

“Fight with all you’ve got!” 1 Tim 6:11b-16.

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

In our today’s reading Paul speaks about faith. About the importance of keeping and guarding our faith and even fighting the good fight for our faith. To appreciate what Paul says we need to be clear – why our faith is such a big deal?

I would like to tell you a story...

There is this king. He is not like other kings, not at all. He is, as Paul puts it, the only Sovereign, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, immortal and dwelling in unapproachable light.

His Kingdom is not like other kingdoms. In the middle there is this great city of the King with the tree of life and the river of the water of life. There is no oppression, no injustice, no lies, no evil, everything there is good. Very, very good.

However, for now there is something that overshadows the otherwise pure blessedness of His Kingdom. One of His subjects have led a riot against the King, and as the result His favourite creatures are held captives by the enemy.

The enemy has filled their ears and hearts with lies, portraying the King of kings as some selfish and judgemental tyrant. He has stolen their hearts. Their love for their Creator has grown cold, for some it has turned into hatred.

The King could, of course, bring them back by force, but that is not an option for true love. He wants their hearts, not their submission, He wants them to come home freely and willingly. He knew that there is only one force powerful enough to overcome the lies of His enemies, to silence every hatred and to regain the hearts of His favourite creatures. This force is – pure, self-sacrificial love.

Out of His holy love the King of kings went through great sufferings and by giving up His life and embracing death He created a way, through which His children could pass from their captivity to His Kingdom. He prepared the seal of the Spirit for those

who wanted to return. Only those with the seal would be allowed into the great city. Meanwhile His children live under the rule of the King's enemies. Even if Sun is shining, that is still dark and gloomy world. Filled with lies and selfishness, with strive and injustice, with evil and fear and loss. Ending in death, without a hope.

But because the children of the King haven't seen anything else, they don't realize how bad it is. It is heart-breaking for the King of kings to see His beloved in such captivity. So, He launched the rescue mission and sent out His messengers.

They were to tell His children the truth about who they truly were – dearly loved children of the great and gracious King, held captive by His enemies. And to tell them about everything that the King has done for them out of His great love, and how much He longs to be with them.

They were to seal the children with the seal of the Spirit that would grant their return to the Kingdom of their Father. And what a life it would be! Whatever bad we see in this world, pain and loss, sin and sickness, temptations, injustice, death, they all will be gone. Yes, even death will be no more.

And whatever good is in this world, it will be multiplied infinitely – joys and beauty, love and friendships, pleasure and peace, adventures and discoveries, truth and wisdom... and so on.

The children of the Father will finally find the fulfillment of all their deepest longings. They will reign in the great city of their Father together with their brothers and sisters in wonderful joy and blessedness forever and ever.

They just need to get there, and they need the seal of the Spirit to enter into their new life. But here is the thing. It is not all easy and effortless. There are agents of the enemy who are sent with one mission and one mission only – to prevent their return. To make sure they never enter the Kingdom of their Father.

The agents are many and they work tirelessly to achieve their goal. They are smart and they are ruthless, they use whatever strategy possible in order to snatch the seal of the Spirit away from the heirs of the great King. They may come wearing faces even of our closest people.

So, they come with the most sophisticated and persuasive arguments trying to convince the children of the Great Lord that the message is not true. That there is no Great King who is their loving Father. That there is no such Kingdom where everything was good.

They promise that whatever the children of the King want now, it will be given to them – power, and wealth and all the pleasures would be theirs, just listen to us and forget about the seal, through it away...

They try to convince the beloved of the Father that they don't actually need this seal to enter the Kingdom. They tell them that there are many paths that lead to the Kingdom of the Father, everyone can pick and choose whatever they please.

These agents have succeeded with many ... many have given up the wonderful future in exchange to lies and things that don't last and don't satisfy. To stop us the evil agents wouldn't hesitate even to murder, but ... they are restrained.

The King of king, the Lord of lords, had provided a protection for His children. Hidden from their eyes, there is someone, actually not just one, but three, who always stand with them as their guardians.

Who surround them like an unbreachable iron wall, protecting them like a shield, enclosing them like a loving parent, filling their hearts with longings to make it to their Father's great city.

Imbuing them with courage and desire for what is true and good and beautiful, quietly whispering in their ear: "You are my dear child, I will protect you, nothing will separate you from me, nothing! Come home!"

Besides, the King of kings has given us His letter, His book, where He reveals all the truth, and this book is like a light shining in darkness, and whoever reads this book, is made wise and can see through all the deception of the King's enemies.

Thus no one can harm the King's children. It is left up to them, what to do with the Father's invitation – to accept, or to reject it. The fight for eternal life is fought in their hearts. Some win and enter the great city, but many lose the fight...

See, this is our story and you! are the children of the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He indeed desires to have you with Him. He indeed has showed His love and commitment to you by laying down His life for you. He indeed has given you the seal of the Spirit – that is your faith. And if this is true – how much should we guard this seal of the Spirit, that is – our faith?!

This is why Paul speaks so strongly. **"Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."**

We need to be clear on how to think about our Christian faith. It is not about what we like or prefer. It is not about spiritual needs or wants. It is not about our emotional comfort; whatever works for me.... It is a matter of eternal life and death.

That should define our attitudes. The verb that we translate as "fight" describes fight, or wrestling match in competition. Meaning, you give your everything to hold to eternal life, all your energy, all your power, all your will. When you fight for your life, there is no place for laziness and indifference.

If you lose, then you are lost. See how much we worry about guarding our life here in this age. Nothing is too great a sacrifice if that helps us to save our lives, right? But then how much more should we be devoted to not losing the eternal life in the wonderful Kingdom of our Father who is in heaven?!

The agents of the enemy will do whatever they can to steal your faith from you. They will lie, they will tempt you, they to distract you, they will try everything. Therefore, we need to be as disciplined as we possibly can, using all the armour of God and all the weapons of the Spirit.

We need to immerse ourselves in the Word of God, reading, studying, meditating upon it, we need to feed our faith with the most holy meal the Jesus provides for us, we need to support and strengthen one another in our Christian fellowship, praying for one another and our loved ones without ceasing. We need to commit to this...

“I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus ... to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

I charge you to keep the commandment unstained and free... What is meant by “the commandment”? The consensus among theologians is that Paul is referring to the entire message of Jesus, to everything that Jesus commanded us, the entire Gospel. What Paul is charging us is – to keep and guard the Gospel message so that it is unstained until the appearing of Jesus.

There is one of those sticky lies, which these days is repeated by the agents of the enemy again and again. “There is no need to worry about pure and sound teaching of the Gospel.” Otherwise put, “don’t worry about false teachings, it’s not a big deal, as long as we can all be friendly. That’s what matters.” No!

Please, don’t let the agents of the enemy to deceive you into believing that false teachings do no harm or that all paths lead to the Father’s city. If we believe these lies, we make our God a liar. There is no other way, but Jesus the Christ.

There is no other entering the Father’s great city, but with the seal of the Spirit, the true faith created by the proclamation of pure Gospel. Every false teaching is like a wrong turn, like an obstacle on our journey home. This is why we need to fight the good fight of faith, giving to it all that we have.

This week we celebrate 490th birthday of Lutheran Church, the day of the proclamation of the Augsburg Confession. Our forefathers understood well, that there is no room for compromises when it comes to the truth of the Gospel and the matters of eternal life. They cherished the truth of the Gospel more than their lives.

490 years ago influential lay leaders, who had heard and embraced the pure teaching of the Gospel that we are saved by *grace alone*, through *faith alone*, in *Christ alone* as revealed in the *Holy Scriptures alone*, they stood before the emperor Charles V and confessed that the emperor can take their lives, but they won't deny their faith.

They guarded the seal of the Spirit, their faith, as the greatest of treasures. You are heirs of the same church that was born out of this brave confession. The same Spirit who gave courage to our forefathers, who made Paul the fearless confessor, the same Spirit dwells in you to help you and to guide you.

When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, when He reflected on God's incredible grace given to us, unworthy and ungrateful, when He rejoiced in the gift of saving faith, he couldn't but become overwhelmed and exclaim with joy and excitement, as He did in his other letters as well.

This God, this our Father ... **"He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen."**

And, yes, we should rejoice and exclaim with Paul, for this King of kings is your God, He is your Lord, and He wants you to know Him as your Father and as your Brother Jesus Christ. He has prepared the Kingdom and the great city for you.

He has sealed you with the seal of the Spirit that will let you in, and He Himself guards and protects you so that you don't lose your faith. Fight the good fight of faith with all you've got, for your Father, the King of kings, is waiting for you!

Amen.