

REFORMATION SUNDAY

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

Here I Stand!

Mark 13:5-11

⁵ Jesus said to them: "Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains. ⁹ "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

The day is April 18th, 1521. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V spends another day presiding over the Diet, or congress, of Worms. It has been a tense four months for the newly-elected emperor. He has been in meetings with princes and rulers. He spent much time attempting to solidify peace in his land and legitimize his rule as the new king. But today all his attention is turned towards a renegade monk by the name of Martin Luther. This monk has been causing quite a stir in the land of Germany and Charles V would like to see this problem go away. That is why he invited Luther to come and address the Diet.

The day before, Luther had been asked two important questions. First, he was asked if the books which they had laid out before them, were indeed, written by him. These books were on a variety of topics. Some were uncontroversial writings about Christian faith and living. However, some books were very controversial as they contained a harsh condemnation of the pope and his church, which was oppressing its members with its false teaching of work righteousness. Luther did not deny that he had written these books. The second question he was asked was a more difficult one: would he be willing to recant, or take back, what he had said about the church in these books? Luther asked for more time to devise his answer to this serious question. The emperor relented and gave him twenty-four hours.

But now the time had come for Luther to speak up. Everyone at Worms was anxious to hear what he would say. Luther broke the silence of the hot, sticky meeting room in which they had gathered with a lengthy explanation of what his books contained and why he could not go back on what he said, even though he admitted he might have been somewhat too harsh at times in the way he said it. The emperor and his advisors were not sure if he had truly answered their question yet. And so they asked him to give them a plain, simple reply to whether or not he would be willing to recant what he had written and the supposed errors found in his books. This was a very important moment for Luther. The words he was about to speak would determine his future. Would he give in to the emperor's demands and recant his writings?

What a moment for Luther. What a moment for the Christian Church. Moments such as these, however, are not unique to the life of Martin Luther. Since the day Jesus ascended to heaven, his followers have been called time and time again to make a confession of their faith. Sometimes this happens in the face

of emperors or ruler, sometimes in the face of a single opponent of the gospel. This should not be a surprise. Jesus said that things like this would happen. In our gospel text today, Jesus speaks of the kind of confessions that his people will be called to make as they live in the last days.

The discussion that Jesus was having with his disciples really centered on the end times. It is appropriate that we look at these words now as this week we enter the End Times season of the church year. The disciples were interested in what things would be like for those living in the last days. Jesus gave this description from our text: *“Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.”*⁷ *When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.”*⁸ *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.”* Warring nations, natural disasters—these words of Jesus read like the front page of the Advocate. One can hardly doubt that we are living in these last days.

Another sign of the end times that Jesus points to is that God’s people will face persecution and be called to account for their faith. Jesus says: *“You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”* The disciples saw this fulfilled in their own lifetimes. The book of Acts is filled with stories of Jesus’ followers standing before councils and kings and speaking God’s truth amidst harsh opposition. As we heard the story of Martin Luther at the Diet of Worms, we know that these words also rang true in his own life. What about our lives? What kind of persecution do we face? We can’t imagine having to put our life on the line for God’s Word like the disciples or Luther. Yet could this one day happen even here in our own country? Could there be a day when I will preach a sermon from this pulpit with police officers waiting at the back of the church to arrest me for proclaiming the truth of God’s Word? It doesn’t seem likely. But realize the political climate we live in. Could there be a day when proclaiming the truth that the Allah of Islam is not God, but rather an idol, goes from being politically incorrect to being a criminal action? That could happen.

But we don’t have to look to future situations to find an example of standing up for God’s Word. Perhaps you haven’t been dragged in front of a king lately, but have you come face to face with someone that opposes or ridicules the Christian faith? Do you have a friend or fellow employee that thinks some parts of the Bible are foolish? Have you overheard conversations that you know are really offensive to the Scriptures? These are your opportunities to stand up for God’s Word—even if you feel uncomfortable or afraid to do so. Have you taken advantage of every one of these opportunities? Or have you acted at times more like you are ashamed of the gospel? I don’t know about you, but there is more than one moment in my life that I wish I could live over. Times when I knew I should say something but kept my mouth shut.

It’s hard, isn’t it? But it doesn’t have to be. Listen to the advice that Jesus gives the disciples about what to do when these kinds of moments come up: *“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”* Jesus assured the disciples that they did not have to be afraid or be silent when they were given the opportunity to speak. The words they needed they would be given by the Spirit. We see this promise being fulfilled more than once. Think of Peter at Pentecost. There were those that jeered and ridiculed the apostles. Yet Peter was able to preach perhaps the most important sermon in his life, giving a daring defense of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Think of Paul brought before Caesar. His clear confession of faith landed him a spot in jail. And the end result of these

occasions was exactly what Jesus said would happen when he said: “*The gospel must first be preached to all nations.*” God used the witness of these Christians to further spread his Word to the world.

This is the ultimate goal of your own witness—that the gospel may be preached to all nations. But before you can do that, you must first preach the gospel to yourself. Let this truth sink deep into your heart: you have been forgiven in Jesus Christ. Every missed opportunity in your life has been washed clean by the blood of your Savior. What a difference that makes. You don’t need to leave church with your head hung low, weighed down by guilt. You can walk out of here with your head held high because you know that you are a forgiven child of God. This is not because of the works that you have done or the words that you have spoken, it is because Jesus loved you so much he did the works for you and spoke the words that you needed to speak. The perfection that God demands from you is the very perfection that God gives you through Jesus. This is the truth that started Martin Luther down the road to the Reformation. This is the truth that can lead you to speak out for your Savior as well.

As we close, we return to that scene at Worms with Luther standing before the emperor. What will he say? By God’s grace this was his reply: “*Since your majesty and your lordships want a simple, clear and true answer, I will give it. Unless I am convinced by the teachings of Holy Scripture or by sound reasoning—for I do not believe either the pope or councils alone, since they have often made mistakes and even said the exact opposite about the same point—I am tied by the Scriptures I have quoted and by my conscience. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither safe nor right. Here I stand. God help me! Amen.*”¹

You don’t need to be afraid. When the situation arises, God will give you words to say as well. Pray that the Lord would give you many opportunities to defend his name as long as you live. And when those opportunities arise, don’t shrink back. Speak God’s Word with the same conviction as the Christian martyrs of years gone by. Pray for the words to speak and then speak them boldly. And with God’s spirit living in you and working through you, you can say confidently, “Here I stand. God help me!” **Amen.**

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¹ Frederick Nohl, *Luther: Biography of a Reformer*, Saint Louis: Concordia, 2003, pp. 106-107.