

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
www.lutheranlccf.org
Twentieth Sunday After Trinity, October 13, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 395:1-4, 425:1, 408, 402, 398.

Lessons: Exodus 3:1-10, 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12, Matthew 17:1-12.

Sermon Text: Philippians 1:27–30

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul has just written to the congregation at Philippi that he hopes to see them, although he is in chains, imprisoned in Rome. Paul writes ***“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”***

This is an encouragement to let the entire life of the Christian reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be an example for everyone in the world and especially for those close to the believer.

The Gospel, of course, is the good news that we have been redeemed by the work of Jesus Christ. And because we have been redeemed, we have also been sanctified, made holy by the work of the Holy Ghost. Because our sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ, Paul is encouraging those who have come to faith to continue to live as God’s Holy children, to

LIVE LIKE CHRISTIANS

1. ***“Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”***
2. ***“Stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.”***
3. **Do not be frightened in whatever happens, for your suffering is really a gift from God.**

The word “Christian” means “Christ-like.” Paul is encouraging a way of life, a manner of life that is not just words but everything the Christian does. The Greek picture of ***“conduct”*** has its roots in the picture of citizenship.

What does it really mean to ***“conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”***? First of all this means to live as Christians, as God’s redeemed children. The Greek gives us the picture of letting your lives show your citizenship. In the third chapter of this short letter, Paul bluntly says ***“Our citizenship is in heaven.”***(Philippians 3:20–21, NIV84) He also wrote to the Ephesian congregation, immediately after emphasizing that we are saved by God’s grace and not by works ***“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*** (Ephesians 2:19–20, NIV84) He wrote to them that before God worked faith in their lives, they ***“were separate from Christ, ... without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.”*** (Ephesians 2:12–13, NIV84)

As citizens of God’s kingdom, they were a living part of what Scripture pictures as the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church. And the body follows in the way that the head leads.

As citizens of God’s kingdom through faith in Jesus Christ, they were to live as God’s children, not as pagans, not as unbelievers, not as those who lived only for themselves. They were to live and to serve God, not themselves, not satisfying the lusts of the flesh.

That admonition and encouragement applies to all who confess Christ. It urges us to do everything as a follower of Christ, and not a follower of Satan, not a slave to the ways of the world.

It is certainly appropriate to remember your Lutheran confirmation promises. Those of you who have been confirmed were asked questions about what you believed. They included the question ‘Do you also, as a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, intend to continue firm and strong in the confession of this church, and suffer everything, even death, rather than fall away from it?’ That is a powerful question, and requires a powerful answer. It is not something we consider lightly, and realize it is not something we can do by ourselves. Your answer was “I do so intend, with the help of God.” That promise to “suffer everything, even death” speaks of the dangers and risks the believer in Jesus Christ faces from the unbelieving people of the world. To be willing to suffer for your conduct as a child of God, as a believer, is something we certainly need God’s help with. We need him to strengthen us so that we can stand up to sin, to the unbelieving world, and to Satan himself.

The last question you were asked at your confirmation is “Finally, do you intend faithfully to live all your life according to the rule of the divine Word of God, do you intend to be diligent in the use of the means of grace, and to live in such a way as to honor the Gospel of Christ, and in faith, word and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death?” That is another powerful question and requires a powerful promise. That question echoes Paul’s words **“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”** In all of your words and actions you are to honor Christ, to live as one worthy of your Lord. When we live our life “according to the rule of the divine Word of God,” we are striving to let God’s Law become the guide, the guideline for our entire life. And in order to do that, we must constantly refresh for ourselves what God’s Word teaches, and diligently make use of the Gospel in the Word and in the Sacrament – the Lord’s Supper – which assures us of the forgiveness of sins we hear from the Gospel Word. As a result, we honor Christ in our lives. The question isn’t just idle words when we promise “in faith, word and deed to remain true to the Triune God, even unto death.” There again is that promise to be faithful to Christ every day until the day we die.

And what was your answer to the last question at your confirmation? “I do so intend, by the grace of God.” We recognized at our confirmation that we needed God’s love and mercy to be able to come close to fulfilling that promise. We rely on God and we must rely on God daily.

Then Paul writes **“I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”**

Paul speaks of unity here. That is not a new idea in Scripture. This is an appeal to unity, that their faith show itself in expressions of one-ness, of unity. This is the same unity he wrote to the Corinthians about. **“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”** (1 Corinthians 1:10, NIV84)

In a very pointed sense he is asking for genuine fellowship, as Scripture speaks of it, **“standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; in no way alarmed by your opponents.”** (Philippians 1:27–28, NASB)

The conduct of believers is to match the blessed saving gifts they have received. Their conduct is to reflect what the gospel and its riches have made of every Christian: God’s beloved child. The words of the Apostle Peter certainly apply here, too – as well as to us! **“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”** (1 Peter 2:9–10,)

The Apostle Luke wrote about the believers shortly after Pentecost: **“All the believers were one in heart and mind.”** (Acts 4:32, NIV84) In that example in Acts, their unity expressed itself in areas far outside their gathering for worship, in their also sharing their material gifts from God.

But there will always be those who oppose the truth of God’s Word. Scripture here says that we are to live as God’s children **“without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you.”**

Look at the spiritual gifts of God in your life. Paul mentions two very important spiritual gifts. The first is belief – faith. That is created by God’s work in us.

The second is suffering. How is that a gift of God? The unbelieving people of the world will hate us. Satan will really hate us and do everything he can to separate us from the love of God.

We may suffer as Christians in many ways. Jesus Christ himself suffered the very pains of hell – for us. Scripture speaks of the Apostle James being beheaded. Although not recorded in Scripture, tradition tells of how other apostles were martyred, were killed just because they believed in Christ.

But when Christians live ***“in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”*** they will not be terrified in anything by their enemies. Scripture says repeatedly “fear not” – don’t be afraid. Jesus himself said ***“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more.”*** (Luke 12:4, NIV84)

Scripture is also clear that ***“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.***” (Acts 14:22, NIV84)

Suffering strengthens us and bring us together, if only we recognize such suffering as a gift. We have the same struggle and conflicts that Paul had, just as the Philippians did.

When we stand up for the truth of God’s Word we do suffer, don’t we. Some throughout history have suffered much more than us. In the letter to the Hebrews we read of believers who ***“were tortured, were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground.”*** (Hebrews 11:35–38, NIV84)

To suffer for the sake of Christ is a valuable gift. It is a great honor to suffer for Christ and the truth of the Gospel. It is also an example which will encourage and strengthen the faith of others.

Do you remember Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount? ***“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*** (Matthew 5:11–12, NIV84)

Suffering and adversity strengthen a person, as you may have experienced, even suffering pain. When we suffer pain, we gain sympathy for others who suffer. Even when our muscles hurt after having been given a good workout, we learn that they are strengthened.

The Apostle Peter had a great deal to say about suffering as Christians. He wrote: ***“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”*** (1 Peter 4:12–16, NIV84) ***“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”*** (1 Peter 4:19, NIV84) ***“For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.””*** (1 Peter 2:19–22, NIV84) ***“But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.””*** (1 Peter 3:14, NIV84)

And even in suffering we can praise God, as did the Apostle Peter when he wrote: ***“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”*** Amen. (1 Peter 1:3–7, NIV84)