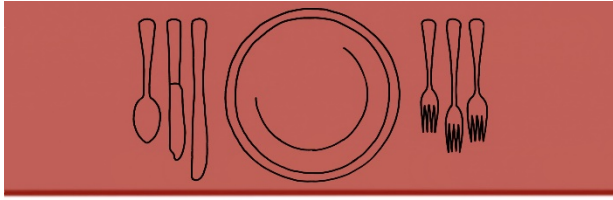
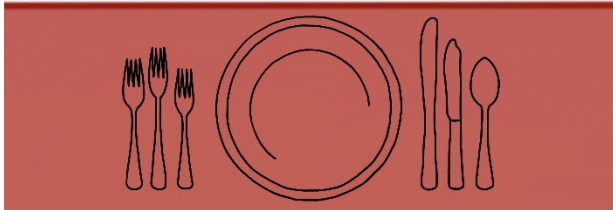


HARD AGAINST IT? COME, LORD JESUS!



Come,
LORD JESUS,
be our guest.



"Because I said so!" When those words come from a politician, they don't mean much. When those words come from your mother, they mean "Take note and act immediately!" But when they come from *"Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,"* then we have a promise that means something we can stake our hopes upon, our faith upon, our eternity upon. David writes in Psalm 139: *"Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, **even there** Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me."* Even there - wherever that "there" may be, Jesus says, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." My prayer as you read this article is that the Holy Spirit would

speak the promises of the Great I AM, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ to your anxious and troubled hearts and grant you calm and peace.

We have every reason to be skeptical about promises in our day-to-day lives. Today they seem to be accompanied by the "fine print" which diminishes the promise to mere false hope. How many of us have been given a promise, guarantee, warranty or contract only to discover that the promise giver has a loophole that gives them the right to not keep their promise? Frustrating, right? We've almost come to accept this disappointment as a way of life, haven't we? Well, so has the world around us. They are in dire need of a promise keeper. **They want what we have as Christians - the Triune God, the faithful Promise Keeper.**

The Lutheran high school where I served as principal had a golf outing this past weekend. It reminded me of this story about a promise between a husband and wife. The husband, Gil, returned home four hours after the time he promised his wife, Liz. "Gil, you promised you would be home at 4:00. It is now 8:00." "Honey, please listen to me. Poor ol' Roger, my golf partner, is in the hospital. He was knocked unconscious by a stray shot on the eighth green." "Oh, that's awful." "It surely was. For the rest of the tournament, it was hit the ball, drag Roger, hit the ball, drag Roger."

We fail to keep promises for some of the lamest reasons. But God is faithful to every single promise. After the display of God's awesome power and judgment with the worldwide flood, Noah needed a promise from God. And God placed the bow in the sky as a promise that never again will there be a worldwide flood of judgment. We should be astounded by the awesome

power of God, but we should also be even more astounded by the promises of God that impact our daily lives. The Holy Spirit led the Apostle Paul to pen the words of this spiritual prayer for you: *"...that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God"* (Ephesians 3:16-19).

No wonder we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus"! We have the promises of God - and the expanse of these promises completely cover the breadth and length and height and depth of all our challenges. That's the message of the Cross of Christ crucified for you. Although this sinful world attacks us from every front with the guilt of unkept promises, relentless failures, daunting challenges of health and finances - you name it, and the sinful flesh will cause us to be haunted by it - what the believer in Christ has are the promises of God that fill us to our inner being. And as we live in these promises, the world around us will ask: "What is it that you have to stand firm in the midst of fires, storms, pandemics and variants? I want what you have." 1 Peter 3:15 promises: *"Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."* God promises the world will ask you for the reason for your hope. Your answer: Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest. Because in the midst of any and all storms, we have God who comes to us.

Therefore, when it comes to sharing the Gospel - the promise of God that helps others - always be ready. Take heart. The great I AM is with you as He promised. His Word is flowing with forgiveness, grace, victory and everything needed for body and soul. What would happen if you intentionally prayed the prayer before your feet hit the floor in the morning: "Lord, prepare me to be ready to share YOU with the world where YOU place me today. Come, Lord Jesus, be my Guest." We have God's promise that He will bring people into your world who will want the hope that you have. Take heart! Share the One who is with you for that moment.

The disciples were literally "hard against it." They were "making headway painfully, for the wind was against them." In Mark's Gospel it seemed as though the disciples and Jesus had been making headway "painfully" for some time – Jesus was rejected in His own hometown; King Herod had put the forerunner of the Christ, Jesus' own cousin, to death for proclaiming God's truth; people were following Jesus and His disciples everywhere to have a miracle done for them so that they didn't have time to rest or to grab a bite to eat or even have a moment's peace and quiet. And then the disciples find themselves hard against the winds and in grave danger.

If that wasn't enough, the disciples had trouble from within. We are told that "their hearts were hardened." Jesus had confronted them before about their lack of faith - their lack of attachment to the One who IS the Answer to everything they needed for body and soul. Every time Jesus

wanted to demonstrate His Lordship, it was His own followers that seemed to have the greatest struggle with it.

Case in point - Remember from our lessons just five weeks ago, Jesus is in the boat with them, sleeping, and the disciples wake Him in a panic during a life-threatening storm saying, "Don't You care that we're perishing?" Jesus immediately says, "Peace. Be still." The storm ceases, the winds are calm, and they look at one another saying, "**Who is this** that can do such a thing?" Since then, they have been eyewitnesses to Jesus casting out demons, healing a woman who had been sick for 12 years, raising a little girl from death and the feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fish.

Now Jesus is walking on water out to His disciples in the midst of another furious storm and they mistake Him for a ghost - or literally, "something supernatural." That is exactly who Jesus is - He is the transcendent God who has come into the flesh to be present with them. Jesus reveals this truth saying, "It is I" - literally - I AM who I AM - Yahweh, God's revealed name. And the disciples are astounded and their hearts are hardened. They are "hard against" Jesus Himself. The stubbornness of their sinful flesh refuses to recognize Jesus for who He is and refuses to believe what God has told them about themselves. The sinful flesh is "hard against" God - an enemy of God.

How often have we, in the midst of storms, blamed God rather than confessing His name? When we're hard against it, are we quick to remember all that God has done - or are we quick to criticize God for not doing what we want Him to do? Are we so quick to call upon God for help or do we want to have all the control? Do we recognize God's presence with us in the midst of storms or do we think God is missing in action? As fellow servants in the Church, there never seems to be enough money, never enough volunteers, or there's sickness, time constraints, the lack of interest, a constant stream of someone being hurt by what someone else has said or done. The life of the Church seems to be "hard against it" and, like the disciples, we seem to row and row and row without really getting anywhere. We need to start from within - with repentance.

The Law of God drives us to our knees to confess our own sin. We must ask for God to forgive all the times we have been like the disciples - rowing and rowing, getting nowhere, but still refusing to call upon Him in trouble and in praise, failing to recognize Him for who He is and failing to confess who we are as sinful people by nature and sinful in thought, word and deed. Instead, we succumb to Murphy's Law - whatever can possibly go wrong will, so just grin and bear it. Whatever doesn't kill you will make you stronger.

When you don't understand what is happening in your life; when you are "hard against it" - whatever that "it" may be - this is not the time to harden your hearts against God. The Bible uses the word, "poros" meaning "stoney" - literally - stone cold, wall-building, looking

everywhere else but to God. The disciples were rowing until the fourth watch of the night - between 3 and 6 a.m. in the morning - **and yet they never once called upon Jesus.**

But Jesus knew exactly what they were facing. Our reasoning likes to think like this - well, if Jesus knew a storm was coming - and He did - and if He knew His disciples were going to be severely tested - and He did - why didn't He just say, "Hey guys, you might want to walk today - a storm is coming. You're My disciples - I will steer you away from all storms - just follow Me!" Wouldn't that be great if following Jesus meant to skirt around all the troubles in life?

But instead, Jesus tells us in John 16:33 – I'm telling you all these things because in this world YOU WILL face troubles. But take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus is concerned about our hearts - not wanting them to be hardened because we face storms but for them to be open to Him, His presence, His help – our relationship with Him. Paul reveals the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ and His love and His willingness to do far more than we ask or think according to the power at work within us. Christ wants to fill our hearts with a longing, a hunger, a thirst for Him - that we don't want to face a single moment in life without Him. This longing, hunger, and thirst is satisfied in the promises of God. And in the same way, we have what the world needs: Hope in Jesus alone. Ask Him to prepare you to share this saving hope - today!

Since God keeps all His promises, it would make good sense to ask Him to equip our hearts, mouths and lives. God is working through your English District Evangelization Team, your pastors and spiritual leaders, and our Synod to produce materials that will equip and prepare you for the life-changing privilege of sharing what you already have: Jesus and His Gospel. Ask your pastor to teach the class, "[Every One, His Witness.](#)" Ask him to put the weekly [evangelism sentences](#) in your bulletin to encourage every believer. Search the resources readily available online at [Making Disciples for Life](#). Purchase and read the new [CPH](#) book, "Connected to Christ - Witnessing in Everyday Life." Since sharing the Gospel to help others is intentional, so is the yearning to be equipped and prepared to do so.

Please see once again. When we're "hard against it," (and we all are due to sin in the world) it doesn't mean that we're not where we're supposed to be. But God says that "even there" His hand will lead you, and His right hand will hold you. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me." Our world is so quick to ask, "Where was God when the condo collapsed? Where was God when I lost my loved one? Where was God when I faced my crisis? He was in the same place He was when His one and only Son hung on a Cross, shed His blood and died for your sin and mine - making sure that no matter what we face, no matter where we are - we know a God who has settled His love for us once and for all. We now know without a doubt that we are loved, we are forgiven, we are never abandoned or forsaken, and we are never alone. And the world around us desperately needs God, too. Ask God to open our eyes to this need.

And if that is not enough, we have a Savior who continually comes to us. In Mark's Gospel, the phrase "He came to them" is in the **middle voice of the Greek** which stresses that He keeps on coming, that there is no end to the action. Whenever you're going through a crisis, there's no stopping Jesus. If He has to, He'll even walk on water to be with you. There is an old song, "No One Understands Like Jesus" that says, "When the days are dark and grim; no One is so near, so dear as Jesus; cast your every care on Him." No matter what you're hard against - even there, Jesus comes to you. "Come, Lord Jesus" is anything but a common prayer, it's our constant yearning and need!

Your Evangelization Team wants to be there for you, too. What do you need to be better equipped to share the Gospel with the world around you? How can we help provide materials that will better prepare you to give an answer for the hope that you have? Drop us a note at this email: evangelizationteam@englishdistrict.org We look forward to hearing from you. We want to help you. We are praying for you as together we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus," trusting that He will keep His promise.

In Christ Alone,
Pastor John Diener
Galatians 2:20