



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

May 12, 2024

Pastor James Enderle

7th Sunday of Easter

First Lesson/Sermon Text: [Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 124 CWS

Second Lesson: [1 John 5:1-6](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 17:11b-19](#)

Resurrection Reality: We Will Overcome This Broken World Delivered through Turmoil

1. _____ provide _____
2. **The Lord works through** _____
3. **Seek to** _____ **and to** _____
4. **Don't** _____ **the cross,** _____ **the cross**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

Was there ever a time that you enjoyed trouble? Most likely not, except maybe if you are still into games and have that game Trouble. My kids like that one. It's always good to play those games like Trouble, jumping on each other. The only other time that you might like trouble is as a mother, if you had several different kids and you had some that, if they got into trouble, "Oooo." If something is broken, maybe a body part, a broken leg, or something else is broken, their trouble is always big. But then maybe you had other kids and their trouble is a little bit smaller, so when that kid came crying or having a difficulty, that trouble was a little bit smaller than the big trouble that you are maybe used to.

There are a lot of troubles in life, big and small, but we don't always react very well to them and don't understand the good that can come from them. But we understand and see in our text today, in Acts, where there is a little trouble and a big trouble, but we also see that God is with His people in both the little troubles and the big. We live in this broken, sinful world, but we can see that we are **delivered through turmoil**. In the face of turmoil of a small scale or a big scale, God continues to deliver us and help us.

As we look and see what life was like for the early church, we kind of go back to this Thursday when we talked about the Ascension and how life must have been for those disciples. Jesus was dead and now He is alive, but He wasn't really with them all the time anymore. He appears there and then He is gone. Then He appears again. He taught them for a while and then He is gone. He ascends into heaven. Trouble... But what happens? The church grows as God promised to be with them, to send His Holy Spirit, and the church continues to grow and grow and grow. Even though they are saying "What good can happen with Jesus being gone," they see God's works through this trouble.

The church was growing. It says, ***"In those days when the number of disciples was increasing,"*** God blessed the church. But what happened was the ***"the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."*** So the church was providing for widows but there were complaints. Some were getting more than others. Some were being overlooked. Does that ever happen? Are there ever complaints among people, even in the church, where people are saying, "There is favoritism" or "People are being overlooked." I think that happens. Church isn't perfect. We are sinners. So inside the church, there is also difficulty.

What happens, though, because of this difficulty, it says, ***"So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.'"*** So what has happened is there is this difficulty, but what do the disciples do? They see an opportunity. I think we can see that in our lives, that difficulties provide opportunities. If we just look at trouble and turmoil and say "Oh no, how can this happen?" or "How are we going to fix this?" we need to look at difficulties and troubles and see God gives us opportunities. What were the opportunities for the early church? The disciples were the ones going out and sharing the food, doing these works of service and they said, "Can we do this better? Could we bring in more people to serve; people who have gifts, that are faithful, that God has blessed, and have them take this over so that the disciples can focus on sharing God's Word?" As it says, they will give their attention to prayer and the ministry of the Word.

We see that this difficulty provided an opportunity to bring seven new people into service and leadership. We see that in our lives, often when there are difficulties and God provides opportunities. When this happens, what do we know? We see what happens. As they got these men and prayed over them (in Verse 7), it says, ***"So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith."*** Through this difficulty, what happened? *The Lord works through difficulties*. The Lord blessed it, even though there

were troubles and disagreements at first, God provided an opportunity, brought up more leaders, and blessed the works so that more people could focus on one thing and others could focus on another.

Have you ever seen that where God is working through a difficulty and you say "This is so stressful and so hard!" but understanding there is an opportunity and God can work through this? An example that I can share: Pastor Ott would talk about this. For many years you were calling for a second pastor. As you were waiting, what happened was "Oh, the second pastor will help with this," but many other people stepped up to lead. So Pastor Ott often talked about how that time of calling for another pastor and waiting for a second pastor provided opportunities for the Lord to bring up leaders and bring up people to serve in different ways. Pastor Ott shared himself, too, that he changed. He would joke with me: "If we would have had the first called, I don't know if that person would have wanted to work with me." He had changed and learned how to work with other people in a different way. God worked through Him and that challenge and that difficulty.

Do you think God can do the same thing now? As we are maybe in difficulties of calling and having vacancies, understanding that God can work through that difficulty and raise up people? That we have Called Workers who are serving and are asked to do certain things, can we have other people who are brought up and raised up to lead in different ways? Can we continually consider what are things that the Called Workers need to do (just as the people in Acts did), and what are the things where other people can serve and do as well to enable the pastors and the teachers to work on that Gospel ministry? That's what happened. We see how God blessed that. God can work through these difficulties and provide opportunities for more people to step up into roles of leadership and opportunities to serve.

As Stephen was one of those, we see what he did as well. As he was going out and serving/helping get this food to the widows, we see what is described that he did. It says, ***"Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen..."*** He was going out and serving, but it wasn't just that. He was *seeking to serve, but he also shared Christ.*

I encourage you at another time to look at the section that we kind of skip over. It says, ***"To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me!"*** If you notice, it goes from Verse 2 to Verse 51. Those passages in between there ([Acts 7:3-50](#)), those are sections where Stephen is pouring out and preaching about the Old Testament, the line of the Savior, the patriarchs from Abraham and on down to Moses and then to Jesus. He sought not just to serve, but to share Jesus. We want to do that as we go out and serve as well. For you and whatever vocation you can serve in, to not just serve and to give but also to share Jesus. When we, just like these people, are serving others, maybe like

the Food Pantry or Soup for Souls, we can help people physically, but we can do more. We can serve them with the Gospel. We can connect them to God's Word and connect them to be comforted in difficult times to know that God is there. Jesus is there and there is love and forgiveness. There is food, not just for their body but for their souls.

We struggle to do that. Why do we often struggle to do that? What happened for Stephen? We see that as he preached and taught about Jesus, people didn't like it. So he was given a cross to carry, just like Christ carried a cross. Jesus tells us if we are to follow Him, we need to be ready to pick up our cross and follow Him. So we see that we *don't want to avoid the cross, but instead to preach the cross*. Like Stephen, we want to serve and to preach Jesus and to not avoid it. It's very easy sometimes to avoid doing that because if I share Jesus, then what is going to be someone's reaction to that? What if they don't believe or maybe they even do start believing but they have some questions and then that takes up my time? Maybe they share something personal and I have to spend a lot of time with them. It's a good thing, but maybe we're afraid of that commitment and being connected to someone and sharing Jesus with them.

And then there is that persecution. Seeing the cross and what it means for us as Christians. The cross is not just suffering in general. Yes, there is sin and suffering in the world, but the cross is suffering for being a Christian, for sharing about Jesus or for living a life for Jesus. Maybe your priorities are different and you're focused on this and "We are going to go to church on Sunday and be in God's Word often." So your life is different. People might criticize you and say "That's not important" or "Why would you live that way?" or "Why would you talk that way?" We don't want to avoid that cross but to cling to the cross of Christ, just as Stephen did. His similarities to Christ are pretty profound. There were false witnesses that came against him. They hated that he was teaching the truth. And then what happens is God gives him a glimpse of seeing Jesus. As he is being persecuted and being killed for his faith, what does he say? Words very similar to Jesus: "Lord, receive my spirit and do not hold the sins against them." That's just like what Jesus spoke.

It's important to see that God can work through even this, even through a thing where we say, "How can God work through death and persecution?" Do you hear who is sitting there, standing there, approving? Saul—this man who would become Paul and become a Christian and a great evangelist. God works through even these difficulties to convert a man who is stubborn and fighting against Jesus.

So we don't know what things God can use. We struggle to see how God can use difficulties because sometimes we are so focused on ourselves and we cry out, "God, why would you give me this?" or "How could this happen?" We know that God is working greater things than we can imagine. When we take ourselves out of it and say "This might be bigger than me" or "God has a purpose for me" or even in this difficulty that "I can show my faith. I can show and lean on Christ more instead of leaning on my

own strength," that can be a witness to others. Maybe through a sickness in the hospital and you show your faith and how you have peace and comfort at all times, or a death of a loved one and how you know that they are loved and forgiven and in heaven. These are difficulties and struggles where the rest of the world says "There is no reason to have hope or peace." But God helps us through these difficulties, through this turmoil, to lean on Him, to lean on other people that God has given us.

We see the body of Christ and we see how we can serve together and share Jesus together and focus on how Christ has overcome this world. We are forgiven. We are loved. Though this world is hard, though we will suffer at times, we are loved and forgiven. God knows and He will be with us so that you can know that. No matter what you face, your God is with you. You are loved, redeemed and forgiven. God has sent His one and only Son to be with you, so what do you have to fear? If He has redeemed you and forgiven you, you can face life and death, a life of turmoil and even the difficulty of death, knowing that the Lord has eternal life in store. We get to share that message with others; to share that peace and joy in all times so that they too, maybe like Saul, a stubborn heart, may know of His love and forgiveness one day. Jesus is with us and delivers us through turmoil. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.