

Sermon – May 23, 2021
Collide Series: “Stand Firm”
Crown of Life Lutheran Church, Rigby, ID
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Since the advent of the Church, there have been people who have tried to spread false teachings about what it means to be the people of God. Paul considered these hollow and deceptive. He warned Christians to be careful what they believed to be true, and to stand firm on the simple truths of the Gospel.

This week, we are beginning a sermon series called “Collide.” And also since the beginning, the Christian faith has been on a collision course with the culture around us.

The values of the world do not align with the values of our faith.

The priorities of the world do not align with the priorities of our faith.

The kingdom of man is not seeking the same things as the kingdom of God.

Therefore, we should NOT be surprised when we experience conflict and tension. Instead, perhaps we should see the conflict and tension as confirmation that we are doing the right thing.

Have you ever been out on a hike or a walk and gone through a “rough patch.” You know the kind where every time you put your foot down you’re not sure if you’re going to roll an ankle or find solid ground. The worst might be trying to walk on ice, where any given step could send you airborne.

These types of perilous adventures are very much like walking through life trying to depend on worldly wisdom. You are never quite sure you are going to land on solid ground, since principles and values are constantly changing. In society, there is no basis for truth such as the Bible.

However, what we learn from Jesus is to trust in the eternally

consistent teachings of scripture. For example, we just heard this in Colossians 2. Let's read it together...

“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” Colossians 2:8

In this one verse, Paul warns us about the world's logic and values. He calls us as believers to stand firm on a different set of values, those of Christ.

But even when we choose to stand firm on the things of God, we will still be faced with the values of this world.

How do we know when something we hear is worldly? How do we know when something we hear is Godly? How do we know when we are being led astray, or worse, being held captive by worldly principles and lies?

As we get started, I would like to draw your attention back to the illustration I brought up a few minutes ago about going through a “rough patch.” Regarding worldly principles and teachings, I said, “You are never quite sure you're going to land on solid ground as principles and values are constantly changing.”

This is an important lesson to remember...

Worldly values are inconsistent

Let me help illustrate this point with something that we are all familiar with, which is one of the primary mottos of the kingdom of man. You just have to...

Follow your heart.

Do whatever makes you happy.

These phrases sound good enough, but the problem is they're inconsistent, shaky, and contradict the teachings of scripture.

For example, the word says in Jeremiah 17...

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

The world says, follow your heart, but the Bible warns us the heart is wicked, deceitful, and confusing.

Then, Jesus says this in Matthew 10...

"Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it." Matthew 10:39

The world says that you need to make sure you're happy no matter what, but Jesus says we should lose our lives for His sake ... meaning, we trade all of the stuff that makes us "happy" in the earthly kingdom for God's kingdom, where amazingly, we can find joy.

The heart is inconsistent, always changing, falling in and out of love with any number of things. Happiness is an ever-moving target from one day to the next, sometimes an hour at a time.

Just be honest for a moment, how can you possibly build anything stable off these principles?

As you continue to think about that last question, let's remember what we heard earlier from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount about building our lives...

"...everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock ... it did not fall ... everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand ... it fell."

Did you catch that? Jesus Himself is commanding us to listen and obey His teachings. When we do, we will be standing on a firm foundation.

Let me speak from personal experience when I tell you that out of the many values the world will throw your way, none will allow you to stand firm when the going gets tough. They are shifting sands of inconsistency.

So why are they so attractive? Why does it sound so appealing to follow one's heart, seek out whatever makes one happy?

Worldly values are seductive

Another word for seductive could be "enticing." Either way, the truth is, many things and words the world tries to give us and tell us, can look and sound attractive when we see and hear them.

Believe it or not, the Bible even talks about this in 2 Timothy when Paul says this...

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but ... they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." 2 Timothy 4:3-4

You see, Paul knew many people would spend their entire lives searching for a truth that LINED UP with their lifestyle. In addition, many people REJECT the truth in scripture because it CONTRADICTS their lifestyle.

They receive something meant to bring conviction and ignore it as useless. Therefore, we must be people who continuously fill our ears and minds with the only truth we can find in this world, and that is in the pages of scripture.

The Bible is full of practical life principles that enable us to live the life Jesus came to bring us. In John 10, Jesus specifically tells us

this is the goal...

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” John 10:10

And what the devil can't fully destroy, he will try to distract. He will try to steal your time, treasure, and attention.

That is why we have to stand firm on the word of God. That is why we have to abide in Christ (John 15:5). That is why we need to have daily time in God's word.

And as you learn how to recognize the worldly values that DO NOT align with the Kingdom of God, you need to also spend energy pursuing the values that DO align with the Kingdom of God.

Allow the Spirit to guide you

It's not enough to simply say “no” to the things and values of this world. We have to take it a step further, and actually say “yes” to the things of God.

Christ gave us the Holy Spirit to be a guide and a strength in this endeavor. Look at Jesus' Words in John 14...

“He is the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

John 14:17

Jesus teaches us open up and allow the Holy Spirit to lead us “into all truth.” Once we begin to follow God's lead, we will be able to experience the best life possible. We will be constantly coming back to the only truth worth standing on, one that will never lead us astray.

Early in my faith walk, I was in a leadership position in a church ... well before I became a pastor. And we had an important ministry

project that we all felt needed to be done, but we didn't have the money to finish it.

Some argued that we should get started, and the funding would follow. I argued that we should wait to ensure that we would get the funding.

I thank God that my persuasion was not as effective as those who wanted to start the project. We started the project, and soon had the all the funds we needed. I learned a valuable lesson from that experience.

If I was going to be an effective churchman working in God's Kingdom, I had to learn to block out all the noise from the world around me ... the voices saying "you will fail", "you will operate in the red", "your congregation will learn to not trust you," or "they will dislike you after you fail".

It takes devotion and effort to learn to walk in step with the Holy Spirit, as you follow the teachings of scripture. There will always be temptations to veer off the path and go adventuring through the "rough patches."

But again, those temptations are only temporary, much like the rewards they promise.

Abundant life is found in the kingdom of God. And the Holy Spirit was given as a gift to help lead and guide the way. We do not even need to find it on our own!

The world is trying to draw you into values that are inconsistent, seductive, and at worst...destructive.

But today, as we begin this new series, let's all take the opportunity once again to invite the Holy Spirit of God to guide us into scriptural truth. The Holy Spirit is the one thing we can stand on, knowing it will remain firm.

The first step is to call out and recognize any false truths you may believe in. I gave a couple of examples earlier, but more examples might be...

- Follow your heart.
- Do whatever makes you happy.
- You are an army of one.
- You can become anything you set your mind to. Whenever I hear this phrase, I am reminded of a comment I once heard, "No matter how much I want it, I will never be the next linebacker for the Denver Broncos"

So, we must recognize false truths.

Then, the next step is admitting how enticing and attractive some of these false truths are.

It does you no good to pretend like they aren't ... but it also does no good to think we can simply avoid the pervasive false teaching that is rampant in the world simply because we do not like it.

And finally, we must trust in the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into and through the truth.

Will you choose to take a stand today, and every day, going forward?

Will you choose to trust the leading of the Holy Spirit?

Will you choose to make a daily commitment to scripture? Will you?

Amen. (please rise as you able for our closing prayer)