

Pentecost 14, 2009  
Good Hope Lutheran Church

This morning, rather than just focus on one of our Scripture lessons, I am instead going to refer to all three of them. All three of them—we have Isaiah, we have Mark, we have James—keep them *all* handy, and read them *all* over again here, and at home later too; and the Lord be with you.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, you have made good and gracious promises to those who put their trust in you. Help us this day, to simply believe those promises. Give us faith, and based on the faith, let us now begin to experience a measure of peace, and hope, and even happiness. In the midst of it all Father, despite everything that this world dishes out—if you have us and we have you, then we have everything; and will forever. Remind us of that now, and whenever we're feeling down; Jesus in your name, AMEN.

Often on Labor Day weekend, I might say something in a sermon about, you know, the significance of choosing a career and, the importance of getting a job; how the Lord expects us all to work and work hard and how He wants to bless the fruits of our labor and so forth, traditional Labor Day stuff. But with unemployment in Hancock County running at 10% and no relief in sight, that all seems a bit awkward, I think. 10% unemployment, and that of course is only counting the people who are out of work and still looking. Add to that figure those who are underemployed; those who have jobs but have seen their hours cut, their wages reduced, their benefits trimmed; and those who have simply given up looking for a job and so aren't even counted anymore. You get the picture. Talking about the

Scriptural emphasis on work is kind of tough right now, so on this Labor Day weekend: Is there another message from the Bible we can share instead?

Glad you asked. As a matter of fact there are several apt words for us on this day, all of them found in this morning's lessons.

#1, begin with a word of hope. That's the message of Isaiah 35—hope! As it is written, Be strong, and do not fear. Be strong, do not fear, because God has you in His care and keeping, and God will not let you go. God will come, and save you.

Now Isaiah doesn't say *when* God will come to save you, I'll give you that. He doesn't attempt to disguise how long it might take, or sugarcoat how tight things could get in the meantime. Instead, Isaiah simply recognizes, that there are times and seasons in life that are going to be very hard, for all of us, and this may be one of them. It may simply be our turn, don't be surprised; don't think or feel God is picking on you. Tragedies great and small happen in this world all the time, to us too, we know that; but no fear. No fear, because there is a God who sees, and who knows, and who really does care. A God who also of course, is ultimately in control. The one who died and rose again beat sin and death and the devil, He can see you through this world to life everlasting. So yes, He can see you through an illness, or a

family crisis. He can see you through an addiction, or a bad habit; or a bad choice. He can certainly see you through a recession too. You know you belong to God. You know what God can do, you know He keeps His promises. So be strong, even now, and do not fear; only hope. For you know what God has promised, and you know what our God can do.

Second word today from the Bible, the Gospel lesson, and the woman who *persisted* in pestering Jesus, she *persisted*, till she got what she wanted. This is an interesting text, and it raises more questions than I can even begin to answer now. But, in our lives today, the example of this woman is kind of a prod to us, isn't it? In other words, whatever it is that's got you down, don't just sit there feeling sorry for yourself, but *persist*, in doing what needs to be done! *Persist*, in making the effort. Trust God, fear not, but understand that faith is not a substitute for responsible planning, or mature decision making. Faith is not a substitute for personal effort and accountability. "God is ultimately in control"—a true statement, and never forget that, you will find great hope and comfort in knowing that and believing it. But you have to understand, it does not mean, you get to quit trying.

Now you may have days when you want to quit. So do I, and for the record so did Jesus. Let those days come, and go, and then with the help of God get back up and back at it once again, the word of God from Isaiah for us today

is hope. The word of God from the Gospel lesson, is persist, in doing what is right; persist, and don't quit trying. Not today anyhow.

Third word from God, from the epistle of James, it's a question really.

What is it you really want in life anyway? What is it you most desire? Is it money?—listen, says James, money frankly is not what it's cracked up to be. You need money in this world, obviously, and no one knows that better than those who are laid off and unemployed; but look around. Is it not the poor in this world who most often are rich in faith? And is it not the case that those rich in things, often find the stuff getting in the way of faith? Haven't we seen that, in our own lives? If you want a closer walk with the Lord and, we say that here all the time. But if you want a closer walk with the Lord then do you suppose it's possible. That tough economic times or some other crisis in life. Is maybe God's way of taking you up on it? "You want a closer walk with me?" says the Lord. "Well here's your chance! The chips are down, so come learn to rely on me like you've always said you wanted to! Come learn to rely on *me* today—not on the money, not on the 401k, rely only on me!—let these tough times," God says, "be the start of something better by far."

So, to anyone living through difficult days, economically or otherwise, the word of God for us is #1, Hope. #2, Persist. #3, Rely on the Lord, for daily bread yes. But also for that which is better by far. And above all. The

Word of God for us is and always will be Jesus Christ, His Son our Savior, who died on a cross to forgive our sins and who then rose from the dead to save us. The word of God is love and mercy and life—life full and free, starting now, lasting forever—may you hear that word, and be lifted by it in good times certainly. But may you be lifted even more, in times like these.

And it is in the name of Jesus Christ that we pray, AMEN.

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