



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Minnesota South District

... cultivating leaders intentionally engaged in the mission of God

May 29, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

Greetings to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who sends us the Helper, His Spirit of truth!

Jesus said, **“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33b, ESV). This is how John 16 ends. Without question, we are experiencing trouble and tribulation in our world right now. Not only are we plagued by a pandemic and all the fear, sickness, and death that come from it, we also have economic uncertainty, job insecurity, and political strife. And now we’ve been cut to the heart by yet another disturbing video of a public servant abusing his power, resulting in yet another untimely and heartbreaking death, which has been followed by yet another series of peaceful protests mixed with destructive riots—in our own Twin Cities.

We are experiencing tribulation.

Yet the words of Jesus point us toward the hope we can have amid this turmoil and tribulation. Not to be taken as some patronizing platitude, His encouragement for us to “take heart” is meant as a message of solace while we endure all that is wrong in this world. Be it the unfairness of an indiscriminate virus, the injustice of violent actions, the willful and systemic oppression of a people, or the abuse of power, Jesus knows what it is to suffer the wrongs of this world. He knows firsthand that we are a people who hurt and sin against one another, enduring all kinds of pain and strife. Yet He calls us to “take heart.”

It is a call to faith—to fear, love, and trust in Jesus above all things, even amid our greatest hurts and deepest troubles and fiercest of tribulations. I realize that this is easier said than done. Nonetheless, Jesus is issuing a call to vibrant faith—more specifically, a call to the hope rooted in the objective fact that Jesus Christ overcame the world with all of its tribulation and distress, not by sheer grit and tenacity, but by His unflinching love and compassion poured out in His suffering and death on the cross for the sins of the world.

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” These few words of our Lord tell us what to expect and how to react to it. Originally spoken to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, Jesus was telling them what to expect, especially given His forthcoming betrayal, arrest, physical abuse by the authorities, and unjust death sentence. In fact, the whole of John 16 would be a good read for us to consider in light of all that we are enduring right now.

In it, Jesus tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit who He calls “the Helper” (v.7) and “the Spirit of truth” (v.13). When we are enduring tribulation and unrest, we need that Helper and His word of truth to lead and guide us through this confusion and pain, most especially by pointing us to the One who is “the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6). This is why our celebration of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit is so timely and important to our lives of faith right now. Pentecost celebrates the fact that we are not left alone to deal with the heartaches and tribulations of this world, nor are we without the wisdom and truth of God’s Word to lead us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Even more, Jesus tells the disciples they will “weep and lament” but that their sorrow will nonetheless “turn into joy” (v. 20). Again, without question we are all experiencing much sorrow right now:

- A world taken over by a pandemic and the death of loved ones
- A country wrestling to tear down its systemic racism and mourn the heartache of brutality
- Cities filled with cries for justice
- Rioters expressing their hurt and anger and frustration through violence and destruction

Sorrow is all around.

And amid all of this tribulation and sorrow, the Holy Christian Church (that includes you and me) has been called to a robust faith that is rooted in the victory of our resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord endured the injustice, heartache, and sin of this world, so He knows intimately the cries going up from our homes and the laments of our cities. He experienced them. He voiced such cries Himself. Willingly going to the cross, He shed His blood, suffered injustice, and experienced all the unfairness and cruelty of this world only to overcome it all by His glorious resurrection. So when He tells us to “take heart,” that call is rooted in the most powerful of all solace and hope.

Therefore, as we mark the Day of Pentecost, we do so in the call of our Lord to “take heart.” Some of you will be marking this together in person, in safe and limited capacities, for the first time in months. Others will be marking it from home. No matter your situation, we mark this church year celebration knowing that the tribulation and sorrows we endure are met in the power of the Holy Spirit, who gives us a faith that leads to these actions:

1. Repent of our own sins and trust in Christ
2. Pray for mercy, particularly for all those who are in need or suffering—be it physically or from injustice
3. Care for our neighbor in word and deed
4. See the tribulation of this world as an opportunity to share the hope that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ

“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The Lord bless you and protect you in both body and soul.

Your Brother and Pastor in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Lucas V. Woodford, President
Minnesota South District, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod