

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Mark 13:1-8 & Hebrews 10

How do we as people of faith hold fast in times of trouble or uncertainty?

Let us hold fast to our confession of faith – for He is faithful. When we don't we lose sight of all that is truly strong, and just look at the glitz instead of the sacrifice. Where we put our trust – in the One who is faithful.

A preacher once told me that he went to visit a member in the hospital. Her prognosis wasn't good, she was upset and not getting out of the hospital anytime soon. As they talked together, he noticed a People magazine on the bed tray. Without passing judgement, he asked her if he might bring her a Bible. "No I don't think so," she said, "I've got my magazines and my phone. I'll be alright."

The pastor pressed just a bit harder. "Well I'm thinking about some Bible verses that you might like to read, which could give you some comfort."

Now a bit embarrassed, that her own pastor is trying to pass off a Bible on her, she had a change of mind. "Sure, that would be great."

He left the room, wondering how she was going to get through her physical trial. Glamour and glitz doesn't have much staying power.

How do we hold fast? What do you hold fast to? When life hits a foul ball on our turf, what are the things or people or faith we hold on to?

Just a couple of words for context. We know the Jewish temple was destroyed by Rome around 70 or 72. Mark's Gospel was written about this time. So looking backwards, the author is remembering the chaos, the crisis, the community who has lost its center of worship, is wondering whether God is still with them, when Jesus says in response to the disciples, "Not one of these stones will stay standing."

In some ways, we live in a day similar to that of the community of Mark.

Right here in Loveland, our community might not have suffered much this last week. But parts of our country endured chaos. Out west, the pictures of the California fire reflect a true Paradise lost. The city of Paradise is no more. It has

been reduced to charred ashes and lost lives. There were beautiful buildings there; homes, shops, schools, people living a regular life. No more – not one of those buildings will remain standing and the death toll rises.

Out East – inches of snow stopped a city in her tracks as passengers waited hours for a subway train. Cars sat idling on a major interstate, into the night, making school children sleep in their buildings instead of in beds. People were frustrated. Cars ran out of gas. A city that never sleeps came to a standstill.

Down South, people are coming to the border looking for a new life fleeing governmental powers that seek to harm them and they cannot get through. The borders are being secured for safety fearing what would happen to their cities if immigrants enter.

What is made of human hands: homes, buildings, subways, fences, will not stand. Bulldozers can come and knock them down in minutes. What gets built with human hands can easily succumb to the power of nature, the power of chaos. Machines and systems which are supposed to help humanity – to assist in making life easier, simply don't always work. We take for granted that which works – all the systems which hold our safety; even when it becomes apparent that nothing is solid, nothing is permanent, nothing can hold us forever. Then what holds us?

Is all lost?

The disciples are supposed to be standing strong, keeping the faith with their own rabbi, and teacher, Jesus. He's told them at least a million times that the cross is out in front just waiting for Him to get there. But they come into the city and all they can mumble is, "Wow! What large stones these are!" It seems, they too, succumb to noticing the glitz and the glamor of the day instead of the sacrifice their Lord is about to make on their behalf.

Because what a sacrifice it will be!

In the Hebrews text, we hear that priests would stand day after day, again and again, offering sacrifices for the people of God. But all that changed with Jesus. Now He, and He alone, has offered Himself, through an amazing act of love to die for God's people. This changes everything.

Now all of us, not only the priests and clergy can enter into God's house for worship and prayers. We get to come to the Holy of Holiest of spaces for

forgiveness and redemption. And in doing so, we hold fast to our confession of faith – the confession of our hope!

Many of us have never lost our house to a fire or a hurricane. I know a woman who did. Perhaps she had a breakdown when I never saw her, but she stayed as calm as a cucumber on a hot summer day. “It’s just stuff! It can all be replaced.”

I guarantee that she was reading her Bible and People magazine.

How do people of faith hold onto our confession of hope while we live in a troubled world? We take into our very souls, the next verse of Hebrews 10:23. For He who has promised is faithful!

God is faithful! God is faithful! Although the disciples did pause to ask Jesus, “Oh really? When will these things come to be, this destruction you are talking about?” They continued to gaze upon that which couldn’t ever save them. Peter denied Jesus, the rest deserted him. They worried about their own selves and the ‘large stones’ of life!

It’s intriguing to me that we hear this text right before Thanksgiving. On Thursday, hopefully we will all have someone to be with and enjoy a meal. At the very core of Thanksgiving, it just that! Giving thanks! Counting our blessings. Remembering that every blessing comes down from above and is not of our own doing or creating! God blesses us!

And then we push back from that lovely table with bellies full and turn right back to all that glitters. Football games – the god – of many. Shop, shop, shopping on Black Friday. The church she already has her Black Friday and we call it good. It has nothing to do with shopping. And I’ve done it myself, what deals can I find on Black Friday and Cyber Monday! Oh, Jesus, what large stones these are!

God has grace for us too. For He whom we hope in is always faithful. God will help us hold fast to our confession of hope. To hold onto God’s hope in Jesus Christ, we follow the advice found in the Hebrews lesson. Provoke one another to love and good deeds. Meet together. Encouraging one another!

This friends, is how we as people of faith, stay faithful when everything that glitters, isn’t gold. Provoke one another to good deeds and love. Stay the course. Be true to God who loves us!

Then, meet together! Do you know that people who go to church have lower blood pressure on average than folks who don't? We do! Do you know that we're happier with our lives! We're more apt to volunteer and contribute to the community? We are!

Meet together! Encourage one another! Where have you seen God lately? When you don't want to turn on the news anymore, ask that question of yourself. With little children we call them God sightings. With adults, we call it a prayer of examine. Where have we seen God lately? Name it! Claim it! Tell about it!

I guarantee you'll feel better after this kind of reflection, than simply reading People magazine! Although God loves all those Hollywood stars as much as God loves you.

People of faith – God is faithful – even when we aren't. Hold fast! Confess the faith. Meet together. Put love into practice! And be thankful. Amen.