

5-8-22 St. Peter Lutheran Church, Doss, TX “Guard yourselves and God’s People”

*Acts 20:26 I declare today that I have been faithful. If anyone suffers eternal death, it’s not my fault, 27 for I didn’t shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know. 28 So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—His church, purchased with His own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders. 29 I know that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. 30 Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following. 31 Watch out! Remember the three years I was with you—my constant watch and care over you night and day, and my many tears for you. 32 And now I entrust you to God and the message of His grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those He has set apart for Himself.*

Paul is on his way to Jerusalem and knows through the Holy Spirit that he will be taken into custody by the Romans to protect him from attackers. He said earlier in our first lesson, “22 “*And now I am bound by the Spirit to go to Jerusalem. I don’t know what awaits me, 23 except that the Holy Spirit tells me in city after city that jail and suffering lie ahead.*”

The leaders of the church in Paul’s day were told to guard themselves and God’s people. Paul seeks to edify or build them up. To be built up is not feeling warm about parts of the message that move us or hymns that touch us. It is “ an increase, an unfolding of the whole spiritual life, including more and better knowledge, but especially centering the will and the character more deeply in Christ and in His Word. Men and women who are thus built up are proof against wolves and errors.(Lenksi on Acts 20) Wolves can come from the world outside or within the

church. That's something we need to always discern. It is the job of the leaders and of every member to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today is Mother's Day and we give thanks to God for His love through mothers and fathers. It is our privilege as parents and grandparents to introduce our children and grandchildren to Jesus. Just as Paul calls leaders in the church to be on guard for the church, so also parents, who are leaders in the home, need to be on guard for their children as well.

The key verse here is : 28 *“So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders.”* This is for the leaders of the church and we can add the leaders of the family. The biblical design is that the husband is head of his wife and loves her as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her. Paul says her task is simply to respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-30) He didn't say 'love' your husband but respect, which is the basis for love. All followers of Jesus, of course, are commanded to love one's neighbor as oneself. Children are told to obey their parents. Paul says in Ephesians 6, *“1 Children, obey your parents because you belong to the Lord, for this is the right thing to do. 2 “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: 3 If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.”* Again, the same thing could be said about the leaders in the church.

Paul said in our text, *“27 for I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants you to know.”* Another translation of 'shrink' is to hold back. In other words, Paul shared the whole Gospel with them. That includes God's love for them and His

expectations of them. The commandments given to Moses for Israel on Mt. Sinai still apply. They keep us from falling into traps. This picture makes me think of life as a mine field. The commandments guide you through it so that you don't step on a land mine and go boom.

As one hymn put it, "God's Word is our great heritage." Each family should find ways to share the good news with their children and with each other. As you can see from listening in on the children's story each week, kids are pretty bright and have something to teach parents and other adults as well.

Christ in Revelation 2, gave this warning: (2:6) *But this is in your favor: You hate the evil deeds of the Nicolaitans, just as I do.*" The Nicolaitans followed the ways of the world, undercutting the teachings of Jesus. They believed that we should all get along with the world and its ways. When you look at the ELCA and several other main line denominations, you will see the same thing. Paul wrote in our text: *30 Even some men from your own group will rise up and distort the truth in order to draw a following.* The bottom line is to teach the true Gospel in our homes and in our churches.

Paul says in our text, which is from our second lesson today, "*32 And now I entrust you to God and the message of His grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those He has set apart for Himself.*" That means the Gospel shared is not duty, but joy in that it builds us up, helps us to know God better and follow Him faithfully. You are here in His church because He has called you and you have responded. Thus, our task as church leaders, church members, and families is to get to know Him better and to love Him more. He is the source of our salvation.

In closing, think about the words of the hymn we closed with last Sunday. It is on 259. The words go:

1) Lord, dismiss us with Your blessing fill our hearts with joy and peace. Let us each Your love possessing, triumph in redeeming grace. O refresh us, O refresh us, traveling through this wilderness.

2) Thanks, we give and adoration for Your Gospel's joyful sound. May the fruits of Your salvation in our hearts and lives abound. Ever faithful, ever faithful to Your truth may we be found.

3) Savior when Your love shall call us from our struggling pilgrim way, let no fear of death appall us, glad Your summons to obey. May we ever, may we ever reign with You in endless day.

*“So, guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as leaders”*- leaders of the church family and your own family. Amen.