

Hobby Lobby. Operated by a Christian family. The Green family. Known for their philanthropic endeavors for many Christian causes. Employees get off work on Sundays, so they can go to church if they choose. A very generous health insurance plan to their employees. Enter Obamacare. You must fund 20 different methods of birth control. Hobby Lobby refuses to fund 4 of the methods of birth control, since it would effectively kill an already fertilized egg. Murder. Abortion. Result. The government goes after them. If Hobby lobby loses the court case, they would have to pay fines of 1.5 million dollars a day. It would have put them out of business. Fortunately, in this case, justice prevailed. But Hobby Lobby was attacked for their Christian values.

A Kentucky County Clerk named Kim Davis, who started work at an office when marriage was still between one man and one woman, is thrown into jail because she failed to sign a marriage license for a same sex couple. Meanwhile, 2 Muslim truckers are awarded \$240,000 in damages for not delivering beer as truck drivers. The Muslim drivers insisted it was against their religion to do this. Our government accommodates Muslims, and yet is on the attack of Christians. I could go on with other examples, such as Chick –Fil-A, and Duck Dynasty to demonstrate how when Christians make statements about what the Bible says, they are labeled as bigoted and racist. But you get where I am going. We are under attack in the United States of America for being Christians.

I am sure the disciples of Jesus never dreamed that as everyday fisherman, followers of a famous local preacher, that they would face bitter persecution. They would never have to stand before the Supreme court, or kings and rulers. Surely they knew that Jesus had his enemies, such as the Pharisees who hated him, but how could that affect them so much that they would suffer for being his disciples? How could it ever be that such a tiny group of disciples in the small corner of the world called Judea would have to stand before rulers and kings? Impossible! But it happened. Likewise, let me encourage all of you on this Reformation Sunday, “Stand Tall For the Truth of God’s Word!

It was only a few weeks after Jesus spoke these words that he visibly left his disciples and ascended into heaven. And it was perhaps only a few weeks after his ascension that Peter and John were commanded by the religious leaders not to preach about Jesus. When they refused, they were called before the council and were flogged and imprisoned. It happened exactly as Jesus had prophesied. But these disciples were not just flogged and imprisoned, they were killed. James, a disciple, was beheaded by King Herod. James the half brother of Jesus according to history was skinned alive. Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. And the apostle Paul. He testified before a king, two governors, and eventually to Caesar in Rome. His life was filled with beatings, imprisonment, and eventually beheaded in Rome.

Amazingly, we hear nothing of the disciples being scared or worried or ashamed. We hear nothing of the disciples not knowing what to say or what to do. The book of Acts is a marvelous testimony to what they did. Whenever Peter and Paul were on trial before Jesus, they actually took the opportunity to preach about Jesus. When Paul and Silas were in jail in Philippi, they sang hymns and prayed so loudly that everyone in the whole prison heard them. Jesus’ other words were fulfilled as well, **“Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”** I have heard a Christian at Open Bible say, “Pastor, I dont know if an Isis terrorist, were interrogating me, if I would be strong enough to testify that I am a Christian. I dont know what I would say.” I tell the person, dont worry, The Holy Spirit will give you the words to say. The Holy Spirit will embolden you to testify about your faith in Jesus.

Those disciples were filled with love for their Savior. They saw what he had done, how he had given his life for them and for all others. They saw him rise from the dead, triumphant over sin and death. They were then determined to share that news of Jesus with others. When the Jewish leaders commanded Peter and John not to preach about Jesus, they refused and replied,

“We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” *That is where they stood. They could do nothing other* than stand on the truth of Jesus and his Word. They refused to budge. They refused to stop preaching. They refused to hide. They refused to give up their faith.

History repeats itself. There was a man who grew up in poverty. His name was Martin Luther. As he grew up, his father entered the mining business to provide for the family. Martin helped provide for his schooling, by singing at rich people’s homes. He was once whipped 15 times because he hadn’t done a homework assignment. He was deeply troubled about his sins. His Name. Martin Luther. Luther wholeheartedly believed what the church was teaching at the time, that a person had to earn and work his or her way to heaven. After joining the monastery this monk named Martin Luther was very serious about his sin. He slept on cold floors, He said his Hail Mary’s, he starved himself, he beat himself. About this time in his life he once said, “If anyone could have gained heaven as a monk, then I would indeed have been among them.”

But as Luther began to study Scripture more and more, God opened his heart and mind to understand that we are saved by God’s grace alone through our faith, and not by our own works. So on October 31, 498 years ago, Martin Luther very boldly nailed 95 Theses on the door of the church in Wittenburg. These 95 Theses boldly spoke about the wrongs in the church at the time. This was the beginning of one of the greatest changes in history.

Of course, like Peter and John with the Jews, the church rejected these teachings and commanded Martin Luther to stop. They were so serious about it that they called Luther to a meeting (they called it a “diet”) in the German city of Worms. On April 18, 1521 Jesus’ words in Mark 13 were once more fulfilled. Martin Luther stood before the most powerful leaders of the church and the world. Most notably, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, the most powerful man in the world, officiated at this meeting. They stacked up Martin Luther’s teachings and writings on a table and asked him two questions: “Martin Luther, are these your teachings? If they are, will you recant them?” They gave him the night to think about his answer. Martin Luther knew that if he stood by his teachings and the truth of Scripture that he would be branded a heretic and an outlaw and might be killed. So he prayed. He read Scripture, including Psalm 46. The next day, staring down the most powerful people in the world and knowing the imminent threat of death, Martin Luther said, “*Hier stehe ich. Ich kanne nicht anders. Gott helfe mir. Amen.*” “Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.” Martin Luther would not budge from the truth of Scripture. He refused to stop preaching salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

That became the turning point of what is called the Reformation. From that point on millions of people protested against the teachings of the Catholic church and then became known as “Protestants.” During the remaining 25 years of his life Luther translated the Bible into German so the people could read it, he wrote hundreds of theological works and over 200 hymns to be sung in church. Martin Luther stood fast on three tenants of Christianity—that we are saved by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone. ***There he stood. He could do no other.***

On days like today we stand in awe of great men like Peter and Paul and Martin Luther who dared to face danger and death as they stood before leaders of the world and boldly testified to the truth of Scripture. We thank God for what they did. But it all seems so far-fetched and implausible, doesn’t it? How could this ever happen in our world today?

I think you know as well as I that it might not be as unlikely as some think. Things are certainly headed in that direction. They ban prayers in public school. How long before they interfere with what Christian schools teach, saying its wrong to only teach what the Bible says or to pray when students might not want to? How long before they command our Christian Day schools to teach evolution and not creation? If we don’t do what they say, they take away tax exempt status, and any government aid for education. This country triumphs homosexuality. Anyone who speaks against it is breaking the law. Is it impossible to think that the government would go on a witch hunt against those who teach creation, or believe homosexuality is wrong, or who preach abstinence and purity outside of marriage? Is it impossible to think that the government will some day try to mandate what we teach in our Christian schools or what we

preach in our Christian churches? Is it impossible to think that you or I might stand on trial or even go before the Supreme Court because we stand fast on the truth of Scripture? Is it impossible to think that reverse-discrimination will take place and we will be victims of beatings and lynchings and mob violence? I don't know if we even want to answer those questions. But we all know the direction in which our country is headed. Friends, this is very real for us—today! Listen to Jesus' words again, **“You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.”** Jesus knew what would happen to Peter and John and Paul and Martin Luther and to many people living in the world today, and what might soon happen to you and to me.

So where are we going to find the strength and the courage to deal with all of this? Where are our children going to find the strength and the courage to deal with this as it gets worse? In the same place that Peter and Paul and Luther did—in our Savior Jesus Christ. Interestingly, Jesus himself did the same things that he predicted would happen to his followers. He was handed over to the local councils and rulers. He was flogged. He stood before the governor Pontius Pilate. Not once did he waver from his path and his mission though. He resolutely and lovingly followed the path that led to his death. He would not change his course for he knew what he came to do. He knew that he had to suffer and he had to die to take away the suffering and death that belongs to us. Jesus went forth in suffering and death to bare the agony of hell and the sins of the world. Jesus did not alter his path once as he died to save us, and then rose triumphant over Satan and this world.

He is our comfort and our strength. Without him, we would be like Martin Luther when he thought he had to earn his way to heaven—lost, afraid, terrified of the punishment our sins deserve. But all that guilt and grief is gone. All that fear and terror is erased. He has freely given us forgiveness and salvation. Life in heaven is his gift—no strings attached. Without him, all are lost. Now he will be our comfort and our strength.

We are now in times when it is by no means easy to be a Christian. We face a lot of opposition and persecution, and things are only getting worse. But we gladly stand with our Savior and we will gladly proclaim the truth. We will not change, for God's Word does not change. That's what it means to be a WELS Lutheran. Sad to say, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Missouri Synod have changed with the times. However, We will never swerve from the truth that we are saved by grace alone and through faith alone in Christ, and all our beliefs come from Scripture alone.

So come what may. People can laugh at us. They can mock us. They can sue us and take us to court. They can beat us. They can torture us. They can lock us up and throw away the key. They can bring us before the Supreme Court. They can take us before President Obama, or the United Nations. They can line us up in front of the firing squad. Come what may. Jesus is our Savior. His Word is truth. Heaven is our gift. *“Hier stehen wir. Wir können nicht anders. Gott helfe uns. Amen.”* **“Here we stand. We cannot do otherwise.** God help us.”