. A lot has stayed the same. What will not change, what will never change, is our God,⁸ His Word,⁹ and His promises.¹⁰ We can do this because Christ is risen! In Him we can do no other.

God help us.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



8 Malachi 3:6
9 Isaiah 40:8
10 Numbers 23:19