

## Mountain View Lutheran Church

Sunday, June 5, 2011

### Sermon by Pastor Mark Friedrich (as transcribed from recording)

Gracious God our Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have invited us to pray and to cast our burdens upon You, because You care for us. Lord, as we wait for Your coming again, help us to be strengthened and to know the power of Your love. The love that holds onto us, so that we can hang in there until You come again. Now Lord bless the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts, that they might be acceptable in Thy sight, oh Lord our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

How many of you have ever done chin-ups or pull-ups? Ever had to do those? I remember that was Physical Education class. You had the test to see if you were physically fit. You had to do so many sit-ups, so many push-ups and so many pull-ups. I think it was 20 pull-ups that you had to do and I got to 18. And I couldn't get up any more, but I didn't want to go back down either! So I said, "Well I'll just hold onto the bar until my strength returns." Finally, the coach says, "What are you doing?" Well, I'm hangin' in there! I'm hangin' in there baby! That's what God calls us to do in life, is to hang in there, because Jesus is coming.

So often when life hits us, all we can do is just hold on. Hold on until Jesus comes. Peter knows that. That's why he says these words to us. Would you read them with me: "Dear friends do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." Does that sound a little strange to you? What's Peter saying? He says don't be surprised at painful trials! You mean Christians have painful trials? Do we have burdens to bear? Absolutely.

In fact, the Word of God says we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God. I think we should be surprised when our life is going good! You know why? Because we have an enemy that doesn't want us to have the good life - who wants to make our life rough. When we suffer in this life, whether it be physical suffering, whether it be suffering for being a Christian, we know that it will happen. It will happen. In fact, not only should we not think it strange, but let's read what Peter goes on to say. "but rejoice that you are participating in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."

Jesus said "if anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself, pick up his cross daily and follow Me." You see we have crosses to bear. Each and every one of us do. I wish I could tell you, fellow believers, that when you follow Christ you're going to be healthy, wealthy and no problems, if you were a true Christian, and that's what some churches teach. But that's not what the Bible says.

You see, there's something about suffering as we participate in it, we are connected in Christ's suffering. Because, you see, Jesus won our victory for us not with some cosmic, light-sword battle, like you might see in "Return of the Jedi." We don't have a Jesus that's a Superman, able to stop speeding trains and shoot bullets at him and he doesn't even duck, but you throw the gun and he ducks. No! We have a Jesus, a Savior, who has defeated our enemy through His death on the cross. So that we who trust in Him, will rejoice in His revelation when His glory is revealed.

Those who hope in Christ will never be disappointed. So our hope is closer than it appears because we don't know when Jesus will return. And if we are living in Christ and we are insulted for following Him, we're blessed! If people make fun of us as Christians, we should smile and say, "Thank you." "Oh you're just a holy roller!" "Thank you." Because following Jesus' way is such a better way! What does it profit a person if they gain the whole world and lose their soul? What can you give in exchange for your soul?

We don't want to compromise our faith in order to be having the things of this world. Rather we want to hold fast to His Word and His life. But remember, we suffer for following Jesus. Not because we're some criminal or we do bad things. Sometimes Christians say "Well, I'm suffering for Christ because you know, yeah, I did that bad thing but suffering is suffering, so I'm suffering right now." No! If you're put in jail because you did something wrong legally, then you're not suffering for Christ. You're suffering because you should be suffering. But when we suffer for Christ, suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character and character produces hope and hope doesn't disappoint.

In my short life, I've had to go through many trials and tribulations and I wish I never would have had to go through one of them. But after I've gone through them, I've seen how God has molded and shaped and strengthened my faith and trust in Him. So that each day has become a day that I feel closer to God and His love for me. You see, it's going to be difficult for even the righteous to get to heaven because Satan doesn't want us to. We are only saved by God's grace, not by human effort, so we trust in Him and we share that Word with others or they will be lost!

Now read these words with me: "so then those who suffer according to God's will" Stop! "...those who suffer according to God's will." I don't know about you, but those words hit me between the eyes. "...suffer according to God's will." I'll tell you what I think that means. I've known some parishioners who've said "You know Pastor, I lost my job, I lost my house, I lost my family, but Jesus found me." I think sometimes God, who sees the big picture, allows us to go through suffering to bring us to the place where He wants us to be.

It's kind of like my little granddaughter said the other day as we went by the hospital. She said "Mommy, I don't like shots!" And her mommy says, "Well nobody likes shots. They hurt." But shots, when you're given a shot, that gives you medicine so you can get better. Nobody likes suffering, at least I hope nobody likes suffering, but through suffering God can and does bring about healing strength. For when we are weak, He is strong. So He says, "humble yourselves before the mighty hand of God."

And I think of that passage in Job, where Job says, "You know if I could just talk to God face to face and plead my case with Him, He'd have to relent." And God appears to Job and he says, basically to Job, "Let me be God, because I know what I'm doing." In suffering, and it's hard, and God hurts with us when we do, but in suffering God would want us to trust in Him. To know that through suffering He's drawing us closer to Himself. Because having that closeness with God is the goal of our faith. Because He will lift us up in due time. He will bring us through this time. So in the midst of our suffering, He invites us, He encourages us, He promises us to cast all of our burdens upon Him because He cares for us. Never think that the suffering you're going through is God saying to you "I don't care about you." Nothing could be further from the truth.

So when you have anxiety and fear, cast your burdens upon Him. And be self-controlled, be alert, because where God gives us tests, Satan uses those tests as a temptation to drive a wedge between us and God. See, Satan is like the roaring lion. You know why a lion roars? Anybody know why the lion roars? To be heard? No, to scare the animals into fleeing, just scattering, because when the animals flee and scatter, the lion can pick one off. Satan likes to roar. He's a great bluffer. You want to take him to Vegas, because he could bluff his way through anything. But all he is is a bunch of hot air, really. He's just a deceiver. He tells half-truths to make us get worried and afraid and scatter and go away from the One who has promised to heal us.

So, don't listen to Satan! He just wants to devour you. Resist him! Stand firm in your faith! Despite what you see around you, despite the fears you feel in your heart, know that it is "on Christ the Solid Rock I stand, all other ground is but sinking sand." Job put it this way: he said, "Though worms destroy this body of mine, yet in my flesh I will see God."

And know that as we stand firm in the faith, we come together as a church. We pray for one another. We support and uplift one another. The church is a body, not just of individuals, but of believers who care for one another, that we might walk this path to go to our final destination. To know that we are just on a path, on a journey. Our life will soon be over and God will restore us.

So we hang in there. We hang in there and give God the glory, to give Him the praise. To know that we're not on this journey by ourselves, but we have a Savior, our Good Shepherd, who not only leads us and guides us, but carries us through until we see Him again. To God be the glory, honor and praise, now and forever. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses our human understanding, guard our hearts and minds, through faith in Jesus our Savior. Amen.