

Remain Firm in the Faith 1 Peter 5:6-11

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. ⁷ Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him by being firm in the faith. You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world. ¹⁰ After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. ¹¹ To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

Today is the seventh Sunday of the Easter Season. It is also the last Sunday in the season of Easter. This Sunday falls in the midst of celebration in our church. Two Sundays ago we celebrated the confirmation of four young people. On Thursday we hosted a joint serve with brothers and sisters at Christ in Cochrane as we celebrated Jesus' ascension into heaven. His ascension assures us that his worldwide rescue mission was a complete success. Now he's at his Father's side ruling everything in heaven and on earth for our eternal good. Next Sunday we'll celebrate the greatest day in the history of gospel outreach, where the Holy Spirit was unleashed on our Lord's disciples. And in just one day, 3,000 lost souls came to know and believe in their Savior Jesus.

So what are we celebrating today? Well, it still is the Easter season, so we are still celebrating Jesus' glorious return to life. Many of us were gathered here on Thursday. But for some of us this might be the first chance they have to celebrate our risen Lord's glorious return to heaven. I don't want to steal anything away from next Sunday. But we are here today because of what began on the first Pentecost—saving faith in Jesus? Today the apostle Peter offers us encouragement for our faith. Not surprising, he offered the same encouragement to his first readers. Peter encourages us all to remain firm in the faith. We do live at a different time than Peter's first audience. We're in a different culture, a different part of the world. But we do share the same God. And we deal with the same enemy. In order that we may remain firm in the faith, you need to know your enemy and you need to know your defense.

Remember that Peter is writing to Christians who are undergoing many hardships from many evil people in the world. With their thoughts on what troubles each new day would bring they could easily lose track of where the real danger lay in their life. The apostle Paul also wanted the Christians in Ephesus to know their enemy. He told them, *"Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (Ephesians 6:12). Peter wanted his readers to know their real enemy. He urges them, *"Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Resist him..."* Peter urges Christians to be clear-minded and wide awake when dealing with this enemy. He isn't a big cat trained to do tricks at a circus. He stalks his prey. He studies our weaknesses. And then when we're not looking he pounces and devour.

How ironic that Peter uses the picture of a lion to describe the devil. Peter wrote this letter a time when the persecution of Christians was on the rise. And soon Christians would actually be brought into stadiums to entertain people as victims to hungry lions. But Peter wanted them to know who their real enemy was. It was not the people that make life miserable for them. It was not the evil men who sent them out to then lions. Peter may have remembered what Jesus said when he first sent out the Twelve to do mission work: *“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul”* (Matthew 10:28). They had a much worse enemy—an enemy that could cause eternal harm.

How do you fight an enemy that you cannot see, an enemy that never tires, and enemy that is never satisfied and doesn't know how to quit? How can you possibly win against an enemy that knows your weaknesses and can with very little effort have you fall into its trap. How can we possibly escape an enemy who has brought death to everyone, no matter how old or young? This is not just survival of the fittest. None of us can survive an enemy that will take our life from us. It's just a matter of time. How do remain firm in the faith when the moment you let your guard down, he pounces on you to take you away from your heavenly Father forever? Can we possibly resist an enemy we don't stand a chance against? Our enemy is very real. He is very powerful. He is very successful in our world. He has devoured the majority of the world and will not quit until he's got us all. How can we possibly keep him away? We need to be in control. We need to stay alert. He can attack at any angle. So we need to know our defense.

The first things we need to do to defend ourselves against this vicious enemy is to humble yourself. Peter writes, *“Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time.”* Certainly there is no room for pride when you're dealing with this enemy. Jesus told people on a number of occasions, *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”* Certainly, we don't want to humble ourselves to our enemy. James tells us, *“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up”* (James 4:10). To humble yourself “under God's powerful hand” means we put our whole trust in the grace of God. We remember God's love for a sinner like me is all I need. God once told the apostle Paul, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Corinthians 12:9). We humble ourselves by relying totally on him to care for us.

Peter writes, *“Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.”* Once we have humbled ourselves under God's powerful hand, there is no room for worry in our lives. Jesus said, *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”* (Luke 12:25). Look at how God cares for birds and grass. Certainly you're more valuable to God than they. Peter tells us what to do with all the worries of life. He echoes the Psalmist: *“Cast all your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you”* (Psalm 55:22). Peter's solution to all the cares in life—throw them all to the Lord in prayer. Have him deal with it. Why make God responsible for all our concerns in life? He cares for you. He cares for you spiritually providing everything you need to attain eternal life. He cares for you physically providing all that you need for daily bread. He cares enough to provide for your eternal needs as well as any temporal need.

The hymn writer said it well: *Oh what peace we often forfeit, Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer?* (CW 411)

Peter urges us to be self-controlled and alert when dealing with the enemy. Certainly, the devil remains alert looking for someone to devour. Peter writes, *“Resist him by being firm in the faith. You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world.”* We resist the devil when we remain firm in the faith. James tells us what the devil will do: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7). Why would the devil run away from me? Why wouldn’t he just stay and terrorize me day and night. It isn’t my efforts to resist temptation that causes him to run away. It’s found in the faith that we hold on to. We’re holding on to Christ and his Word. The devil has no alternative but to run away. Martin Luther pointed out in his great Reformation hymn, “One little word can fell him.” We must draw the one weapon that keeps that ferocious beast far away from us. Paul told Christians in Ephesus, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes...so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground” (Ephesians 6:11,13).

Do you know what our biggest problem is against our enemy the devil. So often we put our weapon down. When I lived in Nebraska, I grew to enjoy pheasant hunting. What I found was that most of the birds we shot were at the beginning of the day. After you walk around with a 12 gauge for a few hours your arms get tired. By the end of the day you’re walking with your gun on your shoulder or hanging down at your side. When a bird kicks up you’re in no position to shoot it. Do you know when you’re most vulnerable to the devil’s attacks? It’s when your away from your weapon, when you’ve gotten away from God’s Word. Then you’re most vulnerable. So we must resist the devil with the powerful Word of God. Then he’ll see our trust in Jesus and run away.

Peter ends his encouragement with a prayer. *After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you. To him be the glory and the power forever and ever.* This final prayer gave Peter’s readers reason to remain firm in the faith. Our defense lies in God’s grace. By grace God has called us into his kingdom. By grace he sent his Son to die for our sins. By his grace we look forward to eternal glory. Peter assures us that the sufferings in life are just a drop in the bucket in comparison to eternity. As Paul told the Romans, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us”* (Romans 8:18). Peter then assures us that God will take it upon himself to restore us. He’ll make us firmer and stronger and give us a solid foundation to stand on. In other words, God himself will keep us firm in the faith.

That is our defense. With God on our side, with Jesus in our lives and hearts, with the Holy Spirit giving us a tighter grip on our faith through his Word and sacraments, our enemy, the devil must stay on the run. We know our enemy. But we also know our defense. By staying firm in the faith we will praise him forever. *To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*