

The Third Sunday after Trinity

1 Peter 5:6-11: "God Cares for Us – but How?"

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In Nomine Iesu

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Heavenly Father, You are truly my Lord and my God; You have created me, bringing me out of nothing, and You have redeemed me through Your Son. You have appointed and assigned me to this place in life and all these duties, but matters do not always take the turn I would like them to take, and there are so many things troubling and distressing me that in myself I do not find hope or consolation. For this reason I commit everything to You, looking to You for counsel and aid. In all these questions be the Beginning and the End. Amen. (Luther prayer reprinted in *Blessings and Prayers for Men*, p. 148)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of St. Peter's First Epistle. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you. / Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. / And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who will never cast out those who come to Him in faith (Joh. 6:37), dear fellow redeemed:

When you want someone to back up what they say by what they do, you might remind them that "talk is cheap." In last week's Epistle lesson, we heard John address this when he wrote, "let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1Jo. 3:18). So it's one thing for a person to say, "I care about you," and it's another for them to show it. One of the most comforting passages in the Bible is found in today's text: "[Cast] all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you." But **How Does God Care for Us?**

Our friends show that they care for us by being there when we need them. They listen sympathetically to our problems. They may speak words of encouragement to us, or offer us food and gifts to help us and cheer us up. God also cares for us like this as He joins us in our troubles and listens to our prayers. He shares His Word of encouragement with us, and He constantly provides the things we need for this body and life. But He demonstrates His care for us in even more profound ways than these.

Peter writes by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that *"the God of all grace... has called you to His eternal glory in Christ."* The God of all grace does not punish us for our sins as we deserve. He shows undeserved love and kindness toward us. In His grace He has called us to *"eternal glory in Christ."* The *"in Christ"* is crucial. God did not say, "I know you have broken all My Commandments, but let's let bygones be bygones. Let's just forget that that happened. Why don't you come up here to heaven and enjoy My eternal glory?"

We are called to eternal glory *"in Christ."* Eternal glory was won for us by Christ. He won eternal glory by taking the everlasting guilt and punishment for our sin on Himself. This shows us so clearly that God cares for us. God the Father sent His Son to be our Substitute, to pay the price for sin in our place, to die our death, to suffer our hell. Because He did this out of obedience to His Father, *"[t]herefore God has highly exalted him"* (Phi. 2:9). Now the kingdom and the power and the glory are His both as God and Man.

Our heavenly Father also wants us to have a share of this glory. This is why He has called us to faith in Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit. We confess that *"the Holy Ghost has called [us] by the Gospel"* (Third Article of the Creed). He has called us through the message of Christ crucified and risen. When we were converted, the forgiveness of sins which Jesus won for us on the cross was applied to us, and His perfect keeping of the Holy Law was credited to us. This means that nothing stands between the believer and eternal glory. Eternal glory is ours already in Christ.

But that is difficult to understand or even to remember when our life on earth is anything but glorious. Peter here clearly acknowledges that we Christians have anxieties, worries, cares. Sometimes we share the same anxieties, such as when flooding or drought affect the whole community, or when economic troubles touch us all. Last March when concerns about a new virus reached us, we collectively felt the anxiety of the unknown. Will we and our loved ones stay healthy? Will we have enough food and supplies? Will we be able to keep our jobs?

When all that was happening, a friend pointed out that the anxiety we felt at that time is something that a portion of the population deals with much or all the time. There are some who live under a cloud of despair, who constantly imagine the worst case scenario, who experience depressive episodes or severe mood swings, who are stuck in addictive behavior, who hardly ever feel happy. For these friends of ours, anxiety and depression and a feeling of worthlessness are often a daily struggle. It can be difficult in these times to believe that God really cares.

And that's exactly the doubt that the devil wants to plant in our minds. Peter writes that *"[y]our adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* His aim is to attack and destroy our faith, our hope, and our love. He wants to tear us away from Jesus and the salvation He has won for us. He does this primarily through temptation.

He tempts us to wonder if God cares about us when things are going badly. He tempts us to doubt God's Word which assures us of our Lord's care. And if we become convinced that God will not help, the devil tempts us to rely on ourselves to pull ourselves out of the depths and to fix our own deep-rooted problems. This only sends us deeper and deeper down.

The devil may successfully tempt us to doubt God's care, but he cannot stop God's care. It is an unchangeable, irreversible truth that **God Cares for Us**. He has not only "*called [us] to His eternal glory in Christ,*" which we will fully enjoy in heaven, but He is also with us in our struggles here on earth. Our text says that "*after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace... will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*"

How does He "restore" us? Psalm 23 tells us that the Good Shepherd restores our soul "*in green pastures,*" "*beside still waters,*" and "*in paths of righteousness.*" Our soul is restored in the life-giving nourishment and in the living waters of our Lord's Word. Through His Word, our Shepherd meets us with the gifts of His grace. He brings us forgiveness when we have listened to the lies of the devil instead of trusting in Him. He brings us His holiness, so that we can stand free of sin and guilt before our Father in heaven and be judged as righteous on the last day.

Jesus also comes to "confirm" our faith, so we can resist the attacks of our adversary. We who belong to Jesus by faith have Him on our side in the fight against the devil and all evil. The devil wants us to think that we are totally alone in this world, that God does not care for us and neither does anyone else. But we are not alone, not even close. The Lord is with us, and He reminds us that "*the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*"

We are joined together with all believers in the body of Christ. We face a common enemy, but God has equipped us for the battle, and Jesus leads the charge. No matter what troubles come our way, we cannot lose because we are in Christ, and He conquers all. So He "strengthens" us in this promise of His undying care, and He "establishes" us, gives us a firm footing in His Word, so that nothing can destroy our faith in Him.

These are the concrete ways God shows His care for us. He does not always give us what we ask for or give to us right away. But He certainly still cares. Sometimes in His care, He places a cross on us, not to drive us away from Him but to draw us closer. These crosses remind us that we cannot get along by our own wisdom and strength. We are not in control of the past, the present, or the future. Our life is in the hands of "*the God of all grace.*" Whatever He does, including humbling us under His "*mighty hand,*" is for our good. It is because He cares.

So you may cast all your anxieties on Him. He invites you to do this. He can handle anything you throw His way. These burdens are too heavy for you, but they are not too heavy for Him. Jesus carried your sins and the sins of the whole world to the cross. He can bear the daily worries and cares that weigh you down. "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,*" says Jesus, "*and I will give you rest*" (Mat. 11:28).

We find rest in Jesus. We find it by listening to His sure promises in His Word. We find it by receiving His free gifts in His Sacraments. His care for us never falters. His commitment to us never dries up. As long as we have breath, He has blessings to give us through His Word. And when we breathe our last, He has eternal blessings waiting for us in heaven.

God's talk is not cheap. He sealed the promise of our salvation through the blood of His Son. He showed His care for us not just by saying, but by doing. And He still actively works for our good. He defends us from the constant attacks of the devil, and He delivers us when we have

fallen to our knees and can go no further. “[A]t the proper time” He will exalt us, lift us up, and bring us at last to “His eternal glory.”

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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