

Luke 12:49-53

August 18, 2013 – 13th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Persevere Under Trial

✦ **Like Jesus in the fires of affliction (vv.49,50)**

✦ **Like families in the face of division (vv.51-53)**

In the name of Jesus, our determined and victorious Savior, dear soldiers of the cross, family of God:

Last week Pastor Jim Radloff showed us a Chinese Buddhist and his Christian wife. The man was interested in Jesus while he drove for Radloff's team. But then his car broke down on rocky mountain roads. So he decided that being a Christians was too hard and went back to Buddhism. New Christians face challenges which Satan loves to turn into stumbling blocks. For WELS kids it's college. Mom and Dad aren't around to make them go to church. Work, studies, love crowd out Christ and faith in Him.

That's why our loving God trains us to **Persevere Under Trial**. One way for me was running distances in track. My high school in Mobridge, SD, had river on two sides, town another, basically one direction to run. Wide open prairie is really boring. We learn perseverance through pain. One classmate inflicted his own, flailing as he ran with hands and feet going in all directions. Sin, fear, pleasure easily distract us. *"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus,"* we heard in today's Second Lesson. Instead of flailing, *"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."* (Hebrews 12:1ff) **Persevere Under Trial...**

✦ **Like Jesus in the fires of affliction (vv.49,50)**

Jesus taught in picture language to catch minds and hearts. *"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!"* He could not turn in any direction, but had to go straight ahead. I can almost feel my Granddad's strong hands on my shoulders. Whenever teenagers visited, Granddad grabbed me. "There's a new family with young people," as he pointed me toward them. Any excuses made his grip stronger. One family said they joined our church because the young people were respectful, and they wanted their son brought up that way." God's discipline grip helps us learn to **Persevere Under Trial**.

Jesus had already been baptized by John in the Jordan River. That did not cause Him distress. But here our dear Lord is using *"baptism"* as picture language. He is looking ahead to His suffering and death when torrents of our guilt would flood His innocent soul. It's the way we say, "I'm drowning in debt." Jesus' *"baptism"* of suffering would nearly drown Him in our debt of sin, as He told His disciples, *"My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow even to the point of death."* (Matthew 26:38). He wished it were all behind Him, yet He pressed on. Love for his Father and for us lost sinners would not let Him go off track.

Is this scary to hear Him say, *"I have come to bring fire on earth..."*? Fire can be a life saver. Future Foresters of America taught us about backfires to stop a forest fire. On the prairie too, fire strikes terror for remote ranchers and small farming towns. A spark from tractor exhaust, lightning, even a piece of glass can kindle a conflagration which blackens thousands of acres. One escape is by a controlled burn, a backfire. As long as the wind is not blowing too hard you burn out a place in the grass and stand inside until the fire passes by. Jesus was starting a backfire with His own life as the fuel.

Too many people today image God is a harmless old Grandpa. But next Sunday's Second Lesson reminds us that *"our God is a consuming fire."* (Hebrews 12:19) And that's where the water of our Baptism saves us from the heat of His anger. *"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:3f NIV84) We are buried in the wounds of Christ, safe underground from the fires of God's wrath and bursting into new life with Jesus like a forest after a fire.

Jesus saw you on a plane that was going to crash. He took your seat. From eternity He named you as a beneficiary on His insurance policy. He went down with the plane in the storm of God's wrath over our sin, but then He rose again. By Baptism you cash in on His policy of life eternal, bliss with God.

“He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,” literally: “...by the Holy Spirit's washing of born again and renewing.” Don't run away. Run with Jesus. **Persevere Under Trial** with His strength to escape the coming wrath for the glories of heaven. **Persevere...**

✦ **Like families in the face of division (vv.51-53)**

“Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division.”

Too much of what passes for “peace” in family relationships is what one of our professors called “the peace of the graveyard.” Families talk, but don't communicate. Important issues lie buried under smiles and years of neglect. Faith issues rarely come up at all. Not acknowledging Jesus is disowning Him (12:8). Christ-denying silence can come from greed for inheritance (12:15), worry over the things of this life (12:16-34), feeling sorry for ourselves about how much is demanded of us (12:48). Families are divided when they fail to see the need for reconciliation with God. Jesus calls us to repentance and faith in His true *peace*, earned on the cross and given to us by adoption into God's family through Baptism.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, says, ***“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”*** (John 14:27 NIV84) Then He appeared to His disciples after He rose again, and said, ***“Peace be with you.”*** (Luke 24:36) Reminds me of that famous picture of President John F. Kennedy and his advisors in the Oval Office during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Playing on the floor under the President's desk, unaware of the danger, is John Kennedy Jr. Trust our heavenly Father to take care of world and country. **Persevere Under Trial.**

A Lutheran Pastor Martin Niemoller was going to stand trial before the Nazis because he dared to tell Adolf Hitler that pastors, not the state, are responsible to God for people's souls. On a February morning in 1938, a green-uniformed guard escorted the trembling pastor from his prison cell through underground passages. Terrified and lonely, he wondered what would happen to him, his family, his church. What tortures would they endure? The stone cold guard walked in silence until they left the tunnel up a flight of stairs. At first Niemoller wasn't sure if he heard a whisper or where it came from, a voice as soft as a sigh. Then he realized the guard was breathing into his ear the words of Proverbs 18:10: ***“The LORD is a mighty tower where his people can run for safety.”*** Pastor Niemoller's fear fell away. The power of that verse sustained him through his trial and his years in Nazi concentration camps. ¹

Jesus understood family *division* firsthand. His own family thought Jesus was ***“out of his mind”*** and came to take Him away (Mark 3:21). But Jesus persevered even in the face of family *division* and the coming terror of His ***“baptism”*** of suffering on the cross. Jesus predicted **fires of affliction** and family *division* that His followers would suffer as He did. But Jesus assures us, ***“I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.”*** (John 16:4). Forewarned is forearmed.

Come the Judgment Day, this world will be destroyed by fire. So remember Jesus' warning and find safety in the backfire of your Baptism. God burned out a place for you to stand. Here God's white-hot anger burned out our sins on the cross of His own Son. Now the cooling waters of Baptism quench the smoldering embers of guilt. Now a new forest and prairie flowers spring up in the new life of Christ. He is our backfire. In Him we will stand safely as the fire of God's wrath passes by when Jesus comes again in judgment on the Last Day. Grace brought us here and grace will keep us safe by faith. In eternal peace He will welcome us home to heaven. ² In living hope we **Persevere Under Trial.** Amen.

¹ Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. Copyright © 1997 by Robert J. Morgan. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) Used by Permission. All Rights Reserved. DailyReader Copyright © 1999-2001 by Jeff Wheeler and Craig Rairdin. Laridian.

² *Preach the Word*, Westendorf, James, ed. Vol. 4, No. 3, January/February 2001, p.3.

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