

Lent 2 / March 16, 2025  
Philippians 4:1  
*“Stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.”*

Stand firm in the Lord

Standing firm is a theme found in each of our readings this morning. Jeremiah stood firm in the Lord despite the threat of death for speaking the Lord’s word to the leaders of Jerusalem and priests in the temple. Jesus stood firm in the mission set before Him, to call the lost sheep of the house of Israel to repentance and to offer Himself as the sacrifice to atone for the sin of Israel and the sin of the world. In our gospel some Pharisees attempt to intimidate Him with the threat of death and the fear of violence, saying, *“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”* Jesus said, *“Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.’”* Herod was a fox, but Jesus is the *“Lion of the tribe of Judah.”* Jesus wasn’t intimidated by violence and the threat of death. He stood firm in the purpose for which He had come, to suffer for our salvation and to offer Himself on the cross as our Redeemer from sin and death.

St. Paul encouraged the believers at Philippi to stand firm in their faith in the power and promise of Christ our Saviour, against a different threat. Jeremiah and Jesus were threatened by violence and death. The believers at Philippi were threatened by something more insidious, the temptation to put the world and its desires ahead of the things of God. Paul lamented that many who once knew Christ as their God and Saviour, now served their bellies as their god. He said, *“As I have often told you...many walk as enemies of the cross of Christ...their end is destruction, their god is their belly.”* It wasn’t the coercion of intimidation or the threat of violence that led them to abandon Christ, but rather the passing pleasures of life and a desire for a life of ease. An obvious and immediate threat can galvanize our spirits and steel our resolve to stand firm in faith. More dangerous is the complacency that leads us away from Jesus and the cross, which He said, all who follow Him must bear. We stand firm in our faith by remembering of first importance, our sin that needs forgiving and Christ our Saviour. He stood in our place to receive the judgement of the cross, so that we would stand with Him in the presence of the heavenly Father in the resurrection to life everlasting.

Paul’s love for the church at Philippi was deep and unconflicted by any major problems related to factions, rival teachers, spiritual gifts or the teaching of Jesus,

such as were evident in the Corinthian congregation. His letter contains no words of rebuke, only encouragement, affirmation and love. The only issue he speaks to is a personal dispute between two women, Euodia and Syntyche. Whom he urges to agree in the Lord and for whom he asks the others to help. We need to help others resolve their differences when they have disputes and not stand and watch, or ignore the situation. In many ways the Philippian church was a model congregation. They were Paul's joy and his crown. He thanked God whenever he remembered them. He yearned for them "*with the affection of Christ Jesus.*" The tie that bound them to each other was not simply the natural affection people have for each other as part of life in the world. The tie that bound them was the love of God in Christ our Saviour. That's tie that binds us and all believers together. And that's why Paul warns them and us, against becoming belly believers and urges us to stand firm in the Lord.

Philippi was a Roman Colony, composed almost entirely of Gentiles with Roman citizenship. Roman citizenship was a great privilege and a much sought after prize for those not privileged with it from birth. Although he was a Jew, Paul was born a citizen of Rome. His citizenship provided him with protection from the leadership of Jerusalem, who sought to kill him as an enemy of their religion. His citizenship allowed him to appeal to Ceasar when unjust charges were brought against him as an enemy of the Roman state. His citizenship allowed him to travel freely throughout the empire to proclaim the gospel of God's love in Christ Jesus; crucified for our sins and raised to life for our justification. Paul proclaimed the gospel in Philippi. Many Roman citizens believed and became with him, fellow citizens of heaven for the sake of Christ their Saviour.

Paul and the Philippians were Roman citizens, but their most important citizenship was in heaven. There is nothing more important than the citizenship we share in common as believers in Christ the Saviour. We receive this citizenship now through faith, sealed in the promise of our baptism. We will receive the fullness of our citizenship when Christ returns and calls us to share in His resurrection. The only thing that could cause a Roman to lose his or her citizenship was disloyalty to the Roman state and treason against Ceasar. No one can take our heavenly citizenship away from us, except ourselves, by disavowing Christ through our words and actions and abandoning His church, which is His body on earth. Through Paul's words the Holy Spirit warns us against separating ourselves from Christ and His church through indifference, apathy, by setting our minds on earthly things and counting the things of the world as more important than the things of God. The Holy Spirit calls us to stand firm in the Lord by setting our minds on Christ, seeking

Him in His word, receiving Him in the sacraments and fellowshiping with Him in our fellowship with one another.

Paul and the Philippian church had a common love for each other. A common faith in Christ as Saviour. A common desire to share Christ with others, so that more people would know and confess Him as their God and Saviour. The most important thing they shared in common was Jesus their Saviour whom they received through faith and baptism into His death and resurrection. Roman citizenship was valuable, but much more valuable was the heavenly citizenship they received through Jesus their Saviour and Lord. Paul urged them to stand firm in the Lord. Jesus was the heart of their relationship with each other and the heart of their relationship with God. Paul urges us to stand firm in Jesus. Jesus is the heart of our relationship with each other as Christians. He is the heart of our relationship with God as believers. Jesus is the assurance of our heavenly citizenship, which we receive now as pledge through faith, which we will receive in its fullness at His return.

The world, the devil and our sinful nature seek to undermine our faith and weaken our resolve, by tempting us to focus on our bellies, our appetite for earthly bread, at the expense of our greater need for the bread of the Spirit that Jesus gives. Jesus said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled."* Our bellies need to be fed, but we should never let the needs of our bellies make us numb to our hunger for God's righteousness. Jesus said, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, He will live forever."* Our bellies need to be fed, but our spirits have an even greater need for the bread that Jesus gives. The bread of the earth sustains us one day at a time and at a certain time will no longer sustain us in life. The bread Jesus gives sustains our lives in time and for eternity. We stand firm in the Lord when remember our spiritual hunger and seek as of first importance, Jesus and the bread of His righteousness that feeds our spirits to life eternal.

We stand firm in the Lord by remembering our sin and the promise of forgiveness God speaks to us in our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. We stand firm in the Lord by remembering the weakness of our human nature. We stand firm in the Lord by remembering our continual need for the Holy Spirit to support, strengthen and sustain our faith through the hearing of the word, the fellowship of the faithful and the receiving of the sacrament of Christ's holy body and precious blood. We remember that we only stand against the assaults of the world, our sinful nature and the evil one, by standing in the Lord. He stood up for

us in judgement on the cross. He stood up for us in His resurrection on the third day. He stands with us in the word and by His Spirit that we may stand with Him in His resurrection and receive the fulness of citizenship that awaits us in heaven. God in His grace bring us to that day. In Jesus' Name. Amen