

## **PENTECOST 3**

**June 10, 2018 (Saint Peter)**

**Pastor David P. Nelson**

**“No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his property without first binding up the strong man.”**

**Grace and peace be unto you from God our creator and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

**So here’s a preacher’s dream: Our texts today are about losing. And they come from a way of thinking that isn’t ours anymore. Great.....a sermon about how to lose in an outdated and possibly irrelevant way.**

**Our first lesson is about losing our way. Our second lesson is about losing our heart and our Gospel is about Jesus losing his mind, at least according to his friends and family. And then Jesus tells a story of a person who gets their house broken into and loses all they have. Our first story is from the Creation story and it talks about the garden of Eden and the great temptation and the eating of the apple and then the nakedness and the hiding from God. Well, we have been hiding from God ever since but in our super scientific modern days**

**we think about this story of apples and temptation and hiding in the original garden as rather quaint and fairy taleish. We don't talk like that anymore.**

**In our second lesson, Paul urges us to not lose heart. He talks in antiquated ways about our outer shell wasting away even as our inner nature is being saved and made new by Jesus. Now, I will grant you that I thought about a sermon on how our bodies are not what they used to be. I thought a couple of times about the challenges of growing in faith as our outer shells....our bodies and physical capabilities start to deteriorate. I am contending with the advances and the limitations of age and lots of people around here tell me "Oh wait until you actually get old." I hear lots of stories about the real challenges of aging bodies. Sometimes it seems like the old saying that everything hurts and what doesn't hurt doesn't work. Well, Paul talks about this outer nature wasting away even as our inner nature is being renewed and he urges us to not lose heart. And we don't talk like that much anymore.**

**And our Gospel is a strange story that begins with Jesus' family and friends being concerned that Jesus has lost his mind. They have all been cramped into a place where it is so crowded they can't even eat. And people were saying Jesus had lost his mind and the scribes from Jerusalem had come down to tell everyone that Jesus was really the Devil and the works he was performing were from the Devil. And Jesus tells them a parable where Jesus is the guy breaking into a house. And we don't talk like that anymore.**

**But for all our different language and advanced understanding and changing perspectives what is at the heart of these texts is still the truth about us and**

**our lives and our world. Even if we don't talk much about apples and temptation anymore we are still a people who have lost our way. The question from God in the garden to us, "Where are you?" is still painful to answer. Where are we? Why are we still hiding? And even if we don't talk about inner and outer natures we know what Paul means when he says, "do not lose heart". We know all too well what it has meant for us to give in or give over or give up. We know what a broken heart is and we know some broken hearts just don't seem to mend. We know what it means to have to find the courage to face some things we never thought we would have to face. We know the brokenness of losing heart.**

**And even though we don't talk about the Devil much and would never think Jesus had lost his mind in a battle with the demons in our lives, we darn well know there is evil in our world. And we know there is sin in us.....as a church and as individuals. And we know, somehow even if we don't admit it often and sure don't like to talk about it much, we know we are in a struggle for our lives. We know there are things in this world that are not of God, things in this world that draw us away from Jesus, things in this world that cannot last or cannot heal and are not good for us. And these things can have a hold us on us. These things can fool us and make us think they are what matter. And we can lose ourselves to these things.**

**Jesus says that when these things get ahold on us....be it money or status or pride or selfishness or hatefulness or intolerance.....be it the pursuit of pleasure or an unwillingness to share or a hardness of heart....these things of**

**the world are strong and they can occupy us like a strong man occupies a house and its property. They can rule us and direct our days and our deeds. And Jesus says it takes something more powerful, something greater to come in and bind the strong man.....to tie up what is controlling us and take back the house and its property.**

**Jesus is the only one who has the power to come into our house....into our lives and bind the strong man....bind the Devil.....and re-take our house.....re-take our lives. And we don't talk much like that anymore.**

**So try it this way. The things that seduce us and tempt us in this world will always be looking to have our hearts. Every day we will be tempted to set our hearts on that thing, that new toy, that desire, that principle, that way we want things to be. And every day Jesus will contend for our hearts. Every day Jesus will look for room in us so that our hearts might be set on our Lord....that our hearts might be shaped like servants and beat with compassion and move to the rhythm of grace. Each day the world invites us to set our hearts on having things and pretty soon they have us. Each day the world invites us to set our hearts first on our own interests and pretty soon we are full of ourselves. Each day the world entices us to see grace as a bad business plan and love as a silly way to get ahead.....sees sacrifice as for the suckers and crosses for the losers and the golden rule as God helps those who help themselves and then help themselves some more. And every day Jesus wants that same heart. Every day Jesus invites us to care more about others than ourselves and to find Him in the little, the lost, the last and the least.**

**Every day Jesus invites us to forgive instead of get even, love with abandon without exception, mind our tongues and our deeds that we look and sound like the kingdom, give away our stuff and set our hearts on the treasure of the Gospel.**

**Call it a battle if you want. Call it a contending with evil if you want. Call it an urgent invitation to discipleship. Call it not losing heart. Call it hiding in the garden or binding the strong man. Call it what you want but our faith is, each day, a matter of the heart.....to whom will our hearts belong. Upon whom will our hearts be set.**

**It is a strange image but I pray today that Jesus would break into our houses.....break into our lives and bind up the strong man that tempts us to follow the ways of this world. Break in Jesus and take our hearts, our lives, our days and our ways and make them yours. Bind the world's strong man and set us free.**