

**Standing Firm!**  
**Philippians 1:27-30**

“Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened** in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

**D)BROTHERS, STAND FIRM IN ONE SPIRIT!**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, During my 65 years I've heard many sermons. I must confess that there are only a very few that I remember. I certainly can't remember all of the sermons which I've preached. I will never forget, however, **the shortest sermon which I have ever heard.** *I was a student at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis so it would have been in 1977 or 1978. The setting was the old chapel at the seminary and the preacher for the day was Rev. Dr. Martin Scharlemann, one of the 5 professors who remained at the seminary after the infamous walk out which led to the creation of Seminex, the Seminary in Exile, and division in the LCMS. I was still in the ALC at that time but had seen what acceptance of the Historical Critical Method of Bible interpretation had done especially in the colleges and seminaries of that denomination. As a result I was surprised that so many students and faculty members had walked out and helped with the creation of the AELC, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, which subsequently became part of the ELCA. How could so many depart from the historic view of the Bible as the inspired and inerrant Word of God, something that I had been taught in confirmation. During that seminary chapel service more than 40 years ago Dr. Scharlemann stood up, read his text which spoke of martyrdom, and then delivered this sermon, and I quote. **“The shedding of blood may be required....yours!”** Then he sat down, the message finished. You must admit that it was all law but was a very effective message which I've never forgotten.*

The August issue of the **Lutheran Witness** included many important and thought-provoking articles. I felt that they were so important that I ordered enough copies to give on to each of our church families. It is an issues which speaks on issues of church and state including the lead article, **“Necessary Conversations: Religion and Politics”**. Other articles in the magazine speak of *“One King: Two Kingdoms”*, *“Beyond the Voting Booth”*, *“Social Media Politics”*, *“Facts, Fiction, and the Media”*. I hope that our members are reading it from cover to cover and that they will share it with others. **It speaks directly to the violence, division, and political turmoil which we are seeing in our country. It also reminds us that our beliefs and values are to inform and guide our voting.** One of the articles speaks of the recent **Supreme Court decision which reinterpreted the 1964 Civil Rights Act** in a way that its authors could never have imagined. Let me quote, *“The court voted 6–3 to add sexual orientation, gender identity, and transsexual status to the civil rights law. Two of the supposedly conservative justices joined the four liberal judges in the decision. The article asks, “Does the newly defined civil rights law mean that churches can be prosecuted if they let go of a parochial school teacher for coming out as a homosexual or a pastor who decides to become a woman?”* **The article concludes that for the time being this probably won't happen, but that the church will increasingly become a target in the culture wars.** Churches with schools are especially warned of dangers to come from this ruling which applies to non-clergy employees such as custodians, musicians, and other contract workers.” This brief article follows a longer one which talks about Lutheran martyrs in Nigeria where 52,000 Christians have been killed in the last decade. The warning is clear, **unless our nation elects those who are guided by traditional beliefs and moral values, the church and its leaders will face future attacks..**

The epistle for today concludes with words which call Christians to stand firm in the faith, so as (1)to be of one spirit, and (2)to be of one mind. It calls upon us (3) to stand side by side striving for the Gospel, and to stand as men not be frightened by our opponents. I'm grateful that during my 65 years I have never really felt that I had opponents. Yes, there have been

people who disagreed with me or who may have opposed me or my ministry in some way. I have certainly never felt physically threatened by anyone, however, and I pray that none of us will face that danger. I see the tide turning, however, and the opposition being emboldened. I fear that this is one of the negative consequences of a well-intentioned but misguided lockdown of our society because of the Pandemic. Government leaders in the United States and around the globe succeeded in forbidding Christian churches to function freely. This may only encourage them to put more permanent restrictions on churches and schools. This could include taking away the tax exemption which churches enjoy, or as has happened in some places telling churches or ministers what they can and cannot say or do.

It is in this context that I believe we must consider the words of St. Paul today. We will do so in four parts during this service of readings, prayers, and hymns. Through his servant St. Paul the Lord first says to us: **Stand firm in one spirit.** In his commentary on Philippians **William Barclay** writes, *“The world is full of Christians on the retreat, who, when things grow difficult play down their Christianity. The true Christian stands fast, unashamed in any company. The Lord expects unity; they are to be bound together in one spirit like a band of brothers. Let the world quarrel; Christians must be one. He expects a certain unconquerability. Often evil seems invincible: but the Christian must never abandon hope or give up the struggle. He expects a cool, calm courage. In times of crisis others may be nervous and afraid; the Christian will be still serene, master of himself in the situation. If they can be like that, they will set such an example that the pagans will be disgusted with their own way of life, will realize that Christians have something they do not possess, and will seek for very self-preservation to share it.”*

1 Hear the voice of our Commander standing firm,  
Holy pilgrims, take the armor, standing firm;  
Shod in gospel preparation,  
Sword and helmet of salvation,  
Meekly hold the true position, standing firm.

Refrain:  
Fear not, brethren, firm and true,  
Whate'er thy foe may be;  
Jesus fought the battle through,  
And gives to us the victory.

## **II) BROTHERS, STAND FIRM WITH ONE MIND!**

I'm grateful to be a pastor in the LCMS, a denomination which is far from perfect but which has with God's help continued to “believe, teach, and confession” the Gospel of Christ according to the historic Lutheran confessions. Those pastors, churches, and denominations which have abandoned the “faith of our fathers” have in many ways become part of the opposition. They have caused division in the Church and have obscured the message of Christ by holding to beliefs or moral values which are the opposite of historic Christian teaching. In his commentary on Philippians **Matthew Henry** condemns such disunity. *“The unity and unanimity of Christians become the gospel: Strive together, not strive one with another; all of you must strive against the common adversary. One spirit and one mind become the gospel; for there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There may be a oneness of heart and affection among Christians, where there is diversity of judgment and apprehensions about many things.”*

In his “high priestly prayer” Jesus prays for us and for the whole church. Since Jesus “**ever liveth to make intercession for the sinners**” I believe that our Lord who warns that the world will hate us as it hated him, continues to pray this prayer: <sup>17</sup> **Sanctify them<sup>[b]</sup> in the truth; your word is truth.** <sup>18</sup> **As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.** <sup>19</sup> **And for their sake I consecrate myself,<sup>[c]</sup> that they also may be sanctified<sup>[d]</sup> in truth.** <sup>20</sup> **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”** Brothers, Jesus is praying for us. Stand firm with one mind.

2 If it be thy lot to suffer, standing firm,  
Vilest slander tongue can utter, standing firm;  
Shout and sing, for then is given,  
Greater thy reward in heaven,  
When the wicked far are driven, standing firm. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Fear not, brethren, firm and true,  
Whate'er thy foe may be;  
Jesus fought the battle through,  
And gives to us the victory.

### **III) BROTHERS, STAND FIRM STRIVING SIDE BY SIDE FOR THE GOSPEL!**

I love that phrase, “**striving side by side for the Gospel.**” Matthew Henry writes: “*It becomes those who profess the gospel to strive for it, to use a holy violence in taking the kingdom of heaven.. There is that in the faith of the gospel which is worth striving for. If religion is worth anything, it is worth everything. There is much opposition, and there is need of striving. A man may sleep and go to hell; but he who will go to heaven must look about him and be diligent. 2. The unity and unanimity of Christians become the gospel: Strive together, not strive one with another; all of you must strive against the common adversary....It is a shame to religion when the professors of it are off and on, unfixed in their minds, and unstable as water; for they will never excel. Those who would strive for the faith of the gospel must stand firm to it.*”

We will be singing a song called, “**Side by Side**”. I love the imagery because it reminds me of the Lord sending out the 70, his first followers two by two. As he sent them, he spoke practical words to prepare them for their task. The words “*Side by side we stand*” also call to mind a military unit marching in formation. No good soldier would disregard the orders of his superior or decide to turn aside from the column of soldiers to go off in his own direction. We strive side by side for the Gospel led forth into victory “**for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.**” “**We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.**”

3 In the time of sore temptation, standing firm,  
Grace will be thy sure salvation, standing firm;  
Virtue crown thy soul with honor,  
Sin resisted tempts no longer,  
Faith in conflict waxes stronger, standing firm. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Fear not, brethren, firm and true,  
Whate'er thy foe may be;  
Jesus fought the battle through,  
And gives to us the victory.

### **IV) BROTHERS, STAND FIRM UNFRIGHTENED BY OUR OPPONENTS!**

None of us could have imagined the changes which have come during this year because of the Pandemic and the measures which have been taken during this national emergency. One of the changes which I have seen is that people are living in fear, whether they know it or not. When you see a man walking down the sidewalk, with no people around, but wearing a mask, you know that fear has taken hold. The same can be said of a woman dutifully masked even as she drives alone in her car. I believe that this fear, or in some cases panic, has impacted the church too. “**We live by faith and not by sight**” is still true but I can't help wondering if it hasn't been turned around. I have had several people tell me that they will not be back to church until it is all over, when there is a cure, or the much sought-after vaccine. I believe that this goes beyond a wise concern for one's physical health. In no other generation have people been able to have an iron-clad guarantee that they wouldn't fall victim to some other illness. “**God is our**

**Refuge and Strength, an ever present help in trouble,”** not the CDC, some pharmaceutical company, or a political leader—regardless of their party.

Allow me to share one last quote from **Matthew Henry**: Through his servant St. Paul the Lord exhorts us to courage and constancy in suffering. **“And in nothing terrified by your adversaries. “The professors of the gospel have all along met with adversaries, especially at the first planting of Christianity. Our great care must be to keep close to our profession, and be constant to it: whatever oppositions we meet with, we must not be frightened at them, considering that the condition of the persecuted is much better and more desirable than the condition of the persecutors; for persecuting is an evident token of perdition. Those who oppose the gospel of Christ, and injure the professors of it, are marked out for ruin. But being persecuted is a token of salvation....”***For to you it is given on the behalf of Christ not only to believe, but also to suffer for his name.”* ([Phil. 1:29](#))

As Stephen the first martyr was being stoned by his adversaries, he lifted up his eyes to heaven. **“But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.”** <sup>56</sup> And he said, **“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”** May the Lord help us to so **“fix our eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”** So brothers, let us stand firm looking to Jesus not afraid of our opponents. Amen.

4 'Mid the battle's raging fury, standing firm,  
Face the legions dark before thee, standing firm;  
In the strength of our Redeemer,  
Make the pow'rs of hell surrender,  
Be a valiant overcomer, standing firm. [Refrain]

Refrain:

Fear not, brethren, firm and true,  
Whate'er thy foe may be;  
Jesus fought the battle through,  
And gives to us the victory.