

Sermon for February 4, 2024 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

1 Peter 5:6-11 EHV

Theme: **When your life seems to be falling apart.**

- 1) Humble yourself under God's powerful hand.
- 2) Resist the devil by being firm in the faith.
- 3) Trust that God will graciously restore you.

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist 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.

¹⁰After 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. ¹¹To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

It's bad enough when just one big evil pops up in your life – like a severe sickness, broken relationship, or job loss; but when multiple things occur all at once (when your life seems to be falling apart around you), the stress it causes can seem unbearable. You worry about the future, thereby increasing your anxiety. Such worry often affects your physical health and makes you feel more miserable. To make matters worse, the devil seems to be constantly trying to get you to doubt and be angry with God - tempting you with thoughts like, “Does God really love you? It looks like He has abandoned you - punishing you for some past sin. What did you do to deserve this?” And there you are: stressed, worried, sick, tired, and afflicted. You want it all to stop. You just want a little bit of relief, but even sleep alludes you.

How do you get through those times in life? Where is God, and why is he allowing you to go through such things? With the apostle Peter as our guide, let us listen to the Holy Spirit answer these questions under the theme: **When your life seems to be falling apart.** 1) Humble yourself under God's powerful hand. 2) Resist the devil by being firm in the faith. 3) Trust that God will graciously restore you.

Part One: Humble yourself under God's powerful hand.

The apostle Peter wrote the letter surrounding our sermon text to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. Many of them had suffered persecution for their faith, and that persecution was about to get a lot worse. Peter encouraged them to persevere in their Christian faith and living despite being persecuted for the good they did. He said they were sharing in Christ's suffering as they lovingly shared the Gospel with those around them. In everything, Peter points to our salvation in Christ as the reason to press on.

And, after encouraging an attitude of submissiveness and humility among the brotherhood of believers - reminding his readers of how God gives his grace to the humble - Peter offers this encouragement:

⁶Therefore humble yourselves under God's powerful hand so that he may lift you up at the appointed time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

This verse tells us that God does not allow bad things in your life for no reason. There's always a good purpose for them – even when we don't understand what it is or how it will come about. One thing is sure: whenever he allows evil, he has already planned exactly how to rescue us from it and make it serve our good.

That is why Peter tells us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. How? By casting our anxieties upon Him. Our English translation makes it seem like the command to cast our anxieties on God is a separate thought from humbling ourselves before Him, but they are not independent thoughts. The phrase "humble yourself" could also be translated as "be humbled," that is to say, let God humble you and do not try to avoid the trials He is sending your way. Instead, cast all your anxious thoughts and worries on the LORD because he genuinely cares for you. Don't try to avoid or overcome the flood of problems on your own. Understand that these trials are God's will for your life now. He has already planned how he will carry you through them and restore you. Yes, let God be God and cast all your worries, sorrows, and fears on Him in prayer – trusting that He is working in all the evils you experience for your everlasting good.ⁱ

But how can you be sure that God cares for you when your life seems to be falling apart? Because of Jesus, that's how! Think about it: if God willingly gave up His own Son for you, how will he not also graciously give you all things along with him?ⁱⁱ Yes, God giving up Jesus on the cross proves He loves you beyond any shadow of a doubt. And it's a proof that no one can ever take away. Your feelings, logic, past sins, and present regrets cannot change the fact that Jesus died for your sins and rose again. And because Jesus did that, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.ⁱⁱⁱ

Yes, God cares for you immensely. He cares enough to send severe trials to test your faith, and he cares enough to deliver you from them at his appointed time. Follow the Holy Spirit's prompting to surrender to God's promised grace when he sends trials your way – resisting the devil by being firm in the faith.

Part Two: Resist the devil by being firm in the faith.

It's important to understand that casting all our anxieties on Christ doesn't mean we will feel better emotionally. To be sure, sometimes we do feel better after praying to the LORD. Other times, however, our emotions barely change. Yes, we genuinely believe that Jesus is our Saviour, who cares for us and works in all things for our good; nevertheless, we may still feel frazzled and anxious. And this gets us to worry: "Is there something wrong with my faith? If I really believe,

why do I feel the way I feel?” Then we begin to cycle back into anxious thinking— focusing on self instead of Christ.

Perhaps this is one reason why the Holy Spirit inspired Peter to write: ⁸*Have sound judgment. Be alert. Your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.*

Don't underestimate the devil's hand in every mental, physical, and spiritual trial you suffer. He is not some harmless, misunderstood “antihero” like our society often wants to portray him. No, he is your enemy, who is hellbent on your destruction. That is why Peter encourages you to be alert to the truth of what is going on in your life. Use sound, biblical judgment to evaluate all your experiences, feelings, and advice your friends offer.

Peter calls the devil your “adversary.” That is a courtroom term meaning accuser. Do you remember the story of Job? He was a righteous man before the LORD through faith, but the devil accused him to God that his faith was not genuine. God allowed the devil to rage against Job, thereby proving the genuineness of his faith. And rage the devil did! Like a roaring lion in Nero's Roman Colosseum - looking for some poor Christian martyr to devour - the devil roared against Job. Satan sent the raiding armies that killed his servants and stole his donkeys and cattle. He caused the lightning that destroyed his sheep and other workers. The devil aroused the wind that killed all his children. He afflicted Job with constant pain, disease, and such horrible dreams that he was afraid to sleep. Yes, the devil even used his wife to tempt Job to curse God and die. He used his friends to question Jobs' integrity – trying to get him to look to himself instead of trusting God's Gospel promises.

And as the devil raged against Job, he wants to rage against you. Understand that Satan's hand is in every evil you experience. He wants to terrify you away from Christ. He wants to destroy you mentally, physically, and spiritually. Yes, if it weren't for the fact that our God will only let the devil go so far so as not to tempt us beyond what we can bear,^{iv} all our lives would be like Jobs!

But how can we resist such a powerful, evil enemy who is attacking us on all fronts: afflicting our bodies, messing with our minds, and attacking our spirits?

⁹*Resist him by being firm in the faith.*

Only Jesus can overcome the devil; and he already has through his cross! Therefore, remain in Jesus by believing God's promises for you in Christ – that is how you resist the devil. Put on God's spiritual armour: the righteousness, salvation, peace, and faith God freely provides you through His Word and Sacraments. Stand firm in that Gospel by believing every promise he made to you in Christ. Use those promises against the devils' accusations of guilt and shame. Always pray – trusting God's promises to hear, help, and forgive you.^v Yes, resist the devil by basking in God's promises to you in Christ. Jesus is your mighty fortress. No matter how much the devil tries to rage and terrify, your soul is safe in Christ.

Not only that, but God wants you to know that you are not alone in what you suffer. Peter states: *You know that the same kinds of sufferings are being laid on your brotherhood all over the world.*

As the devil rages against you, so he rages against all Christians. Talk to your brothers and sisters in the faith because they can empathize with what you are going through. More than that, they can point you to God's Word – showing you how the LORD has kept his promises in the past, keeps them in the present, and will continue to keep them in the future. Listen to them as they point you to Christ – encouraging you to cast your cares on Him and wait patiently for His deliverance, which most certainly will come, as the apostle Peter writes:

Part Three: Trusting that God will graciously restore you.

¹⁰After 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.

Did you notice how the LORD is described here? The God of all grace – that is to say, the God who is full of undeserved love and expresses it towards us. How? Even though we sinned and rebelled against him, he saved us in Christ Jesus – calling us to be coheirs of his eternal glory. To that end, he has been constantly working throughout history - not only by providing the Saviour but also by making sure we would hear the good news about what he has done, repent, and believe. Like a Shepherd searching for lost sheep, he sought us out and called us to himself – making us his own through Holy Baptism. He didn't do that to abandon us to the devil. No, he did it so we could share in his everlasting glory.

And our gracious God calls our sufferings temporary. Though our troubles may seem long-lasting, they will come to an end. Compared to the everlasting relief that is to come, *our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us^{vi}* at the end of time.

And what will our all-powerful God do for us who suffer? As Peter stated at the very beginning of our text, he will lift us up. He *will himself restore, establish, strengthen, and support you*.

Again, do you remember the account of Job? As the devil raged against him, it seemed his life was over – that he would never again enjoy the blessings God had formerly granted him. But when his sufferings ended, the LORD gave him more than before. The LORD lifted him up. And, as a branch becomes stronger after pruning, so Job's faith became stronger than before.

To be clear, God does not promise his restoration to be earthly in nature. Sometimes, the relief he grants is delivering a Christian's soul to his side in paradise – as he did for the many Christian martyrs who died under Nero's persecutions. That certainly was relief, as the apostle Paul once wrote, to depart and be with Christ is better by far.^{vii}

At the same time, the LORD often does restore a person even on this earth, a truth that can be seen in the accounts of Jacob, Joseph, Ruth, David, and many other Old Testament believers. And, as the LORD has been faithful to every promise he gave every believer in the past, he will be faithful to the promises he swore to you in Christ.

Therefore, dear Christian, **whenever your life seems to be falling apart**, humble yourself under God's powerful hand by casting all your anxieties on Him. Resist the devil by firmly believing everything God has promised you in Jesus, and then be still - trusting that God will graciously restore you in Christ just as he has done for every believer in the past. ¹¹*To him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.*

ⁱ Cf. Romans 8:28

ⁱⁱ Cf. Roman 8:32

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Romans 8:38

^{iv} Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13

^v Cf. Ephesians 6:10-18

^{vi} Romans 8:18 EHV

^{vii} Cf. Philippians 1:23