

Sermon for June 1, 2014 - Graduation Sunday

Jude 17–21, 24-25 (NIV84)

Theme: **Keep Yourselves in God's Love.**

- 1) *Because many will try to destroy your faith.*
- 2) *Because your faithful God is able to keep you from falling.*

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. ²⁰ But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. . . ²⁴ To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy-- ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

We live in perilous times. There is a concerted effort by our society to undermine Christianity – telling people they should believe whatever they want to believe and do whatever they want to do. Society says that Christianity has no right to claim it alone has the truth.

Probably the biggest danger is found on secular university campuses. Dr. Daniel Johnson (the president of Wisconsin Lutheran College) stated that his experience and research has convinced him that there is an effort to undermine Christianity in secular colleges and universities; with administrators, professors and students all playing a role.

But this effort to undermine Christianity is not only found in places of higher education, you see it also in the media. Anyone who speaks a word against homosexuality is belittled and made a fool. On top of this, fallen away church bodies like the ELCA and Episcopalians actually defend things like homosexuality, abortion and even idolatry - saying that it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe. We all worship the same God anyway.

We live in perilous times. Statistics show that 70% of evangelical Christians drop out of church in their late teens and twenties with only about 1/3 of them ever returning. Worst of all, is the fact that most youth are not just leaving the church; they are leaving the faith.

And this is why my prayer for both you, graduates, and everyone else in the congregation is that you **keep yourself in God's love**. Because, as our sermon text says, *1) Many will try to destroy your faith, but 2) your faithful God is able to keep you from falling away.*

Part One: *Because many will try to destroy your faith.*

Our sermon text is from the book of Jude – a very short, one chapter-long book. It was written to warn Christians about the dangers coming in the last times – dangers we are certainly experiencing now. What kind of dangers? That people, even self-professed Christians, will scoff at us for our faith and try to lead us away from the truth.

Our text begins: *But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.* In other words, the situation we face today should not shock us because the apostles predicted that it would happen. You find these predictions throughout the epistles of the New Testament – from Romans to Revelation. And the fact that they are coming true should make us all the more confident that the Scriptures are true.

And what did the apostles warn? *They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

People scoff at the teachings of the Bible because they do not want to believe they are true. For example, people want to defend their ungodly sexual urges, so they mock us when we say that sex is reserved for marriage. They claim that our teaching causes all sorts of repression and harm for not letting people act out on their natural impulses.

And that's the real point, isn't it? The people of this world want to do what they want to do. They want to follow their impulses and desires and not have to feel "guilty" for having sinned. They don't want to be responsible to God. And isn't this the real reason behind most atheism? If you deny God you also deny sin and can set up your own moral code of ethics. You can live like an animal –following your instincts and passions. You can explain away everything. And if you start with the presupposition that there is no god, you will interpret nature and all the events that happen in the world under that presupposition.

Make no mistake: no matter how much atheistic college professors say that science proves there is no god, the truth is that most scientist are only misinterpreting the data under their preconceived atheistic notion. They have neither proof nor evidence that macro evolution ever happened, but they preach it anyway. Why? Because, since they refuse to even acknowledge the possibility of God, they have no other way of making sense of the world around them.

And why does natural man refuse to believe in the true God? Because he does not have the Spirit, as the Bible says: *no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.* (1Co 12:3 NIV84). And why doesn't natural man have the Spirit? Because he constantly resists the Holy Spirit when God tries to work faith in his heart through the Word.

The ideology of the world threatens your faith day-in and day-out. We are constantly being tempted to give in to the world's idea of sexuality. We are constantly being tempted to live for ourselves and not for our Lord – pursuing the desires of our sinful heart rather than God's glory. This is why the Jude urges:

²⁰ *But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. ²¹ Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

If you believe in Jesus, then you most certainly have the Spirit – who was given to you at your baptism. You have a blessed relationship with Christ: all your sins have been forgiven. You are his dearly loved child, and the LORD desires you to remain as such. This is why he forewarned us of the dangers we will face in this life. This is why he urges us to keep ourselves in God's love as we wait for him to fulfill everything He promised in Scripture.

And we can do this by building ourselves up in our most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit. The way we build up our faith is by using the means of grace God has given us: His Word and Sacrament. Through these means the LORD promises to strengthen our trust in him. How? By reminding us of his faithfulness in forgiving, saving and taking care of us.

Do not stop coming to hear the Word and partake of the sacraments. These things constantly keep Christ before our eyes. Not only do they remind us of His suffering, death and resurrection to forgive us of all our sins, but they also point us forward to the day when God will give us the eternal life he promised.

And as you use his Word and Sacraments, do not forget to pray. Pray in the Holy Spirit. That means meditate on His promises – recorded in scripture – and hold on to them. Recall with thanksgiving His past faithfulness and all the blessings He has given you. Recognize the danger our world poses to our faith and ask the Holy Spirit for his protection and help to keep you and all Christians in the one true faith. Ask for his guidance and encouragement to never tire of His Holy Word.

Sadly, we must all confess that we often fail at doing this, don't we? We don't take the danger of the world leading us astray seriously. We think we are strong enough in our faith, that we won't fall. It all starts with complacency followed by a little laziness. "I have too much to do than go to Church, and I know what pastor is going to say anyway." Soon worldly desires start to creep in. We want to spend our Sundays working, relaxing or sleeping in. Other things we want to do that get in the way of our devotional life. And if we continue down this path, we might soon find ourselves wandering down the same road to destruction that the world is.

So we pray: Dear Lord, forgive our complacency. Move us to take your warning seriously, and to be vigilant with our faith – building it up through prayer and meditation on your Holy Word. Keep us in your love – that is, keep us mindful of your great sacrifice for our sins that saved us completely. Let our eyes ever be on the skies – looking forward to your return. Lord, do not let us fall away from your grace.

Part Two: Because your faithful God is able to keep you from falling.

And if this is your prayer, then know this: the LORD will not let you fall away. He will remain faithful to you, as Jude's song of praise indicates: *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--*

Jesus is able to keep us from falling. How? He send us His Spirit who prays for us when we are weak, and reminds us of God's loving will when we are tempted. The Holy Spirit guides and counsels us through His Word as we meditate on the Bible. He will never abandon or forsake us. God will never take his love away, as the Bible promises: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? (Rom 8:32 NIV84) . . . For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39 NIV84)*

And so we are convinced that as long as we keep ourselves in God's love, Jesus will keep us from falling. But what if we, according to our own to stupidity, do fall into sin. Then what? When we return to him in repentance and faith, Jesus will forgive us, as the Bible promises: *My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (1Jo 2:1 NIV84)* It's because we are covered with his righteousness that we will be presented before God without any sin or blemish – and how that thought gives us great joy. Many in the world refuse to give God glory because they do not want to give up their sin. We praise Him because he has taken our sins away – giving us his righteousness as a gift – so that we might be eternally holy and blameless in his sight.

We live in perilous times. Our sinful society is doing its best to undermine and destroy our faith. This is why I encourage you to Keep yourself in God's love – studying His Word, rejoicing in His sacraments and remembering with thanksgiving the salvation Jesus won for you. And why should you do this? Because

many are trying to entice you away from Christ and destroy your faith, and because, as you hold on to him in faith, your faithful God will keep you from falling away from Him. Therefore, *to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.*