

Exaudi  
2 June, Anno Domini 2019  
St. John 15:26-16:4  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Here we are at the end of the Easter season, the technical end of our celebration of our Lord's resurrection, and what are we talking about? Persecution. This isn't exactly the joyous end that we might expect or hope for. My guess is that when telling your friends about the Christian faith this isn't your go-to verse.

But this is what the disciples needed to hear as they would soon be first filled with terror and sadness at their Lord's death and then overcome with joy at His resurrection. This is what you and I need to hear as the world grows more and more actively hostile toward the Gospel. The reality is that the world is not at all excited about the faith you just confessed in the Nicene Creed. They aren't eager to join you in that confession. It may bring you joy to sing of Christ and to gather around His holy altar, to hear the word of absolution and call upon God's Name in your need. But that same faith, the one true faith, sets you at complete odds with the world, with Satan, and even with yourself. Maybe you've felt this at work, being asked to be dishonest or act in a way that is harmful to your neighbor. Maybe your coworkers openly mock and insult Christians. Or maybe your own family doesn't understand or respect your beliefs or the way you conduct your life because of that confession. It goes without saying that most schools and athletic programs have little to no use for the Christian faith and don't think twice about scheduling practices and games on Sunday morning and threatening children with consequences if they don't show up.

And, let's be honest, your own flesh certainly isn't interested in being told that it's desires are evil, completely in every way contrary to the will of God. I might even go so far as to argue that the most intense source of persecution of your faith comes from your Old Adam. Your sinful nature by definition is at war with God. It hates what God loves and loves what God hates. It is convinced that it is good, that it is absolutely capable of being

righteous and holy and good in the eyes of God. It believes that unbounded license to do, to say, and to think whatever it feels in the moment is the highest good as though God is chiefly interested in hedonism and self-indulgence.

But if that were true, then Jesus' warnings would be useless. If the flesh were good and the world was actually filled with people who were basically good but who sometimes just do less than good things, then Jesus never would have been nailed to the cross because you wouldn't need a Savior. For what purpose did Jesus die if your flesh and your desires are actually good? If the world loved God and His will, we wouldn't be able to build big enough churches. The poor and needy would be fully cared for. The family would be the most desired and protected institution on earth - men loving and protecting and providing, women receiving and nurturing, children honoring and serving. But we all know that none of these things are the reality.

Dear baptized children of God, your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Your sins are forgiven. God Almighty is your Father and eternal life has been promised to you. But your life in this world will very often not seem to support that truth. The devil is your constant enemy who will stir up persecution and suffering, pain and discomfort on every side whenever and however he can. He will use the most benign and even good things to lure you away from Christ, to convince you that you don't really need a Redeemer. He will work tirelessly to sow seeds of doubt in your mind about the clear Word of God. Just look at how many even of our own confession have begun to reject the clear teaching of Scripture concerning the six days of creation and the creation of people as male and female. Satan will try to stir up your own mind against Christ, encouraging you to place yourself and your reason over Scripture when you need to submit yourself to the will and wisdom of God.

This is why our Lord warns us about the persecution that follows faith - in the heart, in the mind, in the body, in our work, our families, in every last facet of our life. And no one is immune. So don't be surprised when persecution arises as though it's unheard of. No one who confesses faith in Christ will be spared this hatred of the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature. The apostles and myriads of faithful Christians who have come before us will testify to the truth of Christ's words, some with even their blood.

You have been warned, not to scare you, but to comfort you and prepare you so that when your time of persecution comes you are ready and you can see it for what it is rather than what the devil wants you to see it for what it is. You have the Word of God so that you can recognize the desires of your flesh and the proddings and invitations of the unbelieving world for what they are. You are blessed, yes, blessed, to be counted worthy of Christ's sufferings. After all, you are a member of His Body. When the world persecutes you, they are persecuting Christ. Your Lord loves you and will be with you along with the whole Body of Christ. Christ has already given you everything you need to endure to the end and receive the crown of everlasting life. He has sent the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who will teach you again and again the truth - the truth of Christ, the truth about yourself, the truth about your sin and the world you live in. Your Lord has given you His Word so that you may not be deceived, so that you may have the truth as you are surrounded by so many lies, many of which are told in the Name of Jesus. The speaking of the Holy Spirit through the prophets and the apostles has been preserved for you because God desires your salvation.

If you want practical, what-to-do instruction from Christ, here it is. Be self-controlled and be sober-minded. Do not fill your eyes and hearts and minds with worldly things as we are all more than ready to do. Instead, fill them with the Word of God. It's not what your flesh wants but it is what each and every one of us needs. Think about what God teaches is good and holy and beautiful. Confess your sins and be forgiven. Forgive those who have sinned against you and seek the forgiveness of those against whom you have sinned. Strive after the heavenly treasure of Christ's righteousness and peace which He offers freely week after week in Word and Holy Communion. Pray. Pray against the devil, the world, and yourself. Pray for the Church and the spread of the Gospel. Pray for your neighbor and then go help him. Pray for you enemies and love one another earnestly, not just in word, but in deed. Use your gifts for everyone else's benefit rather than your own. Help bear the terrible burdens that your brothers and sisters are suffering even as Christ has born the whole burden of your sin and death gladly and willingly for the joy of your salvation that was set before Him.

The end of all things is even more at hand than when St. Peter penned those words. But that is good news for us! The end of all things means the

return of our Savior, the vindication of our faith, and the beginning of our eternity of rest. Your suffering is not in vain nor is it eternal. And Christ has sent His Holy Spirit to you to Comfort you, to strengthen you, to teach you, and to guide you. You have not been left alone. In Holy Baptism the Holy Spirit made His home in you. And by continuing to proclaim to you the promises of Christ - the promise of your forgiveness, the promise of your resurrection, the promise of the Father's love - the Holy Spirit strengthens you and brings you safely through your own hour of persecution. Above all things, do not let Satan or the world or your flesh rob you of the work of the Holy Spirit. Do not let them convince you that you don't need them. You do as often as your Lord offers them to you. As surely and even more than you need air, you need the Word and Holy Sacraments. These are the means which Christ has appointed to save you and keep you in these latter days.

The season of Easter may end today, but the celebration and comfort of Christ's resurrection are eternal. May you daily find joy and comfort knowing that your Lord lives and reigns and that soon, the tribulation of this world will fade into the joy of eternal life.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In the Name of +Jesus.