

Sermon during Matins on Hebrews 12:1-7

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all +

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.” Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?” (Heb 12:1-7 NIV)

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” (1Jo 3:8 NIV) That was his mission. That was his calling. He did that and he completed this task, finished him off, tied him down and pulled his teeth. He’s no more than a prowling lion, whose roar still terrifies, but one single word can fell him: IX and him crucified. This Jesus Christ is with us. Therefore we have to fear no ill – neither in good nor in bad times. He is with us (Immanuel) and there is no way, anybody or anything is going to snatch us from his hand. He is greater than all and everything. All power in heaven and earth has been given to him. He is at the right hand of the Father. He rules and reigns in eternity – and all knees shall bow to him and all tongues will confess that IX is Lord. Together with the Augsburg Confession we unanimously believe, teach and confess: “... afterward He ascended into heaven that He might sit on the right hand of the Father, and forever reign and have dominion over all creatures, and sanctify them that believe in Him, by sending the Holy Ghost into their hearts, to rule, comfort, and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin.” (CA III) He truly is the author, pioneer and perfecter of our faith. Him we are to love, trust and fear above all things. Him together with the Father and the Holy Spirit – one God and divine and most delightful, wholesome and beloved Trinity now and forever. Therefore fear no ill. Take heart and be confident. Your brother IX is ruling in your favour. He is on your side. Quite partisan. He’s your friend, your bloodbrother, your one and only.

Now – and this might come as a shock to you and even surprise some of you – that’s not the end of the road. That’s not the end of trouble for you nor of temptations and hard times. No, remember Jesus Christ your Lord – after his glorious and most awesome baptism there at the Jordan? Well, what happened? He was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit to be tempted by the devil: 40 days and 40 nights. That must have been a

hard time. If you think Martin Luther was going through deep waters as you saw in the film, that was nothing against those devilish troubles our Lord had to withstand. It didn't stop then either once the devil left him and the angels served him. No, the devil would come again and again until the very end, tempting and trying to dissuade him from going faithfully to suffer and die in Jerusalem. He would try by sly means, by hook or by crook, by force or by feigned affection and sympathy – but always to try and trip up Jesus, make him waver, make him fall, make him fail. However IX would not waver, and even when he fell on the way to Golgotha it was not sinful, faithless or despairing of God's love and goodness. He stood up and was obedient to very death, to death on the cross. There he our Lord was not defeated, rather he triumphed in his death and dying and thus conquered death, sin and the devil. The old evil foe was ruined for good left hanging out to dry after our Lord's magnificent victory there on Golgotha. Jesus harrowed hell, there is no place for the devil to hide. He's vanquished. He's finished, but IX lives and rules and reigns – for you and your salvation - and don't you forget it! He's the rock of your life, your most precious treasure, your hope and salvation, your all and everything.

You however don't give up, when you grow tired. Don't throw in the towel. Don't despair. Rather look up and see. There are a lot of good reasons to persevere and to continue in the race that is laid out in front of you. As a baptized child of God, you've got a race to run, a life to live and a very high and precious calling to follow. It is still day and your heavenly Father wants you to do him proud, follow his will, live according to his laws and precepts, love, fear and trust him above all things and your neighbour as yourself. You'll see, that where you want to seriously follow Christ with earnest will and determination, the devil, the world and even your own selfish self will revolt and try to get you off course, get you entangled in other things, make you forget your high and precious calling and lastly to give up following Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, to suffer much even as you live faithfully as a Christian. Well, the letter to the Hebrews mentions a few things, which you should then do:

1. Throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. That's the good sense behind any diet, of fasting and giving up on this and that excess baggage you carry around with you. Throw it off, discard and get rid of what hinders and entangles. Especially take the opportunity to confess your sins that you know and feel in your heart and that are burdening your conscience, confess them and believe in God's forgiveness granted in the absolution under laying on of hands! In the Lord's Supper, in your holy Baptism! The Lord has freed you, don't be caught up again in the old and past things and matters.
2. Run with perseverance, fix your eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Look at the cross. Look at Jesus and remember, what he did for you: For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Instead of staying in heaven, he came down to earth and suffered vicariously for us, in our stead, so that we might go

free. Imprint this image of the victorious Christ on the cross on your heart and mind, let it impress you, form you and create you in his very image and kind.

3. Consider him IX who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. He was not disheartened by the animosity of his enemies. Even when they hit and tortured him, he did not give up due to this opposition. Rather he prayed: "Father forgive them, for they know not, what they are doing!" Therefore don't hate your enemies. Rather pray for those that persecute you and bless them, that curse you – and you will heap burning coals on their heads.
4. Remember: In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. Don't think that you've come to the end of it already. You are in for considerably more. Up to now You still cruising on "easy going" – remember the cloud of martyrs, all the saints and Christian fathers & mothers in the faith – then and even today. Consider their faith, their hope, their love – and follow their good example. They are not our saviours, but they are good examples. Therefore honour them and hold them in high regard, but don't expect help or salvation from them. That honour, veneration and trust is due only to Christ. He's a good example too, but still more, he's the sacrament of God – he for us – the vicarious sacrifice, the propitiation for our sins, the lamb of God slaughtered for us and for the forgiveness of all our sins. Count your blessings that you are not yet persecuted to the point of bloodshed like the martyrs or like Christ, but remember it can happen to the very best in the Church. It's not a sign of their eventual loss or them being finally vanquished or beaten by Satan and his ilk, but rather that they were esteemed worthy to serve the Lord in this high and precious calling of martyrdom. They that have washed their garments in the blood of the lamb will be resurrected on that final day and they will be gathered around the throne of the living lamb of God and they will sing his praises without end – and you're called to join in – now already. Therefore take heart and courage. You've got a high calling for sure.
5. And remember above all: You are sons and daughters of the heavenly Father. Princes and princesses true! He loves you dearly. He's not going to lose you, but keep and bless you as the very apple of his eye. Therefore "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." Therefore endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?" Amen.

The peace of the Lord be with you always + Amen.

Hymn 716: *I walk in danger all the way...*