

It was the last Sunday of this past December that a young man from our congregation was preaching here for the first time. His name is Isaac Hayes who has two years left in his seminary training. Hundreds of people knew Isaac. Isaac graduated from our Lutheran Elementary School and was confirmed. He attended our Lutheran High School, ALA. He was in church services every Sunday with his parents and brothers. In fact, they sat about six rows from the front on the right hand side, the east side. It was great to have him preach here in his home congregation. It was a special day for him, for his family, and for his congregation. The welcome mat is out for him to preach again here at Emmanuel.

It was almost 2000 years ago that another man preached in his home congregation of Nazareth for the first time. The people of the small village of Nazareth must have been eager to hear him. His name, of course, was Jesus. He often was referred to as Jesus of Nazareth. Although he was born in Bethlehem, he was raised in Nazareth, the hometown of Joseph and Mary. Everybody knew Jesus. Children went to school with him. He played with them. They all went to the same church, the Jewish synagogue. He studied at the synagogue. Joseph who was a carpenter taught Jesus the trade of carpentry. Perhaps, Jesus had done carpentry work for some of the villagers. The people had heard that Jesus had preached in other places and that he had done wondrous miracles. What a great day it had to be when the hometown son preached in the synagogue. The villagers also anticipated that Jesus would do a few miracles. But it did not turn out so great – the people of the synagogue rejected him. There was hateful and unjustified opposition. That opposition would continue throughout his ministry. In fact, the opposition toward him and his teachings and his followers continues to this day. That brings us to the main thrust of today's sermon. "Be strong in the Lord, even should there be opposition."

How hateful was the opposition against Jesus? To illustrate this point let's take a trip of about 250 miles north to the Grand Canyon. The Canyon averages over 10 miles wide and a mile deep. Some members of my family and I had the adventure of rafting the Colorado River through the Canyon for 277 miles. It was exciting. But the Canyon can also be a very dangerous place. On the average about 12-15 people die each year, some from dehydration and heat exhaustion while hiking the trails. About 2-3 people die each year from falling over the edge, even from the overlooks frequented by tourists. Most of these were accidental falls but it is suspected that over the years some fell not by accident but by being deliberately pushed over the cliffs. How terrible and awful.

They tried to push Jesus over the cliff. The opposition against Jesus that day from the people of Nazareth was so murderously fierce that the people led Jesus out to edge of a nearby cliff and were intent on pushing him off. They meant business. However, Jesus with his divine power simply walked away from it all. Well, what was it that Jesus had

done or said in the synagogue that the villagers thought was so terrible, so horrible that they had to get rid of him? The Scripture that served as a text for the sermon was a prophecy from Isaiah about the coming Christ. Jesus said **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** He claimed to be the Messiah and the Savior.

The people did not for one moment accept that possibility. The problem: They had totally wrong ideas about the Messiah thinking that he would be a great king and lead the Jewish nation back into a world power as it had been in King David’s time. They knew that the Christ would be born in Bethlehem which they knew that Jesus was; that the Christ would be a descendent of David which they knew Jesus was; That the Christ would do miracles of healing which they had heard that Jesus did. But they refused to believe that the Christ would come not as an earthly king but as one would humbly suffer and die for the sins of the people as Jesus would do. Isaiah had written about the Christ, “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:4-5)

Their sin was that they twisted the words of the Bible.

And isn’t that often our problem when we do not believe the message of the Bible? For example, we know that God repeatedly tells us throughout the Bible that we are not to worry and be filled with anxiety but yet who of us does not fret and worry? Or we might wonder and doubt whether all of our sins are forgiven even though God says through Isaiah “Come now, let us reason together,” says the LORD. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18) “The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

Let’s remember too that God calls upon you and me to be strong as we face enemies of our faith. Remember the initials DFW. The D stands for the devil; the F stands for our flesh, our sinful nature; and the W stands for the world, the sinful nature of the world. Let’s look especially at the world about us. **“Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.”** (1 John 3:13) Jesus said, **“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”** (Matthew 10:22) Certainly, there has to be a concern for all age groups but ought we not to be especially concerned about our children and our grandchildren who have to grow up in this unbelieving world? Look at what is being promoted today by the godless world in which we and our children live.

- Rejected by the world is the very foundation of the Bible, its first chapters, which show us that God created this world and that mankind is a special creation of God, the number one creature. How often evolution and the millions of years are being taught, dismissing God.
- Notice too how the family is being attacked.
 - a. God created male and female. But our children and grandchildren are growing up in a world that says there are more than two genders. That means

if a boy feels like he is a girl, he suddenly has become a girl and should be able to use women's bathrooms. Are we becoming alarmed about nothing? The City Council of DePere, a suburb of Green Bay, had mandated that all public facilities including churches have to allow people to use any bathroom they would choose. Five churches including a WELS church filed a lawsuit and were successful in overturning the ordinance as it applied to churches

- b. Our children and grandchildren are being raised in a society that defies and mocks God's institution of marriage consisting of one male and one female.
- c. Our children and grandchildren are in a world in which the most dangerous place in America is the mother's womb. Many do not make it out alive. Statistics show that one out of four babies are aborted. There are nearly 1 million abortions per year in America. Legislation in some states now allow mothers even in the last trimester of their pregnancy to abort. Abortion is an industry in the USA.
- d. Sexual relations before marriage and outside of marriage are condoned and promoted. Many of those who refuse to yield to this immoral living are mocked.

The Bible with its message of sin and of grace is ignored and belittled. There is no hell, many say, and if there is a heaven most people will get there, especially if you have been good and kind. In essence, they are saying, "You do not need Jesus."

Remember what is at stake here? It is eternal life in heaven along with a life of willing and happy service to Jesus, our Lord. It is the spiritual and eternal well-being of children. But what shall we do about it? Let's do much more than wring our hands and decry the sin and evil out there. And let us not come across as self-righteous people with a better-than-thou attitude. We are not better by nature but through the Lord we are better off. Throughout the Scriptures we are called upon to Be Strong in the Lord.

This Sunday is called Christian Education Sunday. That is for adults too. We are kept strong by the Holy Spirit as He strengthens our faith and Christian living through His Word and communion. Feed your soul with the Word through Bible reading and study at home and here at church. In addition to the basic and overview Bible course, most of the time there are five Bible Classes offered weekly at church. Keep strong.

Keep strong for your sake but also for the sake of others, especially for the sake of children and grandchildren. Christian education and training begins in the home. As a passenger jet taxis from the terminal to the runway for taking off, flight attendants are busy giving safety instructions to the passengers. They give instructions about the seat belts and also the exits. They give detailed instructions concerning the use of the oxygen masks that will automatically drop down in front of the passengers when the plane is experiencing problems. A special directive is emphasized that the passengers is to apply the oxygen mask first of all to self, then to others such as their children. It is important that the adult be kept strong so that they can help others. How important that we Christian

adults be kept spiritually strong so that we can and will be a source of strength to our children and grandchildren. Christian training begins in the home.

The Lord has told us as a congregation not only to “Feed my sheep” but also to “Feed my lambs.” As a congregation we feed our children through Sunday School, Confirmation Classes, our Preschool, Lutheran Elementary School, and our Lutheran High School, ALA. It is necessary to keep and support these training agencies. Be strong in the Lord for there is opposition in this world.

How should we react toward opposition to our faith and Christian beliefs?

- a. The Lord tells us in many places of the Bible, “Do not be deceived.”
- b. Don’t wave the white flag of surrender.
- c. Be God’s Light to the world
- d. Don’t have a fortress attitude where we stay inside the ‘Christian fort’ and not venture out to the world. The Lord tells us to go and tell and make disciples.
- e. Have a love and sympathy for the unbelievers as Jesus did and has. When the people sought to throw Jesus over the cliff, He could have had them thrown over the cliff. But He did not. Instead He would suffer and die for them and rise again. Listen to the words He spoke to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned. (John 3:16-18)
- f. Don’t be obnoxious as you speak to others. The Bible tells us to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15)
- g. Pray for all, even enemies.

As we think about our children and grandchildren and families and every one, let us pray in the words of a stanza from the evening hymn, Now the Light Has Gone Away.

Let my near and dear ones be, Always Near and dear to thee;
O Take me and all I love To the Happy Home Above. Amen