

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost  
9 July 2025  
Text: Matthew 11:25-30  
Theme: The Reason for Hope

Prayer: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

1A People often wonder what I do as a Navy Chaplain. I do two main things. I take the Word and the Sacrament to Christians who are cut off from their own congregations and unable to receive the Means of Grace. I also help people learn to draw on their spiritual strength to help them fight and win with honor. And some of those people are very, very far from knowing God. Some of them don't even believe that they have a soul or a spirit to engage.

1B They ask me what I even mean when I'm talking about the spirit and I take baby steps with them. I tell them that no matter what they think about the existence of God or an immortal human soul, that the spirit is the part of human being that has the capacity for hope. It is that part of us which can press toward something better. Zechariah speaks to this in our OT lesson for today when he call the people of Israel "prisoners of hope." What a fascinating turn of phrase...

2A What a fascinating reading. This little section of Zechariah comes up a lot in our lives. We read it during Advent. We read it during Lent. We're reading it here in the heat of summer. When we hear it we can't help but be reminded of the triumph of Easter and the peace of Christmas time. But spring has passed. Winter is a long way off. And we can be forgiven for being, quite frankly, a little confused about why we're reading this text hot on the heels of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Its even more weird, in some ways, that it comes hot on the heels of last weeks readings.

2B Last week Jesus telling us that He had come to bring not, "peace, but a sword." And this week we're back to "peace to the nations" and cutting off of chariots, war horses, and battle bows. Last week Jesus was admonishing us to lose our lives for His sake and to take up our crosses. This week were back to rest for our souls and we're being told that our yokes will be

easy our burdens will be light. There's a kind of whiplash here that we can't ignore. But there is one thing that is very much the same between this week's reading and last week's. That is St. Paul's continuing screed about the limits of the Law.

2C He gives a real and honest voice to the confusion we feel. Just listen again to what he says in verse 16. "Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, and that is good."

What?! Whiplash! How is his spiritual schizophrenia a good thing? How is ours? And how does he manage to stick these two sentences back-to-back with nothing in between them? "Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" We Christians believe and have always believed that the Word of God is inspired in the authors by the Holy Ghost and that it is God speaking to us through them. Whatever St. Paul is telling us must be true. And we can see, that although confusing, it is both true and honest.

3A St. Paul is saying when we're all feeling. That we are surrounded by constant conflict. We are surrounded by the enemies of God. We have, in fact, been overrun. We have surrendered to the devil, the world, and our own flesh. We have even, as St. Paul admits of himself, sided with them against our Lord and Savior. We have been overcome by sin. But God has in no way been overcome. We are in conflict and we are conflicted. He is attacked but in no danger. And He is definitely not confused about what He should or will do. We are at war with ourselves and crying out to be delivered from our dying and deadly bodies. God is so sure of Himself and so devoted to us, that takes on our bodies and becomes truly and fully human while remaining God.

3B I have a deep sympathy for people who are so lost or in such pain that they wish, like St. Paul, to be delivered from their own bodies. My heart goes out to them. If you have ever been in real pain or felt truly lost, you can't help but find sympathy. And I am so sad for people who are suffering like that and don't know where there help will come from. They look for hope in

transhumanism, the prospect of trading in their bodies for machine parts. They look for hope in transgenderism, the prospect of finding comfort in a different kind of body. They look for hope in mind altering drugs or even in suicide, anything that will prevent them from existing the way they do. They aren't wrong for looking for a way out, they're just looking in the wrong places.

That's what St. Paul means when he pivots from "Who will deliver me from this body of death?" right into "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

3C Who will deliver us from our bodies death who could deliver us from our bodies of death other than Jesus Christ the incarnate Son of God? There is hope. There is a way out. There can be peace and rest and life at the same time. Before we can enjoy that peace though, we must acknowledge that it can come from no where but the cross. It won't come from any of the things we've already mentioned and won't come from any of the things that we here in this nave are tempted to try. We will not find our hope or any peace in the rise and fall of nations, even our own, nor will we find it in self-discipline or stoicism, or clever self-justifications, or self-help books, or divorce, or a new town, or a new wardrobe, or in over-eating, or in drinking too much, or in work or in money or in willful ignorance or in denial or in blaming others for our unhappiness. None of these dead ends offer any more hope than the self-destructions we talked about earlier.

4A St. Peter has something to say about this. He joins St. Paul in talking to us about how to deal with suffering; the suffering we endure as well as the suffering we cause. He talks about it in the third chapter of his first epistle and, interestingly, he leads into this section by talking about marriage. Keep that in mind while you listen to his inspired message. I Peter 3:14... 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to

make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. 17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

4B Our reason for hope and our expectation of peace, even in this conflicted world, and within these bodies of death, is found in the birth, life, death, and resurrection, of Jesus Christ. His entire existence and His every deed reveal the goodness and grace of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. All we can learn from Jesus is that God is good. That God will love us no matter what. That He will forgive any and every sin.

4C He is so good, He is so generous, He is so gracious, that we actually want to please Him and do His will. This is why St. Paul finds it encouraging that he at least wants to do good even when He can't find the strength. That is already a change being wrought in us. And it points to more and better changes to come. We hate our sins and we pray for the strength to resist them more and more but we are not afraid of them as we would be if we didn't know they were forgiven. We know our sins have already been forgiven and that gives us courage. The law kill

sus but the Gospel encourages us and gives us life and strength. It makes us daring.

5A St. Peter can't help but talk about baptism when He talks about suffering. No saint living or in glory can talk about death without talking about the resurrection nor can we talk about dying without talking about the body and blood of Christ given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. We can't talk about sins without talking about absolution. And we don't just talk about things we receive them and share them among ourselves. We eat and drink them. We speak them to one another. We are washed by them and live in them and confess them in word and deed on a daily basis.

5B God is good and God is victorious. Whatever we are suffering or inflicting will pass away and God will turn it something blessed for those who love Him. And in the meantime, we are made bold and courageous. We are less afraid of conflicts either within or without. Our faith in Christ, feed by the Holy Ghost on Word and Sacrament makes us willing to imitate Christ, to be humble, to be gentle, to be long-suffering, sympathetic and generous, to be winsomely kind even to our enemies. When St. Paul writes to the Galatians he says it this way. The Holy Ghost fills us with "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things," Paul says, "there is no law." These are the ways in which we Christians confess Christ and against such a confession, not even the gates of hell can prevail. Amen. RISE. The Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.