

# **“STAND FIRM & WITNESS”**

## **Pastor Mike Corwin**

TEXT: 1 PETER 4:12-14 & 5:6-11

GOD’S WORD: ACTS 1:6-14

### **I – FRUSTRATION:**

Okay it’s official...I’m tired of it. I wonder how many of you are too. I’m tired of hearing all about it. I’m tired of trying to figure out who’s telling me the facts, and who doesn’t really know what they’re talking about but the news must go on so they talk and they talk and they talk from every conceivable angle. The News comes up with something whether it really is what was said or done, they have to sensationalize it. I guess that’s their job. I’m tired of it. You’ve already told me our world is affected by a pandemic, you’ve given me the numbers of how many people have been affected, and all the other charts and graphs you can put on the screen, but I’m already aware of the fact we are surrounded by sick people. If it’s raining for an hour I don’t need somebody standing next to me and reminding me every 5 minutes that it’s still raining!

While I say all this I also need to say that I am frustrated, like most of you are too. We all have questions about when we will be able to get back to normal. We also ask what normal will look like in the future. We’re tired of socially distancing, tired of wearing masks, tired of not being able to go to our favorite restaurant for dinner. Tired of not seeing our friends, not finding toilet paper in the store or now being limited on how many packages of chicken we can buy at one time. I am frustrated that I can’t go and see people in the hospital or nursing homes. I am frustrated that I can’t see all of you every week at church or interact with the munchkins who bring me great joy. I know that most of this is for not only my own safety but for the safety of others as well.

Each week I in our “This Is Life” Sunday school class we discuss various problems we face, then we conclude the discussion by asking what we should do about it as Christians. So the question for today, in the face of being tired and frustrated is exactly that...“SO, AS CHRISTIANS WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT?”

### **II – ACTS:**

Well I am glad you asked that question and as I do in the Sunday school class I will attempt to show you what the Scriptures say about it. If we are Christians then we should be getting our answers from this book and the teachings of Jesus Christ shouldn’t we? First let’s look at this morning’s passage from the book of Acts.

Today is Ascension Sunday when the church marks the return of the risen Savior to God in heaven. The Apostles have been meeting with Jesus on and off since his resurrection. This day they are all gathered around him and the question is if the time has come that Jesus will do what they were still wanting from a

Messiah. Would this be the time that he sets his people free and the kingdom is restored? First note that they still don't get Jesus fully. They aren't asking if God's Kingdom with a capital K will be restored but "our kingdom" with a small k. The Jewish kingdom. Jesus turns it back to God when he tells them that God alone has that authority to set the date and time and it's not up to us to know.

Don't you have to wonder why people are always making predictions as to the end of the world? Every generation has tried to read the signs, make the planets align, and make money off of books as they predict the coming of the end. Jesus said no one knew – NO ONE! Quit worrying about it – Only God knows and the rest of us will find out when it happens.

It's the next part of the passage we should be looking at closely this day and every day. He says two important things. #1 – they, and us, will receive power from the Holy Spirit. When you find Jesus, when you accept Jesus and make him your Lord and Savior you get Holy Power from God's Holy Spirit. But then it tells us something else very important...what to do with this power. #2 - According to Jesus this power is to be used to witness and tell everyone possible about Jesus. He says to do it in your own neighborhood...then in your sphere of influence...and then throughout the world. Even to people we don't know or we don't like. There is no escape clause in this contract. You get the power – you use the power to witness. Remember this WITNESS ORDER we'll come back to it in a few minutes.

Then Jesus leaves them and returns to God in heaven. They stand there with mouths agape just staring after him until the angels ask them what they're staring at and tells them Don't just stand there – Do Something!

### **III – TEXT:**

After finding out about our duty to witness I want to next turn to this morning's text from the Letter of 1 Peter. This will give us the rest of the answer.

#### **1 Peter 4:12-14 (NLT)**

<sup>12</sup> Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. <sup>14</sup> If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ, you will be blessed, for the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you.

#### **1 Peter 5:6-11 (NLT)**

<sup>6</sup> So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. <sup>7</sup> Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. <sup>8</sup> Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going

through the same kind of suffering you are. <sup>10</sup> In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. <sup>11</sup> All power to him forever! Amen.

Being a follower of Jesus was not a popular thing in the first century. There were all kinds of abuses by the government, by the established church, and just by those who used any reason to abuse someone different than them. Peter knows this, Peter has witnessed it, and Peter has experienced some of it. So he writes a letter to the church to help them hold on and keep their faith.

He promises his church that they will be able to face the tuff stuff and times ahead and they could do it because they knew what Jesus had done for them, and because they knew that glory and power ultimately belonged to God. Nations and rulers may think they have the ultimate power, they may have temporary power to persecute and even kill the faithful, but ultimate power and your soul belong only to God. He reminds them that Jesus went through such things and more and their own suffering put them in partnership with him.

We are also reminded in verse that God cares for us personally. That instead of worrying about any of it, or getting tired and frustrated by things we need to turn it all over to him. We are to honor that and live lives that bring glory to God, not shame. That usually means we are living a lifestyle that contrasts that of the world around us. Live as if you were really serious about God being in your life and caring about you.

But I see it all summarized in verse 8 & 9 where Peter tells them, and us, that the enemy is always trying to get God's children away from their beliefs and faith, away from the loving care of God, and we are to "Stand firm against it and be strong in our faith."

As we stand firm we are sharing in God's eternal glory – in other words we are witnessing – and we aren't the only ones suffering, others are too, but God will take care of us, will support us, strengthen us, and bring is closer to him.

So adding this to our passage from Acts we find the answer to how we are supposed to get through these times: **STAND FIRM IN OUR FAITH AND WITNESS.**

#### **IV – WITNESS:**

I don't think there are many who would look at the current situation and deny that there is suffering going on in the world right now. Our country has had more people die of the virus than any other nation. We have never seen the need for refrigerated semis to hold bodies or mass graves to bury them in our lifetime. We

do have restrictions, shortages, unemployment and newfound poverty. It would be easy to complain and worry about it all and some have chosen to do so.

Yet in the midst of it I see people who are standing firm in their beliefs that this is all temporary, and who are witnessing to the hope we can all have. I see people clapping on their balconies for health care workers; I see blue lights displayed on porches to support the first responders. I see choirs singing together via ZOOM, I see entertainers getting together long distance and singing for us or giving us a reason to escape from reality for a minute and be happy. I see people making food banks operate and helping those in need. Drive by birthday parades or Disney sing-along's. It shows me that even in the middle of such a thing as a pandemic we can support each other in our mutual suffering and be a witness to those who need one right now.

### **V – THE CHURCH:**

As I look at messages such as this in the Bible, I know how we, the people and the church of Jesus Christ are supposed to be acting right now. We of all people should be standing firm in our beliefs that God has the ultimate power, that God Cares for us and will see us through these times, and while we are doing all of this we need to do it in such a way that we are being a strong witness to our faith in our community, or sphere of influence, and beyond.

We will weather this storm as the church has done since the first century of persecution and trials. We have had to make adjustments, we have had to stop some of the things we did and started doing new things. My prayers each day thank God that we have not had anyone in our congregation be infected with this virus. My other prayer is that we will be witnesses as we continue to proclaim the Gospel, just in a different format. As we come through this I also pray that we will come through it not only healthy but wiser and more daring in trying new ways to be witnesses to others. Adjustments will have to be made, new ideas tried, and new technology employed. I don't think we will ever get back to the "Old Normal" that we all felt comfortable in. But I am confident that God can use this pandemic to strengthen his church and his children. I am confident that the church will go on, just in a different form. And I am confident that The Bucyrus United Methodist Church will still be an asset in building God's Kingdom.

Two weeks ago I preached about the Martyr Stephen being stoned. I want to tell you that story contained a piece we didn't get into much that Sunday. While Stephen was going through his persecution he looked up to heaven and saw the "glory of God." If we do this right, if we STAND FIRM AND WITNESS then others will look at us and see the glory of God.

AMEN