

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
November 5, 2017

Here I Stand! Christ Alone

- 1. Against the enemies without**
- 2. Against the demons within**
- 3. At the moment of death**

Acts 4:1-12

Children's Message

The sermon began with the children coming forward to be counted. But when I counted us, I always came up with one more than they did. Then I explained that Jim Bucholtz, a good friend of mine who is already in heaven, would always add one when, as an usher, he counted the number of people in the congregation. He always added one to remember that Jesus is always with us. In every situation in life, "Always add one."

The Lesson: Acts 4:1-12

Our lesson for today recounts the first time that the Apostles faced opposition after Jesus' resurrection. In the previous chapter, Peter and John saw a lame man begging as they walked into the temple. In Jesus' name they healed this man. That gave them an opportunity to teach about Jesus to the people in the temple courts. That came to the attention of the rulers of the Jews, so they came to arrest them. That's where our lesson begins.

The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.² They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.³ They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day.⁴ But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵ The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶ Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷ They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people!⁹ If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed,¹⁰ then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.¹¹ Jesus is

*"the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone."*

¹² *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*”

The Message

This event must have happened just a couple of months after Jesus was crucified. Peter and John are imprisoned by the same people who had masterminded Jesus’ death on the cross. This is the first time that their faith is challenged from enemies without. How would they respond? Their message was “Christ alone.” “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

They understood that Jesus’ death on the cross was all part of God’s plan. They understood that Jesus had to die as the sacrifice for their sins. And so even though they could have been put to death for their confession, they testified to the truth: “Christ alone” is the way to be saved. As Jesus said in our gospel lesson: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:1-6).

What gave them that courage? They knew that they were not facing these enemies alone. Always add one. Jesus was present there with them.

As the Reformation progressed, Luther also faced enemies without. In 1521, at the Diet of Worms he was declared an outlaw and subject to death. His prince hid him away for 10 months in the Wartburg castle.

In 1522 he returned to teach in Wittenberg. But the danger did not go away. Just half a year later, on July 1, 1523, he learned that the first Lutheran martyrs were put to death in Brussels, Belgium.

In 1530, when the Lutheran princes were commanded to renounce their faith at the Diet of Augsburg, Luther sat alone in the Coburg Castle because he was already under the sentence of death.

But we sang Luther’s confession in the face of these enemies without:

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no hill,
They shall not overpower us.
This world’s prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none
He’s judged, the deed is done!
One little word can fell him.

One word can defeat the enemies without. “Jesus.” We never face these enemies alone. “Always add one.” If Christ is on our side, we need not be afraid.

That is also true of us. Though we do not face the challenges that the apostles faced in prison or Luther when he was shut up in the castles, there are enemies without that make us tremble in fear. You need only look at the statistics of churches in the United States to begin to tremble. It seems

that Satan is destroying the Church, leading our elderly to be afraid to be generous because they won't have enough, leading our youth to think that Christianity is all about rules so that they want nothing to do with church.

But as we seek to carry out our mission: Always add one. We are not facing Satan's attacks alone. Christ is victorious and he is on our side. Our confidence doesn't lie in our own tactics or wisdom, but in Christ alone.

But I believe the greatest enemies that we face are not those on the outside. The most fearsome enemies are the demons within.

Our lesson mentions that the church continued to grow. Suddenly the number of believers jumped to 5000 men from 3000 people just a few weeks earlier on Pentecost (Acts 2)! Luther also experienced numerical success. When he rode into Worms to stand before Emperor Charles V, the townspeople cheered and greeted him like a hero. We too celebrate some amazing things as God continues to bless our ministry.

When you see these kinds of victories, there don't seem to be any demons within. All is well. But how often doesn't Satan seek to twist God's blessings into a trap. He can lead us to think that this success is dependent on us.

When the demons tempt us to pride and arrogance, may we go back to "Christ alone." You and I are not the foundation of the church. Jesus is the stone the builders rejected that has become the capstone.

That is especially important because we will often not be surrounded by the crowds. Peter and John are alone in the darkness of the prison. What will happen tomorrow? Luther spent many long days and nights alone. Perhaps you have heard of the story of Luther throwing an inkwell at the devil. While that story may not be true, since it first appears in writing about 100 years after Luther's death, we do know that he often agonized in the darkness of despair. And many of us know the horrible darkness of the one. I'm thankful that one of our brothers in Christ is willing to share his story with our teens. How many people find themselves in that darkness where they are all alone and there is no hope for the future?

But in that darkness, always add one! Christ alone! Satan, you are right that I have failed God. Satan, you may be right that no one else likes me. But I am not fighting you alone. The whole world may be against me, but I shall add one. There is one who promises to stand with me, there is one who was willing to die for me. He will never leave me or forsake me. When Satan attacks in the darkness, always add one!

And finally at the moment of death, it would seem that we are all alone. At that moment, all of the Reformation truths that Luther taught became extremely practical. As death approached, his good friend Justus Jonas asked, "Do you want to stand firm on Christ and the doctrine you have taught?" "Ja," Luther responded. Yes! Always add one. Christ is there. In the face of death, Christ alone gives us the confidence to face death.

Death, it seems, would be the one place where we are all alone. But in Christ you and I are never alone. Always add one. Jesus tasted death for us. He rose victorious over death. We too shall rise. Christ alone gives us that courage.

That is our Reformation Mission to bring people closer to Christ. That is the key. That in every situation of life, we want those around us to always add one. That Christ Jesus is there to protect them from the enemies without and the demons within. That's our congregations mission. It is our personal mission: By every possible means we bring every person within our area of influence closer to Christ. Amen.

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Dig Deeper

- Go back to your spiritual roots. Read a biography of Martin Luther (see our church library or your local public library).
- Purchase the DVD *A Return to Grace – Luther's Life and Legacy* at Northwestern Publishing House or order online.
- Read the Gospel of John this week, just 3 chapters per day, to prepare yourself in every situation to “always add one” – Christ alone!