

“You Will Have Trouble...and Peace”

November 5, 2023

Pastor John Mars

This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church! I want to read a passage of Scripture that comes from the book of John, chapter 16, beginning with verse 25, Jesus speaking. He says:

“Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to my Father.”

Then the disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”

“You believe at last!” Jesus answered. “But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
May God bless the reading of His word.

God called me into ministry when I was 18 years old. I began pastoring churches at 20. Yes, that's scary! So, I have quite literally been in ministry all of my adult life. And as such, I have probably been sheltered in some ways. I acknowledge that, but I've also acknowledged that I'm not naive. As a pastor I have seen, in churches and Christians, things that the non-churched world would be ashamed of. I have seen Christians behave in ways that I would never dream someone who claimed the name of Christ would act. But I've also seen the other side. I have seen goodness and generosity and self-sacrifice that would blow your mind. Almost every single day, right here in this church, I see God transform lives and touch people's hearts and do beautiful things that most of you never get to see. And I am privileged to witness that, and I give God glory for that. That's one of the few benefits of being a pastor!

I want to talk about you for just a moment. I want to brag on you for just a minute. I have been privileged here. Do you believe I'm in my third year already? Time flies, doesn't it? And I have witnessed your goodness and your generosity. Now, don't get the big head! You're not perfect. If you were perfect, you couldn't be a member here and I couldn't be your pastor! But I have witnessed your goodness and your generosity. Back during the summer, we were running a little low on funds and I wrote a letter to the congregation. And you responded, by that month, giving an extra \$80,000. Just like that! Over the last two years, we have faced six-digit deficits at the end of the year, just like this year. And both of the last two years, in November and December, you made that up. I'm beginning to understand you guys, which is a little bit scary for me. A couple of weeks ago we had our annual Salmon Dinner to raise funds for local missions and foreign missions. If my

calculations are right, if we had sold two more dinners, we would have made \$20,000. We cleared over \$18,000, which means Martha's Cupboard and the Kenyan BLISS Program both get \$9,377 apiece. We did that in one night! And when we are generous, and when we are giving, and when we have a spirit of generosity among us, God blesses us. And almost every month now, we are seeing more and more kids and young families. And, as a result, our worship services are getting more giggly and wiggly and loud, and that's awesome. I long for the day when we have a child crying during the sermon every Sunday. All right? God is blessing us, and that is awesome, but we're not perfect. That may come as a shock to you, but that is reality. But what I know that I know that I know about this congregation is: You have a desire to do the right thing. You don't always get it done, but you have that desire.

Jesus' disciples had that same desire. They had promised Him that no matter what happened, they would stand by Him. And yet, in our passage, He says, "You will fall away." Jesus knew. You see, Jesus was an absolute realist. He didn't say to them, "Now, if you just follow me, everything is going to turn out all right. It's all going to be good." He said, "I'm sending you forth as sheep among wolves. They hate me. They're trying to kill me. What will they do to you?" Again and again, He said, "You will be hated because of me." In our passage, He says, "In this world you will have troubles. In this world you will have troubles." And a lot of those troubles we bring on ourselves. We fail. The life Jesus asked us to live is not an easy life. Life is complicated. Life is messy. And you add trying to follow Jesus to that, and it gets tough, and that's the truth. Jesus knew this. He said, "You will have trouble, but in me you can also have peace," and we need that peace.

Now, if you are a Christian who from time to time fails, if you are a Christian who from time to time falls, if you are a Christian who sins (don't raise your hand; I'm raising it for you!), this sermon is for you. Because Jesus addressed that with His disciples. Listen to what He says. He says, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace." Let me say that again. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace." Now here's where it's going to get weird for just a moment. What things? What had he just told them that's going to bring them peace? He had just told them that they were going to fall away. They were going to desert Him. They were going to abandon Him. Now, I don't know about you, but I don't find that very comforting. But that's what Jesus says. Now here is where the comfort comes in: Jesus said, "I'm telling you this before it happens, so that you will know that I know. I know you're not perfect; I know you will fall; I know you will fail; and I want you to know that I still love you." You see, you can have peace even in the midst of failure. Jesus knew and loved them anyway. Jesus knew that they would fail. Jesus knew that they would fall. Jesus told them ahead of time that He didn't hold it against them.

Do not raise your hand, please, but do you sometimes fail? Do you sometimes fall? Do you sometimes disappoint yourself? Jesus knows. Jesus knows you. Does it surprise you to know that Jesus knows you're not perfect? Jesus, when you fail, is not in heaven going, "Oh my gosh, did you hear what she just said?" He's not shocked. He's in heaven going, "Bless her heart." Now, for those of you who don't know proper Southern etiquette, Southern etiquette dictates that if you begin or end a statement about a person with, "Bless their heart," you can say anything you want. It's okay. And so Jesus is up in heaven going, "Bless their heart." He forgave them before they failed, so that they might have peace when they failed. There's peace in knowing that we can be forgiven even when we fail, even when we fall, even when we disappoint ourselves. It's

not a shock to God when we're not perfect. But here is the rest of the story. (And Aaron, this is where it gets "gooder.") Not only does He forgive us, He also still trusts us. And that's a miracle. It's one thing to forgive somebody and say, "Well, I forgive you, but I won't ever trust you again." Jesus forgave them, still trusted them, and still used them to turn their world right-side-up for God.

God can still use us in spite of our faults and failures. I want you to hear loud and clear that you are not beyond Jesus' forgiveness, and you are not beyond His usefulness. Try as we might, we fall short in so many ways. I know what my sins are. Do you know what yours are? More than likely. It's comforting to know that Jesus knows, is prepared to forgive you, and is prepared to use you to do miraculous things, even with your faults and your failings. It is amazing that He still trusts us, wants to work through us, and can accomplish beautiful and amazing things through us. He doesn't hold our faults and our failings against us, but forgives them and casts them in the sea of forgetfulness. The Apostle Paul called himself the greatest of all sinners, so you can't have that title. The Apostle Paul said, "I am the worst sinner of all times," and he was pretty good at it. He imprisoned, tortured, and killed Christians for a living. And he did that for years. And yet, God used him perhaps as the greatest evangelist the world has ever known. God used him to write half of the New Testament. If God can use him, the greatest of all sinners, with all of his faults and all of his failings, what can he do through you? So, if you're not a John Wayne Christian and ten feet tall and bulletproof, if you have faults and failings, if you have cracks in your armor, chill! Because God loves you anyway. And God trusts you, too. And God has a desire to work through you and to use you as an instrument of light to the world.

Let us pray. So, God knows you're not perfect. God knows your failings, your faults. God still loves you; God still trusts you; and God wants to bless this world through you. Yes, you. So right now, in this quiet, say, "Lord, with all of my faults, with all of my warts, with all of my failings, I give you myself. Lord, work through me." Let us pray.

Lord, we are so grateful for the knowledge that You love us and care for us, with all of our faults, with all of our failings. And Lord, we give ourselves to You, such as we are. Lord, work through us. In Jesus' name, amen.