

## ✠ *In the Name of Jesus* ✠

There's nothing wrong with being realistic. Sometimes God actually closes a door and does not open a window. But to close the door before God makes clear that he's closing the door, that's defeatism. A defeatist is someone who desires or who admits or who proclaims, before the fact, the defeat of his own country, party, or movement on the grounds that it is impossible or impractical to continue trying. You might hear a defeatist say, "What's the use? It doesn't matter if I help or not. Nothing is going to change for the better." Or "We better not try that. People won't like it."

Let's admit that this harmful attitude has shown up in our heart at least occasionally. Defeatism can quietly influence the decisions of church leaders. It can also lead us individuals to pull back our efforts longer than it takes to rest a little and get recharged. Defeatists may ask, "Why plan to win more people for Christ? We few will be alright. We have all we need in order to go to heaven. Somehow everyone else will be fine ...we think." And so defeatism can undermine the usefulness of a church.

In the Scripture lessons we heard this morning, we saw how defeatism kept the Israelites from even considering that the Lord could rescue them from Pharaoh's army by a miracle. Defeatism kept the

great prophet Elijah from seeing how many believers were still alive and well, and how valuable it was for him to continue sharing God's Word. The apostle Peter was doing well walking on the water, until defeatism caused him to sink. Later on Peter tried talking Jesus out of going to the cross. You can imagine Peter saying, "Lord, death is not the way to worldly success! If the course of your kingdom is going to take you to the cross, it would be better to give up now" (see Matthew 16:21ff).

If defeatism sounds oddly familiar to you, perhaps that's because defeatism is just another form of fear. It sometimes pops up when difficulties surround and besiege the church like an enemy army. Defeatism often follows some kind of disregard for God's Word and God's power. Think how the Israelites disregarded God's promise to bring them to the land of Canaan, and they dismissed the miraculous plagues which had so recently forced Pharaoh to forfeit their services. So what if they were surrounded by the sea on three sides and Pharaoh's army now had them hemmed in. God is mighty to save! But if we forget his past blessings, or if we turn our eyes away from the Lord's promises, then the obstacles in our way can seem insurmountable. How many times has it seemed to you that the Lord has laid on us too large a task? "Take the gospel to the whole world, or even to our town? When it takes so much time? So much

money? When some don't want it? Lord, can't we have an easier duty? You're almighty. Why don't you just say, 'Let there be' converts? Speaking up about you is just not my thing. Could you send someone else?" And he does. So other congregations grow. Or Satan convinces the people in the false religions that they are true, and they themselves go to show concern for those who are hurting. And so God's church sees no gain.

Do you see how defeatism can destroy sound judgment and well-directed actions? That's because it lacks faith in the Lord and his promises. Defeatism magnifies the ogres in our way. It is afraid to suffer for the Lord sake. In fact in our defeatist hearts we can actually find fault with the Lord for sending us so many difficulties. Defeatism can lead God's people to state, "I don't care what you say, Lord, I am not doing it." Defeatism can afflict even the most active people in God's work. This weakness of faith attacks us all because our sinful flesh is a born defeatist.

If we have given in to defeatism, it's time to repent and renew our first love for the Lord (see Revelation 2:4-5). It's time for us to declare that defeatism is unwelcome in the church. There are at least three good reasons. First, Jesus Christ is the great king of the Church. He founded it. He paid dearly for it with his blood. It belongs to him. This church is our church only in the sense that God wants us to manage it well for him. But how

successful our church is—this remains in the Lord's hands. Since we have been redeemed by Christ, purchased and won by his holy, precious blood, we have only one thing to do—obey him with joyful hearts. It is not our place to reason with God, to debate him, to doubt him, or to await a time that's better for us. When he says go, we say, "*Here am I—send me*" (Isaiah 6:1-8). When he says do, we spring into action. This church belongs to Jesus.

The second reason why there is no room for defeatism in the church is that Jesus intended the church to be a fighting church. Jesus said, "*I did not come to bring peace, but a sword*" (Matthew 10:34b). Let's fight, not each other but our own sinful flesh, in order to spread the gospel message, in order to maintain the church against the devil and those who agree with him. Let's fight to extend the church's reach and perpetuate its existence. It seems like a never-ending battle. Unbelievers don't see why they need a savior, or why they need this particular Savior. That's why many hear the good news as something unwanted. We should not expect this to be an easy fight. If we want only rest, if we advise a truce with the devil's ideas, that's defeatism. If a church doesn't want to struggle anymore, if it does not want to go out to bring in the lost, that's when it is a dying church. If we are no longer willing to become skillful in the use of God's Word, the Sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17), we will soon lose the

strength to pick it up and swing it. We do not want the Lord to remove from our hands his weapon for spiritual warfare, the good news about Jesus (see Revelation 2 and 3). No, Jesus intended his church to be a fighting church. There is no room for defeatism here.

If we are to be healed from the weariness of spirit that so many of us have felt now and then, let's submit ourselves to Jesus our Savior. Let's hold still while the great Physician wields his scalpel and cuts this tumor out of us. Has the arm of the Lord somehow become shorter now so that he can't help us anymore? Has the Lord blessed us abundantly in the past? Let us acknowledge that he has forgiven us for doubting his promises or losing our focus or forsaking our first love or disregarding his Word. Because we are fully forgiven, we get to declare to each other, "There is no room for defeatism in the church."

There is, however, room to say, "I'm tired" or "I'm struggling with a particular sin." "I'm discouraged. Please help me." There is room in this church to stand near each other, or put an arm around each other, and help one another find strength in the Lord (1 Samuel 23:16).

Which leads us to the third reason there is no room for defeatism in the church. Christ's church is already a victorious church (see Psalm 110) as Jesus proclaimed in John 16:33: "*In this world*

*you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" Jesus Christ has already won the victory over his enemies. Sin is defeated. Death lost its grip to hold human bodies in the grave. Hell has been trod under foot by Jesus' victory parade there on Easter morning (see Colossians 2:15, 1 Peter 3:19). Defeatism wants us to forget all this and focus instead on how we can get the church to spend less money on ministry, as if that's the problem, rather than that there are people out there who need our help to know Jesus better.

That's why the Lord moves to defeat defeatism, as we saw in the Scripture lessons for today. There is a sure cure. We are well supplied with the remedy against this evil. Think of it. Since defeatism is weakness of faith, the cure lies in strengthening our faith. And we know that faith is kindled and kept alive by the Word of God and the Sacraments. Once we are convinced that defeatism is sinful, we are ready to confess it and turn away from it, knowing that we have already been washed clean of it through the blood of Jesus Christ. And then the Lord lays before our ears, like he did for Elijah, another promise from his Word, an assurance that he is still in control for our good. Remember how he told Elijah to get back to work, that not all was lost? He still had 7000 believers that Elijah was unaware of. Remember how he told the Israelites to turn around and walk through the sea—on dry ground? Remember how Jesus restored Peter again and again?

And he will help us in just the right way. He says, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* He reminds us through the apostle Paul, *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up”* (Galatians 6:9). Think how astonishing it is that God could love this world so much, despite our sin, that he gave his best for all, his one and only Son, that we might be saved from his anger. This good news is for the whole world. This good news is the only message that can save people. This good news makes the church a victorious church. Despite all the attempts by those who hate this message, the gospel has not been silenced. It is the one thing in this world that cannot perish. *“Heaven and earth will pass away,”* Jesus said, *“but my words will never pass away”* (Matthew 24:35). Think how many nations, kingdoms, and republics have passed away into the annals of history. The Word of God still stands. Think how every new religion man has invented is just another version of the same old lie—*“You can do something to help yourself in the next life.”* But the gospel doesn’t change. It is just as new, just as up to date, just as able to meet the needs people feel, just as powerful to kindle faith and win souls for Christ, as when it was first proclaimed to sinners. We have in our hands the power that neither the world nor the devil can withstand. When proclaimed as God

gave it in the Scriptures, it is an invincible weapon against all spiritual foes. Let us rely on it completely and use it rightly. This means study it patiently, humbly, prayerfully, persistently. And when we do, what do we find? We find Jesus, the Savior who would not be deterred so that his church could be victorious.

We have been cured of defeatism when we can say with the apostle Paul, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel [of Christ], because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes”* (Romans 1:16). Then it can be seen that the Holy Spirit has given us a lively confidence in the gospel. From that victorious point of view we agree with the Scriptures: *“In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”* (Hebrews 12:4). None of us has lost either our life or our limbs for the gospel. Of the monies we have brought to spread the gospel, we have not yet given to the extent of hurting our fortunes. Many of us have given generously. But all of us have given from our abundance. None of us lacked food or clothing or shelter as a result of our giving offerings to spread the gospel. We may have labored hard in the Lord’s vineyard, but we have not yet risked our lives in this work. The Lord of the church would have us follow his example and take up our cross. We can do this because we know what our Lord says: *“I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to them, creating praise on the lips of those who*

*mourn among my people. Peace, peace,  
to those far and near,” says the LORD.  
“And I will heal them” (Isaiah 57:18-19,  
alt).*