

"Sure Enough"

Text: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-24

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." ¹ Peter 5:10-11

Dear Fellow Christians: We say so many things that really make no sense at all. Or, more accurately, make sense only because everyone agrees to understand more or less nonsense words in an agreed upon, meaningful way. Literally speaking, what does it mean to be "done for"? Who first used the expression to mean "doomed," and how did they come to think that "done" and "for" together expressed that thought?

The list of that sort of thing is endless. In fact it's only limited by the fact that we don't stop to think about what our words really mean. What exactly, for example, is a "bald-faced lie," and how is that different from a plain, run-of-the-mill lie? How is it that "fat chance" really means no chance? How did "really tired" come to be expressed as "tuckered out," and who first decided to add the word "plumb" to it? And yet everyone knows exactly what you mean when you tell them that you are "plumb tuckered out."

One of those same rather puzzling expressions forms our theme for this morning: "*Sure enough*. Interesting expression when you stop to think about it. This morning we are going to use it to help us understand some of the truths communicated by God the Holy Spirit in our text for this morning. That text is found in Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the First Chapter:

^{ESV} **Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30** *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁹ ¶ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My*

desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

These are the very words of God. Surely the very words that God chose to reveal to and preserve for all mankind are worthy of our careful study and meditation, as Jesus himself said, "**Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and treasure it.**" So we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

This morning we are talking in general about Christian confidence. Confidence itself is a fascinating study, and when you add the idea of *Christian* confidence, it becomes even more intriguing. For example, why are some individuals just so confident in almost everything they say or do, while others – who are often every bit as mentally and physically gifted – are not? Is confidence good or bad? How does the picture change when you talk about *Christian* confidence?

One line in this morning's sermon text gave birth to this while discussion: "***And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.***"

Here's where we come to our first application of our theme for this morning, *Sure Enough*, and this is obviously an element of Christian confidence that every Christian wants – the confidence to be bold witnesses for our Savior.

Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome. The first didn't seem all that bad – more like a house arrest. The second was nothing like house arrest and ended in his martyrdom for the Christian faith. Our text was written during Paul's *first* Roman imprisonment, the "good" one. Understand that "good" here is a relative term. While it would not be accurate to think "dungeon," there is no getting around the fact that Paul's freedom was taken from him, which obviously meant that he was not free to come and go as he pleased. Only those who have been robbed of that freedom can understand the loss. More importantly – and this is what obviously worried Paul the most about his first imprisonment – there was an obvious element of shame. In fact Paul in his letters referred often to the shame of his chains, repeatedly encouraging his fellow Christians *not* to be ashamed or discouraged by his imprisonment for Christ. To the young Pastor Timothy, for example, he wrote: "***Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.***" ² Timothy 1:8

Paul was not thinking so much about himself as he was about the potential shame and discouragement his imprisonment might have on his fellow Christians and the spreading of the gospel. (Great reminder, still today, that any shame that we bring on ourselves by our words and actions we also bring upon our Christian faith, since in the eyes of your neighbor, your faith is what you are.) You and I today recognize that Paul was *unjustly* imprisoned for his faith in Jesus Christ and we regard it as noble, admirable, and impressive. But if we project ourselves back into Paul's day, and think in terms of a fledgling New Testament Church that was just in its infancy, we get a much different and more accurate appreciation for Paul's concerns. No one in Paul's day knew what effect such widespread persecution would have on the Christian Church. Today we know that the Church actually thrives under adversity and tends to stagnate and diminish in times of peace and prosperity. That was still a very big question in Paul's day.

You get a sense of Paul's joy and relief in our text once he had a chance to see for himself how his fellow-Christians would be impacted by persecution and imprisonment. **"I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ."** What seemed to please and comfort Paul was the fact that also in his imprisonment the focus continued to be Jesus Christ. Paul was worried that his imprisonment might bring shame to his Savior and to the message of the gospel. Just the opposite was true. He was also evidently worried that his fellow Christians might become discouraged, fearful, and withdrawn. Again, just the opposite was true. Surely there had to have been some initial fear and uncertainty when Paul, the great champion of the Christian faith, was himself imprisoned. Paul needn't have worried. Even though his fellow Christians weren't *sure* about what the future held for Paul and for them, they were *sure enough* (confident enough) to carry on Christ's Great Commission. Again from our text: **"And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."** They were unsure of their earthly future, but *sure enough* to continue to do what Christ himself had called them to do.

Stop and think about that for a moment. Hear again Paul's words and consider their rather profound message: **"And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment..."** Note in particular just what it was that gave Paul's fellow Christians confidence in the Lord: *Paul's imprisonment*. Put this into modern terms and you will

understand it better. Suppose that right this moment government officials were to storm into church and arrested your pastor. The charge: preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Suppose those same officials also then issued the warning that anyone else caught preaching this message of forgiveness and eternal life in Jesus Christ would also be hauled off to prison and held there indefinitely. How would you react? How would you feel? If this were *really* happening, your sinful flesh would be screaming at you to shut up and to keep your beliefs to yourself. Yet in our text we read that the Christian friends of Paul were *sure enough* to be bold in their proclamation **"without fear."**

I desperately want that kind of *sure enough*, don't you? In fact it's rather disturbing to realize that I don't even display that sort of courage and commitment *in peace and prosperity, at a time when the gospel still has free reign*.

Pray for that sort of *sure enough* – that courage and confidence to **"speak the word without fear."**

Part of the problem here – and this is evidence of the devil's depraved genius – is that Christian persecution today is still subtle enough that we don't tend to recognize most of it for what it is. The result is that we are at war, but most often fail to recognize it. We may in sort of an objective, detached way, but not really. The result is usually apathy and inaction. There's no battle, so there's really no need to choose sides and engage the enemy. The fact is Satan is most certainly at war with us, which means we are not only at war with him, it also means that we are at war with Satan's allies, which you and I know as *"the world, and our own sinful flesh."*

Stop again and contemplate *that* truth. I'm sure no one here wants to think of the world – more specifically the unbelievers in the world – as our enemies. Yet God in his Word has clearly told us it is so, and has just as clearly told us what we are supposed to be doing about it. In writing to the Romans, Paul said that Christians are supposed to be **"more than conquerors."** That means, first of all, acknowledging both the war and our enemies. (The picture of a conqueror makes no sense if you have no enemies.) But it also means that we are supposed to look on our enemies with love, which is how we are *more* than conquerors. We are not supposed to just defeat our enemies; we are supposed to love them enough to spend ourselves in an effort *to win them over*. Yet note well that this whole truth, this whole scenario, falls apart when we fail to come to grips with the fact that right now every

unbeliever that you know is, in fact, on the wrong side of their Savior and is therefore part of the opposition, both to you and to Christ himself. As such, they are souls that need to be saved, souls that need to be turned from enemies to brothers.

Paul obviously got it, didn't he? Paul knew that this is what life on earth is really all about. Life is about people, and whether those souls will spend eternity in heaven or to hell. Listen again to the amazing last verses of our text: ***"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account."***

When Christ returns, as he will, all mankind will be rock solid sure that Jesus was and is exactly who he claimed to be – the Son of God and Savior of the world. Not just "pretty sure," or "sure enough," but absolutely positive. Why? Because they will see for themselves. The problem, of course, is that then it will be too late for those who have rejected Jesus in unbelief. Our job is to change that, here and now and here in time. *Now*, before it is too late.

How do we get to that point? How do we get to the place where we have the confidence that Paul's companions gained during his imprisonment, and by which they boldly joined the battle for souls? The answer is to be *sure enough* that Jesus Christ is surely enough. Sure enough to act on the realization of the truth of God's Word, especially the threat of hell and the deliverance from that unspeakable horror earned by Jesus Christ for every single human being. Such certainly, strength, and confidence doesn't happen magically. It doesn't even come to us directly from God in heaven. God himself gives us those gifts, but he does so through exposure to the means of grace – the gospel, in your Bible and in the sacraments.

Soldiers train. Good soldiers train incessantly. Christians should do no less, and the way we train is to expose ourselves to the power of God's Word. There he gives us what we need not only to survive but to advance his kingdom into the hearts of others. The basic message is as simple as it is amazing: God the Father punished his Son Jesus in our place. Jesus used his perfect life as the holy sacrifice that paid in full for the sins of the world. Man is therefore not saved by what he does, but through faith in what Jesus Christ has already done for him. And yet as simple and as profound as that message truly is, we frail creatures need the power that God supplies in his Word if we are to keep from discarding the faith that has been given to us, and if we are to possess the love and courage

necessary to share that same message of forgiveness and life with a dying world.

One day Jesus will return – sure enough. One day God will call an end to this world, rolling it up like a scroll – sure enough. One day then, perhaps sooner than we imagine, our time to ***"live to the Lord"*** here on this earth will come to an end and it will be time to ***"die to the Lord."*** May God not only preserve those that are now his, but work through us the divine rescue of our neighbor. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV Isaiah 55:6-9 "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

ESV Matthew 20:1-16 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴ and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.' ⁵ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶ And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' ⁹ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰ Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' ¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. ¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first last."

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The 16th Sunday after Pentecost – September 20, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 761 (Brown Hymnal)

"In You Is Gladness"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 55:6-9) God has established for each human being a window, during which he may come to know his Savior Jesus and to be converted and thus saved. That window is called our "time of grace," and many today go on rejecting because they suppose that there is always time to "get right with God." Our first reading reminds us that that is not always the case, and therefore a profoundly reckless way to live. No one knows when their time of grace will be brought to an abrupt end, which is why our text invites: *"Now is the time."*

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 20:1-16) Our second reading advances the thought of our Old Testament lesson. Not only do those who are brought to faith in the "last hour" of their lives also spend eternity in heaven, but it is a testimony to man's misunderstanding of "grace" that some object to this fact. Those who are converted very late in life share heaven equally with lifelong Christians. In this reading Jesus himself explains that this is the nature of his *undeserved* love for sinners.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 201 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Peter 1:13-16 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Sure Enough"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 385 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Now I have Found the Firm Foundation"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 201 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (28) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Mon-Wed	-9:00 a.m.	– CLC Board Meetings in Eau Claire
Wednesday	No Midweek Classes	
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Quarterly Voters Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Chad Seybt has accepted the calls to the Tri-Parish of La Crosse, Millston, and Fairchild. Seminary graduate Nick Naumann is considering the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. Pastor Thomas Schuetze has returned the call to Bethel of Morris.

Pastor Out of Town – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend CLC Fall Board meetings this week in Eau Claire. Plans call for him to leave immediately after the service this morning, returning Thursday. It is an act of Christian charity that congregations throughout the CLC, including St Paul, agree to share their pastors for this aspect of our shared kingdom work.

No Midweek Classes – Since Pastor Roehl is scheduled to be out of town this week, there are no midweek classes scheduled. Confirmation and midweek Bible Class will resume on September 30.

Council Notes – Five members of the Council, plus the Pastor, were present for the meeting on September 15th. The membership of Hope Meyer was accepted by transfer from Grace of Sleepy Eye. Treasurer Mantz reported that offerings for August were \$1,878 below budgeted needs, and are now \$2,062 below budgeted needs YTD. The landscaping on the south side of the church will be redesigned. An honorarium for our recent guest speaker was approved. St Paul is still in need of a qualified volunteer to update our website. The next Council meeting is scheduled for October 13, with a Voters Meeting on 9/27.