

## Stand Strong with God 5-17-20

When I read the text from I Peter today, immediately I thought of bullying. Now maybe some of you were bullies as younger people, and perhaps some of you still can be a bit of a bully at times. Most people, I believe, go through a period in life where they are bullied. It usually comes as a child or teenager, but also can come as adults. It could be a spouse, a sibling, a boss or co-worker. Sometimes even our children bully us into things that we didn't think were the best ideas, but we go along with it. I Peter speaks about the times that you think you are doing the right thing, and somehow it comes behind to bite you. Some of us just live our lives to please others, and when that doesn't work out as planned, we get very upset. We even may doubt God was there with us when these things happened.

John 14 that we also read today assures us that God has not left us alone. Jesus, in his words here, is reassuring us that we will not be left orphaned. He tells us before that the Father has sent us a mighty advocate in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a powerful force and the part of the trinity we have the most trouble perhaps accepting because we have no visuals. In God, the father, we think of a man with a long white beard, long white hair, massive hands and super strength. Well, that's my picture of God, but you may have a different version. In Jesus, we have the movies which depict him mostly the same except for the occasional film where Jesus is a blond, but I doubt that was correct with his ethnicity. We see Jesus as the younger version of God, just as powerful but touchable, approachable, walking and talking with people. We get to know Jesus through the gospels from the ones who knew him best, the disciples.

The disciples grew spiritually as they had that time with the Messiah. They learned more about the scriptures than they would have been exposed to without him. They saw a gentleness that was unexpected in Jesus, for which the Jewish people did not accept in their long-awaited savior. Jesus was human and he bled and wept and got

blisters on his feet from walking many miles. Jesus was very approachable, a quality which we all do not have. Jesus was so many things to so many people and continues to be the icon of the church. There are few in the world who do not know who Jesus was, or at least have heard his name. Jesus showed the world how to stand strong with God, and how to reach people that were unreachable, unapproachable, depressed, despised and full of sin and woes. He took them as they presented themselves, with all their flaws and he loved them.

Sometimes we really do judge others too harshly. We see them through blinders to the true people we should be seeing without judgement. They do one thing we don't like, and it taints our view of them. We must remember Jesus loved everyone. He loved the prostitutes and the tax collectors, his friends Lazarus, Mary and Martha and he loved them without judgement. It would have been easy for Jesus to avoid those the people found unacceptable. It would have been easy to tell Martha to stop whining about her sister all the time, but instead he taught us how to see the best in everyone. He showed Martha that Mary's childlike fascination of him was spot on, and that she was reaping the benefit of his presence instead of worrying about kitchen duties. We really do get caught up in judging others to the point that we miss the good in them. When we find ourselves judging others, we need to step back and think of the saying "What would Jesus do?". We know that answer, he would not judge.

We are not always so good at being Christians. We jump to conclusions without enough information, we turn our backs on those who need us but are afraid to ask for help, and we find ourselves looking out for ourselves and not looking to come to the aide of others who may need our time and friendship. I think we all have friends, and I am betting your friends do not all look alike as do mine. We find our friendships in many places from our church to our neighborhoods, and sometimes it is simply God that unites us. God has a way of growing us in faith by pairing us with the most

interesting and diverse people. When we stand strong with God, we look past the outward appearances of people around us and see them for the spirits within. We see the gentle souls with the crooked smiles who only expect a returned smile when they greet us. We see the fragile souls who only wish to be welcomed in, and not turned away once again as for many has happened far too often in their lives. We see the people in need and must seek ways to help them, because you never know when they are as the scriptures say, angels in disguise.

Standing strong with God is many things, many circumstances, and gives us many chances to come to the aide of those who need it most. We don't need to be obvious; it can be a subtle help. We show our strength by taking little measures, such as donating funds to our Missions groups who help people all over the world. We do it by donating our good used items to charities who will sometimes resell at a fraction of the cost, or simply give those items to those in need. We help the poor by our simple donations of food to our local food pantries, some items which we purchase just for that means or some which we find ourselves in excess of or really are not using in good time. All we do, no matter how small an effort, shows our strength as we stand with God.

God sent his son, a gentle soul, not the fiery warrior the Jewish people expected. He sent a man who took the time to sit with the children and talk to them on their level. He went into the crowds of people and spoke to them parables that they could relate to about everyday people just like they were. He took rough stones like his disciples and turned them into precious gems for his father's kingdom. Jesus was a surprising and refreshing person to meet. He didn't turn away those in need. He never judged the sinners for their sins, and only forgave them and asked them to live a better life.

We stand strong with God by helping his children. When we help in all the little or large ways that we can, we are building that kingdom of heaven. Jesus promised in

John today that he would come for us. We have not been left behind. Jesus will return and then we will truly see the Father in Him. All we have pondered over, stressed about and spent far too much time worrying about will be explained when Jesus returns and takes us to our new homes. All those we judged will be there, too, and many we did not expect to see will be there also. We have to strive to be as good as we can be while on this planet, this testing ground of humanity. The things our lives toss in our direction are minor, because by standing true to God and gaining His strength as our own we will be rewarded in the afterlife. All that is promised will be revealed on that day when Jesus returns for us. So, stand strong. Do not judge. Help others whenever and wherever you can. Seek out those who may need you, and do not turn your backs on someone reaching out to you for help. Jesus is all about love. We can show him in ourselves when we too choose simply to love one another. Amen.