

Luke 12:51 The road is rough on the way to peace. Pentecost 13 August 22, 2010

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

God's Word to encourage us to stay strong during difficult times is written in Luke 12:51

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth that we trust You to help us. Your Word is truth.

Dear Friends, in Christ's peace,

The word peace may be described in many ways, but today let's relate the word peace to traveling down a road. Perfect peace in traveling terms would be: riding in well-running vehicle on a smooth newly paved highway without another car or deer in sight. Unfortunately, the highways we drive are not usually like that nor are our lives as Christians that trouble-free. Life does not run smoothly. The road seems rough and uphill. And oncoming traffic is trying to run us off the road. Our goal as Christians is to reach heaven, the place with peace which is beyond any description in this world. Our challenge is to stay on the way with Christ and to not be detoured and end our lives in a wreck. Our theme is:

The road is rough on the way to peace.

First, Jesus warned His followers that trouble was coming. He said, "*Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. There will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three.*" (v.51-52) God wants members of a family to be close to each other. But, that unity is often lost when some become believers and others do not. Division replaces unity. This is nothing new. The first children mentioned in the Bible had conflict because one believed and the other didn't. It led Cain to murder Abel. Another example is the Apostle Paul. He wrote that some family members became believers before him. (Romans 16) Think how fearful they must have been while Paul was still Saul the persecutor! Perhaps his relatives were tempted to give up their faith in Christ rather than face Saul's inquisition. But, whatever they would have gained in peace on earth they would have lost in heaven. Today, it's still tempting for Christians to give up believing or to stop expressing their faith or going to worship in order to satisfy unbelievers. But, to give up Christ and an eternity of peace is too great a price to pay.

In this world there will always be opposition to Christians by many people who have good intentions. I believe that many people who oppose Christian teaching are convinced that they are on their god's side. When Saul was persecuting believers, he thought that he was doing God a favor. Later, many of the Romans persecuted Christians because they thought their gods were offended by Christians and that their gods sent draughts or plagues on their land because Christians didn't honor them. No wonder they wanted Christians dead or harmed.

Today, many people still think that Christians are intolerant people. They say that we should not take God's Word so literally and that we should be silent about God as the Creator of the world, silent about the miracles of the Bible, and silent about Jesus as the Son of God who is the only way to heaven. They want us to be inclusive with all people no matter what they do or teach. They say, just accept practicing homosexuals, accept unmarried couples living together, accept drunkenness, lying, and false teaching. But, we cannot do this. These things lead people from the road to life to eternal judgment. We must warn them out of love for them and for Christ. It is not better to be at peace with people and let them be lost. We want everyone to be on the road to heaven by God's way. Since we cannot compromise God's truth and not everyone will listen, it is inevitable that unbelievers will oppose us and what we believe.

This should not surprise us since it happened to Jesus. During His ministry He had many people try to get in the way of His work. Even some of His own family tried to stop Him from preaching because they thought He had lost His mind. Jesus said, "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world.... If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.*" (John 15:18-20) Jesus wasn't purposely looking for trouble. Yet, in our verses He called His suffering a fire

that He wished would soon kindled. So for us, if we follow God's Word as we should, the trouble will find us. We also will wish the Lord's coming to be soon when He will take us home to full peace and freedom from this rough road of life.

Second, Jesus knew that the rough road would be for our good. If we are experiencing trouble from unbelievers it is a sign that we are on the right road. If no one was unhappy with us because of the way we judge or speak, we might wonder if we were being faithful to God and on our way to heaven at all. Jesus warned, "*Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.*" (Matthew 7:13-14) Jesus followed God's plan for Him despite the unbelievers plotting against Him. He knew that in the end God would give Him the victory. And we have that same confidence in Christ. He promised, "*I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33) We are not to lose heart as we travel down the road of life, rather in Christ we gain strength for what is ahead.

Also, knowing the rough road we face, Christ has given Christians fellowship with each other. God's main purpose for the Church is to proclaim the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. And we work together to share the Good News! God's Word is such a great encouragement for all who take it to heart! Christ also has given us other Christians for encouragement. The Bible states, "*Carry each other's burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.*" (Galatians 6:2) Again the Bible states, "*Two are better than one...: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)* We are one family in Christ, imperfect but forgiven. As people worsen toward the end of the world it is urgent that we have love for each other and that we pray for each other. We are going to be oppressed more and more by the world which seeks to mislead us. So we need to stand by each other to keep us looking to Christ and to eternal life with Him.

Last, we know the rough road is for our benefit because Jesus went down the same road. If Jesus had not come, all people would have continued in their sin until Judgment Day. Jesus knew that the only way to get us off the road to hell and on to the road to eternal peace was for Him to walk the road that led to death. Jesus was described in the Old Testament as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). He not only rules in peace, He gives peace to all who trust in Him. He promised His followers, "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*" (John 14:27) Jesus' peace is certain because He satisfied the justice of God for sins. Our innocent Savior carried the burden of our sins and of God's punishment. Through His payment on the cross He made peace with God for us. Jesus now freely offers us peace which will continue forever in heaven.

This was the reason that Jesus said, "*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!*" (v.49-50) Jesus' fire and baptism are really speaking about the same thing. He knew that He had to complete His work to save us even though it included the most intense suffering that anyone would ever experience. He wished that it was already done so that He could proclaim to the world that He had won an eternal life of peace as a gift.

By faith in Christ we will continue to travel down the road that leads to that eternal peace. Life is rough, but Christ is with us. And by His Word He daily renews our strength. As the world draws nearer to its end, let us stand together so that we do not fall or get discouraged. Rather we can extend the Word of Christ as a light for others to see God's eternal peace. Amen.