

“STAND FIRM TO THE END”

Matthew 10:16-23

1. Without Fear
2. Full of Hope

The following is part of the speech delivered by General George Patton to the American troops the night before D-Day. “You are not all going to die. Only two percent of you right here today would die in a major battle. Death must not be feared. Death, in time, comes to all men. Yes, every man is scared in his first battle. If he says he's not, he's a liar. The real hero is the man who fights even though he is scared. A real man will never let his fear of death overpower his honor, his sense of duty to his country, and his innate manhood.” Powerful words, aren't they? Patton charged his troops with his speech, but what did he really offer them? A message of comfort? Of hope? No. He offered them an illusion really: reliance on self. I don't mean to destroy your idea of Patton or his service to our country – he was a hero. It's just that his words, next to the words of our gospel today, ring false. The words of the Son of God in our gospel are a battle cry resting on a rock-solid foundation: Jesus says, “Stand Firm to the End,” Without Fear, and Full of Hope.

Before Jesus gave his speech, he preceded it with a few object lessons – returning sight to two blind men with only a touch, raising a ruler's daughter from the sleep of death, power to heal a woman's bleeding from only a touch of his cloak. Jesus power is out there in the open, right in the faces of his disciples. He knows what he's doing – he knows he's going to send them out; he's going to paint a grim picture – before they go, he lays this base for their confidence. Rest on my power, be aggressive in my strength, be confident in my comfort – have no fear.

“I am sending you.” You are going to go out to do something. “I am sending you.” Here's confidence right from the start. The disciples didn't have to look back very far to realize, “Oh yeah, that guy with the power...” Neither do we. Jesus himself sends us out – how can we fail? The Son of God gives the command! What a great start! It's easy for us to be confident about being sent by the King of Kings. But it is often even easier for us to lose that confidence as we listen to the “how” and “what” of our going.

“I am sending you, as sheep among wolves.” Well, it probably can't get much worse than that. Let's just weigh the sides here. Sheep are stupid animals – helpless, they get lost, stubborn, and defenseless. Wolves are intelligent predators, large animals, 42 sharp teeth, and jaw strength of 1,500 psi – killing machines. The contrast here is obviously one of power. Though we are all of the things listed above about sheep – powerless fits best – especially when compared with the wolves.

The danger is high. So “be on your guard.” The word Jesus uses means “to be on alert.” Ever since 9/11 we have become much more accustomed to that word. Jesus says “Go out” and immediately slaps the situation with a red alert – Severe risk of spiritual attack. You are an emissary of the king, from the kingdom of freedom and a bright future – but don't think life will be a bed of roses. What you're going to do is offer a testimony. You will walk into the territory of the vicious wolves and be a testimony against them, because they have disregarded God, they disregard his message, and they are on the path to hell. As the emissary of the king you enter the land of “It's ok,” “believe what you like,” “do what feels good and what makes you happy.” It's the land of fake-freedom. Christ's message exposes it as the lie that it is – slavery to sin. Christ's message demands allegiance to him

alone – not self, not feeling, not money, not sin. Even though you offer real freedom in Christ, the wolves will seek to defend their territory because they are afraid of you.

How easy it is for us to become afraid too – like the Volkswagen-sized jack-rabbits out in our field – fast, large, but scared stiff if you come within 100 feet. We can easily become just as afraid or worried. “What will happen if I hold out this glorious message – it is so opposite of this person’s life?” “Just think of the things they will say about me.” “What will I say when they slam the door or shout me down?” Maybe there will even be pain. The word Jesus uses for “worry” means to be concerned without reason. See, there is good concern – we don’t want to run willy-nilly, without thought, into danger and destruction. But concern “without reason” comes when I believe that by my concern my life will be saved, that I can add some time to the end-point that is already set – “I’m only anxious because my life is infinitely precious, and I need to make sure all the things I look forward to will happen.” Sounds ludicrous, doesn’t it, especially when God’s in control?

Yeah. God thinks so too. “Be still, and know that I am God.” Even in the midst of a gospel-sharing campaign we run into sin – sin that can damn us to hell. Turn from that attitude of fear – repent of that sin – because it is lack of trust that blinds you to the truth Christ has laid out.

Grab onto the truth and think about it – because it’s easier to be fearless. Jesus says we don’t have to worry about the “how” or the “what” of our message. When we need comfort or power or words – it will be there “in that hour,” he promises. Why no worry? Because the Holy Spirit himself will speak through you. He will remind you of everything Jesus teaches, just like he did for the disciples at Pentecost. For men who were afraid, he reminded them of their Savior who laughed in the face of death and crushed the power of sin so that their fear wouldn’t damn them to hell, but would be replaced with the confidence of everlasting life. He does the same for you.

Jesus offers no idle comforts here – Don’t worry, it will all be over soon; Don’t worry, you’re good at this stuff. Real comfort is yours because God himself is using you to battle sin in the world. He turns the focus away from you and onto his almighty power. Psalm 46, this morning, said “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God...God is within her, she will not fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.” Luther loved this psalm. It is his “mighty fortress” and it’s yours too.

Jesus’ call to arms rings out – Stand Firm to the End and he quickly adds, Without Fear, because he comforts you with his power and his Word. Even without fear, though, we still have a death-march ahead – our own little D-Day; maybe more correctly – the ultimate D-Day. And even filled with strength and comfort you can’t help looking ahead, and the landscape can seem bleak and hopeless.

When the ramps lowered onto Omaha Beach, the view was not welcoming – 400 yds. of beach without cover, and 80 ft. high cliffs bristling with German guns. For the second and third waves of troops, the piles of waiting bodies didn’t help to instill hope either. Do you get that same feeling as you listen to Jesus? He doesn’t pull the punches as he tells us what is to come. “Here’s how bad it’s going to get.” Brother betrays brother; children murder parents. The lowest point of bad – these kinds of things are happening. It seems hopeless.

Because you stand waving the flag of “Christian,” maybe your family has torn apart – brothers or sisters, friends whom you love, continue to reject Jesus and it looks like they’re getting sick of you offering him. Because you offer salvation by grace alone maybe your friends laugh at you. Because you value the comfort of God’s Word on Sunday some people just plain hate you. Jesus promises if

you are compelled to go out carrying his flag that it will only get much worse. You may have to give up your own life, simply for being unwilling to let go of Christ. “They will treat you this way because of my name, for they don’t know the one who sent me (Jn 15:21).” It would, indeed, be very much hopeless if all we had to look forward to was being torn to shreds on the spiritual beachhead of life by friends, family, and enemies.

Of course we look forward to much better – sure hope. “He who stands firm to the end will be saved.” Jesus won the war already. Hang on to the comfort he gave in his death and resurrection – forgiveness now and eternal life for a future. Endure – confidently, with courage – not relying on “self” but on his Word, his Sacraments – little islands of safety in the fire-storm. Think of those who have gone before us, blessed by God to have witnessed – Daniel, who prayed despite a royal decree, and was saved from lions; martyred disciples; Luther – who held up the pure gospel against the whole church. On this Reformation Sunday remember that God delivers his people – Christians past and Christians present. You, who are blessed to hold Christ out to the world, who are blessed to suffer for his name – he will deliver you too.

Follow your Lord’s command. Go out to witness filled with hope. Live lives that cannot be mistaken for anything but Christian. Run to God’s Word when you feel weak, to worship to receive comfort and power. And remember, “When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near (Lk 21:28).” Suffering will come, our life might end – but salvation means we will be plucked up out of harm’s way, out of danger, away from guilt and the fear of hell, and set down on the peaceful shores of heaven. What greater hope is there than a battle already won, and an eternal life in heaven prepared and promised by God’s own Son – there is none.

What would Jesus’ D-Day speech have been like? Unlike Patton’s, it wouldn’t have to be edited for content, and it would give real hope. Jesus charges the troops with an End Time speech today. And what amazing comfort! Stand Firm to the End Without Fear and Full of Hope. Your God is a Mighty Fortress and he waits in a golden home made just for you. Fight on...

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