

Admittance

1 Timothy 1:12-17

The Third Sunday after Trinity, June 17, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

It is easy to forget our solidarity with other Christians. It is easy to forget our solidarity with their suffering.

The first way that it is easy to forget our solidarity with other Christians is that we are American. We Americans enjoy a life of privilege. If we were to pay attention to the suffering of Christians in other places, it would jeopardize our experience of this privileged life. We might feel guilty because they suffer for the sake of Christ and we do not. That guilty feeling would damage our care free life of privilege.

The second way that it is easy to forget our solidarity with other Christians is that we are Americans. In the United States of America we have freedom of religion. While we can see that moderns are trying to curtail that freedom in our public life, we nevertheless do not suffer the persecutions of those Christians who live in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia where it is illegal to have a Bible or to do Christian evangelism, or Africa, where churches are bombed and Christians kidnapped. Since such suffering is not part of our Christian experience it is hard to have empathy and thus solidarity with Christians who are suffering elsewhere in the world.

The third way that it is easy to forget our solidarity with other Christians is that we are Americans. In the United States premillennial dispensationalism reigns in our eschatological theology. Whether we have read a book about it or heard about it on the radio or seen presentations of it in video, some version of the end of the world out of premillennial dispensationalism is everywhere. It is hard to avoid. And when you listen to me, a Lutheran preacher, preach and I don't talk about the end of the world in all of these politically complicated ways it gives the appearance that I have no explanation of some of the passages where our Lord and His apostles described some pretty elaborate end of the world predictions. As a result most of us expect the Jews to be saved without Jesus and we expect a physical temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem and nevermind the fact that you are built into a holy temple in the Lord as God told you last Sunday from the book of Ephesians. One of the side effects of that is that the attention of the American public is focused on Israel in the Middle East. We tend to favor Israel in our public dialogue over the Palestinians and yet it is a fact, that almost all of the Christians in Israel are Palestinian. Almost all the Christians in Israel are Palestinians, not Israelis. In fact one of the third vice president of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is a Palestinian, born and raised in Nazareth. He once told me, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" And I told him, "Apparently two things!" And so when Syria or whoever bombs Galilee, this Lutheran pastor in the United States calls home to see if his aunts are still safe.

Even in the United States we have difficulty showing solidarity with Christians who are suffering. How many of you rejoiced that the Christian baker of cakes in Denver, Colorado, was victorious before the Supreme Court? And how many of you who rejoiced at that great victory gave any money at all to his legal support? Alliance Defending Freedom provided his legal representation before the high court. Have any of you given money to that organization because you show solidarity with those Christians in this country who are suffering because of their confession of faith?

In spite of the difficulty that we Americans face in showing solidarity with Christians who are suffering, we are still one with them. When someone's church is bombed for the sake of the name of Christ all of our churches are bombed. When one Christian's blood is shed all of our blood is shed for we are one in Christ Jesus. When a lawsuit is brought against one of us for a proper confession of faith, then a

lawsuit is brought against all of us. We are the body of Christ. We are unified. We are one in Him. This is the unity that God was telling you about last Sunday. And so when one Christian is persecuted all Christians are persecuted.

Now.

There once was a persecutor of the Church. The reason that he persecuted the Church was because he disagreed with her basic confession of faith. This man believed that a person is saved by keeping the works of the Law. He himself did his best to keep the works of the law. He fulfilled all of the statutory regulations laid down in the Law. What's more, his confession of faith in good works was an honest one. In other words he honestly believed that a person was saved by God if the person in question did enough good works for God. He believed that if anyone held that they were saved by grace through faith without works of the Law that such a person was damned. He further believed that if people went around preaching to others that they were saved by grace through faith that they were leading other people into damnation. Therefore in order to silence what he considered to be false teachers from swaying other people against God and therefore into damnation he sought to silence them. Therefore this man actively opposed the Church and its preaching.

This man was learned. He was articulate. So the first thing that he did was publish against the Church and preach against the Church. He preached against the notion that a person was saved by grace through faith without works of the Law. He published against the notion that a person was saved by grace through faith without works of the Law. He actively and publicly repudiated the idea that Jesus was the Christ promised to the descendents of Abraham.

This man also had social and political connections. He had inherited some prestige among the politicians of his time because of his father. He therefore had a foot in the door when it came to demanding certain political rights before the politicians of his day. His ideas were already popular among the legislature of his day. All he had to do was galvanize the legislature into action against the Church. And this he did.

He participated in convincing the local legislature to outlaw the preaching of the Gospel. It was forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus. It was forbidden to teach that a person was justified by grace through faith without works of the Law. He forced the public servants to stand by the laws that they had made outlawing the preaching of the Gospel. He convinced them to impose penalties on those who preached the Gospel. He therefore convinced them to jail those who preached the Gospel and any of their supporters. He himself in the name of the local legislature went from house to house seeking and arresting those who confessed the name of Jesus Christ. This persecution against the Church became political institutionalized and accepted. Christians were celebrating the Divine Service in hiding in some places in order to avoid arrest and jail time

In this environment disputes were frequent between those who confessed the name of Christ and those who did not. There were arguments about the proper interpretation of the Bible. The Church insisted that we are saved by grace without works of the law and the opponents of the Church led by this particular learned man with political influence insisting that people were saved by their good works and had to keep the works of the Law.

One of those disputes finally made it before the local legislature. The legislature had been called upon to mediate the dispute. The dispute was between a worker in the Church engaged in social ministry and some other people who were accusing him of speaking falsehood in the name of God. Unlike our American system their system allowed the legislature to adjudicate such case. The legislature agreed to hear the case. The charges were made and the evidence amassed against this servant of Christ Jesus and

worker in the Church. Then he was permitted to make his defense. When he made his defense he used it as a platform to announce salvation in Christ Jesus. This so angered the legislature especially those members of the legislature who were under the influence and persuasion of this man who opposed the Church that they sentenced the follower of Christ to death. Stoning was customary in this location at this time. They stoned the Christian to death.

This man of whom I speak approved of the death and assisted in the execution. He then used the execution as a precedent to have other preachers of the Gospel executed. Many Christians died in the persecution. Many others fled their homes giving up their earthly possessions.

Now, if you have not already figure it out, the man that I am describing to you is Saint Paul. God showed him mercy. God revealed to him the truth of salvation by grace through faith. God revealed to him a proper confession of Jesus Christ. God not only revealed His grace and mercy to this insolent, blasphemous man, God also made him an apostle. In other words not only did God forgive Paul of all of his sins, God also made him a preacher of the very grace that he had spent his life opposing. And then once Paul became a preacher of God's grace he suffered the same kinds of persecution that he used to inflict on Christians.

God showed him mercy. He was insolent. He was violent. And worst of all, he was a blasphemer. God showed him mercy and admitted him to the holy Christian Church.

Lutherans still observe saint days.

We don't usually on Sunday morning, but during the week at our schools and in other institutions which have daily services, we Lutherans still observe saint days. If you look in the hymnal at the liturgical calendar that we officially endorse, there are saint days. We do not observe as many saint days as Roman Catholics do, but we did not get rid of them either. If you think that Lutherans were trying to get away from saint days during the Reformation then you do not understand what the Reformation was all about. If you would like to learn more about the Reformation and what it was really all about, you may talk to me some time.

But there they are. We typically observe the saint day of those saints from the New Testament, but there are others. Now why keep these days? We do not pray to the saints. We do not ask the saints for intercession on our behalf. We are not certain that the dead can actually hear us.

The reason that saint days are kept and retained among Lutherans is among other things to give us examples of God's grace. And so it is with Saint Paul, if God could show mercy to him with all of his external evils and murders on his hands, then God will also show mercy to you even though externally your sin may not seem so bad.

That is why in 1 Timothy, chapter one, Saint Paul puts himself forward as an example of God's grace. It is for your comfort. If God will show mercy to him, then God will also show mercy to you. If God will show mercy to the foremost of sinners, then God will show mercy to you. It really is not about works. It really is about God's mercy.

And think of all of the other saints of the New Testament. Think of Peter, the denier of Christ. Think of Simon the Zealot and what political sins he had committed. Think of Matthew, the collaborator. Think of James and John, the hotheads. God showed them mercy. He will show you mercy too.

And while you rejoice in that comfort, remember one thing: the Church belongs to God. Since the Church belongs to God every congregation within the Church belongs to God. Immanuel Lutheran Church is a congregation of the holy Christian Church. Because she is a congregation of the holy,

Christian Church, she is properly called a church. As a church she belongs to God. The congregation belongs to God. Even though we pastors often say, "my congregation," what we mean by that is the congregation that we serve, the congregation with which we are associated. In the same way you laypeople will talk about "my congregation," but you mean the congregation of which you are a member. You do not own the congregation. I do not own the congregation. God owns the congregation.

Now seeing as how God owns the congregation, since He has shown mercy to you and has shown mercy to the likes of Saint Paul, then you should expect that He will admit others into His congregation who are vile and evil and scary and dangerous upon whom He has also shown mercy.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.