

O Lord, You are Master of the stormy winds and alone can order them to be still: Be with us in all the voyages of our life; for our boat is small and the ocean is wide. When the winds are contrary, give us to know that You rule the raging of the sea; and when our faith is little and we cry to You out of the midst of our fears, hear our prayers and grant us Your peace; for the glory of Your great name. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 48)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

In Christ Jesus, who always remained single-minded in His perfect obedience to the Father for us, dear fellow redeemed:

How did you count your last trial in this life to be a joy? Was it a severe health issue? Did it leave you in joy? How about at the death of your loved one, was there much joy there? Have you suffered from depression lately, did that leave you smiling?

When Job lost all his children and all his wealth in one day, he was able to say: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Do you detect the joy in those words? When David learned of the death of his son born of Bathsheba, conceived in adultery, and knowing this tragic result was a consequence of his sin, he was able to rise up from mourning and say about his son: "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me." Do you detect the joy after experiencing that trial. When Paul hears that after asking three times his thorn in the flesh would not be removed, he said: "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses." Do you hear the joy?

So it is not unreasonable to hear: "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds". Not with exuberant joy, but in confident joy living under the cross with our Lord Jesus in this life of corruption and decay, we are taught that **Trials Test Trust.**

# I

All such testing is good as trust is strengthened in the only One who keeps all His promises of life. Think of some of the testing you go through in your everyday life: fire drills, earthquake drills, lahar warnings, active shooter drills, first aid responses, the Heimlich

maneuver. How do these make you stronger? You prepare for these terrible events, which usually elicit terror and panic. The more you practice what you are to do under those stressful times you are strengthened in your confidence to carry out what you have been taught without distractions; steadfastness is produced when needed.

Now trials in themselves do not strengthen our faith, but they place us in positions so we Christians have nowhere else to turn, except to our one way of salvation, namely Christ Jesus our Savior. Where is He only to be found? - in the Gospel, as it comes to us in His Word and Sacrament. One of our Lutheran hymn writers, Paul Gerhardt, captures this truth in our hymn #377:

Why should cross and trial grieve me?  
 Christ is near With His cheer;  
 Never will He leave me,  
 Who can rob me of the heaven  
 That God's Son For my own  
 To my faith hath given?

Though a heavy cross I'm bearing  
 And my heart Feels the smart,  
 Shall I be despairing?  
 God, my Helper, who doth send it,  
 Well doth know All my woe  
 And how best to end it.

God oft gives me days of gladness;  
 Shall I grieve If He give  
 Seasons too, of sadness?  
 God is good and tempers ever  
 All my ill, And He will  
 Wholly leave me never.

All our spiritual enemies would seek to convince us when we are in the midst of the times of our sadness that God does not love us, that He is finally giving us our just desserts for all the evil things we have done, said and thought. One of those enemies is so very close to everyone of us, namely our own sinful flesh.

Our Lord does not bring such trials into our lives with the goal of tempting us to sin and to fall away, but through them to be strengthened. Suffering drives the Christian to draw near to Jesus. In

the day of trouble we realize how much we are dependent upon Him. We then find Him to be the ever-present help in need, sympathetic and mindful of our well-being. Knowing His gracious heart, we say boldly: *"If it be Your will"* trusting it is always good and gracious.

## II

Doubt is the enemy of trust. The seat of all our doubts would be our sinful natures. So we are warned: "the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

Now, of course, our doubts rise to the surface very quickly in the heat of the moment of trial. While Jesus was asleep in the boat, the disciples in our Gospel lesson, cried out to Jesus in the midst of the storm, they prayed: "Save us, Lord; we are perishing." Were they exhibiting doubt? – to be sure. Jesus even comments on it: "Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?" How would you have fared in that boat with Jesus sleeping? My guess is that we would all be afraid.

So did these doubts negate their faith? No, as Jesus observed, they had "little" faith, but faith they still had. What was it that they were doubting? They doubted that Jesus was really concerned about them, since He remained slumbering when the waves came crashing down upon them. They doubted that even if He were awake they could be saved from the storm by Him, for after He calms the winds and the sea they responded, saying: "What sort of man is this, that even winds and sea obey Him?"

You have doubts, unless you are never found to fret and worry in this life. Contrary to the papacy, doubts are not virtues. Doubting God's love and care is sin, clearly condemned not only here in our text but in many other places. When we do not trust our Lord and His Word, we are accusing Him of being a liar. This is no small matter. It was there already in the first temptation to sin, when Satan said to Eve: "Did God actually say?" When she responded that if she ate of the forbidden fruit God told them that they would die, Satan again contradicted God by saying: "You will not surely die."

Placing your trust in someone or something else other than the Triune God is idolatry. We may imagine that idolatry is worshipping some inanimate object, like a golden calf or the Baals. That could be of course, Israel was found doing this while trying to worship the one true God at the same time. Our idolatry today is often more subtle. God our Creator makes it abundantly clear that He is a jealous God, He will not share His glory with anything or anyone else. Are you trusting in your saving account, or retirement investments? Or have

you bought a lottery ticket lately and have said: "If I win, all my troubles will be solved!" Then you are guilty of idolatry.

Our level of trust in God can be measured by our love for Him. Jesus spoke of this when He declared: "Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me." But what about adult children who wander from the faith, do we compromise the Word of God to please them in their wrong thinking, so that they do not reject and leave us? If we do, we love them more than we do our Lord.

We must all admit that we have failed many times when under severe trial, so that we did not trust in our Lord's promise of love and everlasting protection. However, the Lord Jesus was perfect in His trust in His Father. The best example of that trust in the most severe of all trials for Jesus was when on the cross He suffered our hell, crying out – "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Then still confidently trusting in His Father's will for our salvation, Jesus said: "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Then bowing His head He breathed His last and died for us, trusting His sacrifice was sufficient to fulfill the will of the Father.

During your times of problems, suffering, sorrows difficulties, misery, frustration, know that you stand right and holy before the Father in heaven for Jesus' sake. What you are experiencing is not punishment for your sins. Jesus was punished for all your sins. Even when you must speak similarly to the father who approached Jesus in behalf of his demon possessed son and said: "Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief.", know that to say this, your trial has tested your trust and by God's grace produced within you steadfastness. *"Lord, let all rejoice who trust in You, let them shout for joy because You defend them."* Amen.