

Don't Be Surprised

✦ At the painful trial (4:12-17)

✦ By the powerful enemy (5:6-9)

✦ God called you to eternal glory. (5:10,11)

In the name of Jesus, our crucified, risen and ascended Savior, dear fellow disciples:

I was on drugs. Are you surprised? Don't be. It was for my back surgery in 1999. But I was surprised when "Nurse Ratchet" turned to my wife and asked, "Didn't he think this was going to hurt?" In the fog of my morphine I was shouting, "That's right! I was told about a little hose with a drip valve I could turn on whenever I wanted. They said we could manage this!" Contrast that with the night nurse who was so compassionate. "How are you doing?" she asked as if she really wanted to know. When I told her, she looked at her watch and said, "It should be about twenty minutes before your next dose, but we're going to get on top of this pain." I could have hugged her.

God knows suffering patients are not always patient. But my overnight stay taught me some valuable lessons for serving the patient patients of God in long term care. One thing we all need is honest information. When it's going to hurt, I'd rather know. Kids don't have to keep asking, "Are we there yet?" if Mom and Dad say it's going to be a few days. Our gracious Creator says, **Don't Be Surprised...**

✦ At the painful trial (4:12-17)

The "Apostle of Hope" has alerted us that Christians will suffer even for doing good. Noah is a powerful example of a patient believer who preached over a century to a dead audience. Our Baptism, like the waters of the Flood, saves us from the death of sin to enjoy new life by faith in God who makes and keeps such awesome promises. (1 Peter 3:15-22) Among His many great and precious promises is the fact that unbelievers whose sinful lives distress God's holy people will finally answer for their pagan persecution of God's precious own. Meanwhile, the preaching of the Gospel will miraculously bring sin-dead souls to life. (4:1-6) Earth's little day is almost over. It's time to energetically use our gifts, "faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms" – all to the eternal glory of God. (4:8-11)

Now, "dearly beloved, do not think it strange in the fiery trial of your faith-strengthening test as if alien forces were converging on you." Our Champion Christ already won this battle. We face sin, death and hell, ready to whip them in Jesus' name. ***"Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*** No one wants to sit out a major championship. When Christ returns, all who suffer with Him here will shout His triumph in glory. ***"If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed,"*** not necessarily happy, but ***"blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."*** The fire hose of God's Word drives off the mobs from hell and douses the flames before they can burn. ***"If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."*** "Christian" may sound disgusting to some, but not to us who know the mercy and love of God in Christ! God's judgment began with us when He declared us, "Not guilty!" for Jesus' sake. To ***"disobey the gospel of God"*** means refusing to believe the truth that Jesus is the Savior of all and therefore our Savior too. His Name deserves to be on our lips with praise.

Proud of God's work through Word and sacraments, we ought to let insults roll off like water off a duck's back. Remember Martin Luther's reaction to savage personal attacks like that cartoon of "the Seven-headed Luther"? He said the picture would have looked better if the heads had necks.¹

¹ CONCORDIA – LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS, A Reader's Ed. of the Book of Concord. St. Louis, MO: CPH, 2005, p. 289.

✦ **By the powerful enemy (5:6-9)**

Don't Be Surprised: *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*

“Our Father has warned us before, hasn't He? But like children, we nod a quick, ‘Yes,’ and rush off to our fun with an instant memory loss. Children have a hard time staying concerned about danger they can't see. So do we. That's our biggest problem. Sometimes we can't hear him, but he's out there. We don't always see him, but he's prowling around. It's the noise of the jack hammers, cars and buses, crying children, arguing parents, and rattling grocery carts that dulls our sense of hearing him. Bright signs and flashy cars, well-stocked shelves and foamy barrels can keep us from seeing him. But he is there, creeping about. On an unsuspecting victim he will pounce.”²

Resisting the roaring lion from hell takes humble, stout-hearted faith, strong in the promises of God. The Lord says through Peter: **“Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”** But card-carrying Christians do stumble in pride. Too often we're like a Highway Department worker who told an old farmer, “I need to inspect your farm for a new road.” “OK, but don't go in that field over there.” The state employee interrupted, “Do you see this card? It gives me full authority to go anywhere on any farm in this state.” The old man shrugged and went about his chores. Moments later, loud screams showed the Department of Highways employee running full speed for the fence. Right behind him, gaining fast, was the farmer's prize bull. The old farmer shouted, “Show him your card! Show him your card!”³

We are often too overconfident and too proud of suffering. Martin Luther noted, “Were our faith triumphant, we would regard it as a small inconvenience to suffer, even for thirty or forty years or longer; indeed, we should think our sufferings too trifling to be taken into account. May the Lord our God only forbear to reckon with us for the sins we have committed! Why will we have so much to say about great sufferings and their merits? How utterly unworthy we are of the free grace and ineffable glory which are ours in the fact that through Christ we become children and heirs of God, brethren and joint-heirs with Christ!...The Holy Spirit must be our schoolmaster to bring the matter home to our hearts....”⁴

✦ **God called you to eternal glory. (5:10,11)**

It shows how far off the mark were some remarks of this Mark a few weeks ago about pastors being persecuted. A brother pointed out that similar things happen in the workplace. Brother Peter says, **“You know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”** It helps to know when you're in the thick of it, that you're not the only one. Pray for Christians who are shedding blood for Christ. **“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”**

Children playing ball sometimes round the bases and stomp triumphantly on *home plate*. It can be a long way around the bases of life. But our gracious God always has a specific *goal* in mind for troubles and heartache He allows into our lives. He uses these **“light and momentary troubles”** to achieve for us **“an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”** He helps us to **“fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal”** (2 Corinthians 4:17f).

Don't Be Surprised at pain or temptation. **God called you to eternal glory.** In the knock-down, drag-out soul fights of faith we sometimes feel like a fishnet stretched and torn, misfits without a place in life. But our Savior patiently ties everything back together like fishermen mending their nets. We belong to Him whose artistic skill realigns our lives and hearts in His soul-saving care. He has everything well in hand even when outward troubles remain. Our Savior seeks only to teach us by experience to trust His unfailing promises and heartfelt mercy. Absolutely: **“To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”**

² M.C. 6/28/1981 – S#2a.

³ Received by email. Author unknown.

⁴ *Luther's Postil*. John N. Lenker, ed. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, re-printed 1988, Vol. VIII, pp. 99-103.

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