Pentecost 13 2 Kings 11:1-3, 12-18
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"Be Strong in the Lord"
I. The opposition can be very fierce.
II. Patiently trust the Lord's ways and timing.
III. The Lord remains faithful.

Dear Christian friends,

"Be strong in the Lord," Paul told us in the epistle reading. Paul made clear that there's a war going on OUT THERE. **Every day** we Christians are under attack. We HAVE NO CHOICE but to fight this battle – to ***"fight the good fight of faith"*** – or surrender to the devil and be led by him to hell's **eternal banishment**.

Being a Christian is the GREATEST THING there is. **With Jesus** as our Savior we can be absolutely sure – God loves us – God forgives us – God is with us – we are going straight to heaven when we die. NOTHING can top that! **Being** a Christian is also VERY HARD. **Every** Christian better be aware that the **devil has put** a GREAT BIG TARGET on him. The devil has his sights set on **us Christians** and would love nothing more than to **tear us away** from our Savior and **drag us** to hell.

But the war is not just "OUT THERE." It can even be in our **families** as Jesus pointed out in the gospel reading. Being faithful to Jesus and His Word can cause divisions and **wars** even in the family. Divisions because instead of SHUTTING UP and KEEPING QUIET we stand up for **God's Word** and **will**. We are not to stand up for Jesus in an OBNOXIOUS – arrogant – **holier-than-thou** way but in a LOVING – humble – **Christian** way.

Let's now look at these verses with that call, ***"Be strong in the Lord." "Be strong"*** – 1)the opposition can be **very fierce**, 2)patiently trust the Lord's **ways** and **timing** and 3)the Lord remains **faithful**.

I. The opposition can be very fierce.

"When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead." You know **Abraham** – David's son **Absalom** – wicked king **Ahab** – but ***"Athaliah"*** and ***"Ahaziah"***? Actually Ahab ties in with this. Athaliah was a daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Athaliah had MARRIED INTO David's family and **dynasty**. JUST LIKE her mom and dad **Athaliah** was a devoted worshiper of the idol Baal. She had gotten her husband **Jehoram** and her son **Ahaziah** to also worship Baal. They had actually built a temple for Baal **right in** Jerusalem and promoted his worship among the Israelites. The royal family was leading the people **away from** the one true God. Spiritually it was a VERY DARK TIME in Israel.

Both Athaliah's husband and son were **now dead**. Her family back **in Samaria** had been wiped out in a **revolution** so she couldn't go back there. She was the last living member of **Ahab's** family. "STUCK" in Jerusalem she decided to take charge of the situation. ***"She went into action and destroyed all the royal heirs."*** Athaliah's husband had done the same thing when he had become king. He killed all his brothers so they **couldn't try replacing** him. Now here's Athaliah murdering her own **grandchildren**! NOBODY was going to get in her way! The family line of David was down to JUST ONE **legitimate heir** – a little baby named ***"Joash."*** IF **Joash died** David's dynasty would come to an end. That would ALSO BRING an end to God's promises to David – including that promise that the Savior of the world **would come** from David's family.

What can we LEARN from this? This is a good object lesson on how CORRUPT – CRUEL and EVIL the **sinful human heart** can be. A grandmother murdering her **grandchildren** just to secure **her position** as queen. Forget family love! ROYAL RICHES and **power** were more important. NOBODY was going to stop Athaliah from **having her way** and doing what she wanted. When the sinful heart is NOT CURBED by **God's law** or CONTROLLED by **God's Spirit** it is capable of the greatest selfishness

and **cruelty**. We see the same thing today with mothers murdering their babies in abortion – with the crime - **senseless murders** and **violence** all around. DON'T KID yourself – your sinful nature – **my** sinful nature - is JUST AS CORRUPT. Don't ever say, "I **can't believe** people can be like that – I'd never do that!"

This is also an illustration of **Jesus' point** in the gospel reading. ***"Jehosheba"*** was an aunt of little Joash and the wife of the high priest ***"Jehoiada." "Jehosheba"*** took action to keep Joash from being murdered by his **grandma** Athaliah. AS BELIEVERS for Jehosheba and Jehoiada this wasn't simply a matter of PROTECTING an **innocent baby**. It was that AND MORE. God's promises to David and especially that promise of the Savior now centered on that ONE REMAINING **direct descendant** of David – baby Joash. God used Jehosheba and Jehoiada to protect Joash AND **His promise**.

Oh, ***"be strong in the Lord!"*** The opposition can be **very fierce** – even within the family as some IGNORE and DEFY God's clear Word and will and we hold fast and stand up for what God says. ***"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?"*** Jesus asked in the gospel reading. ***"No, I tell you, but rather division."***

So ***"be strong in the Lord"*** AND

II. Patiently trust God's ways and timing.

For six long years Joash **remained hidden** in the temple. Everybody's thinking David's family had been **wiped out**. It ALSO LOOKED **as if** God's promises to David had fallen through. Athaliah reigned as **queen supreme**. It LOOKED SO MUCH **as if** God had gone back on His **Word** and had turned His back on His **people**.

There are some important lessons for us here. ONE – the days can get so **dark** and **discouraging**. Like so many of **God's faithful** over the years we can wonder and pray, "WHY, God? WHERE are You?" As has happened **to so many** of God's saints in the past it can look and feel **as if** God has GIVEN UP on us – GONE BACK on His Word.

Big lesson here! ***"We walk by faith and not by sight."*** We build our faith and **hope** – our relationship with God – NOT ON how things look or **feel** but on GOD'S CLEAR WORD and **promises**. How do you KNOW FOR SURE that God really does love you – that He **really** has forgiven all your sins – that He **really** is with you and is working all things for your eternal good – that you **really** are going straight to heaven when you die? Some days we can FEEL SO LOVED by God – but **many other** times we can feel abandoned by God!

We know **God loves** and **forgives** us, etc., BECAUSE HE SAYS SO in His Word. We find God's love NOT in **how things are going** for us but in a **lowly** manger – at a bloody cross and **empty grave**. We know God loves us and **forgives** us – that we have eternal life in heaven **because** we HAVE Jesus – God's own Son as our personal Savior. THERE IN JESUS is God's love and **forgiveness** – there is our sure hope of heaven – THERE in the perfect life Jesus lived for us – in His innocent death on the cross **to pay** for all our sins – in His triumphant resurrection from the dead. THERE is God's love – that He ***"didn't spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all."***

That's why it's SUCH A JOY and **so important** for us to read our Bibles – to come faithfully to church. That's why Holy Communion is SO SPECIAL and **comforting**. God wants us SO SURE of His **love** and **forgiveness** – SO STRONG in our **faith** – that He actually does a miracle **every time** we come to Communion. With simple bread and wine Jesus actually gives us the **very same body** and blood He gave into death on the cross ***"for the forgiveness"*** of all our sins. THERE in **Word** and **Sacrament** we have God's love and **forgiveness**. THERE in Word and Sacrament we find our peace – strength – **comfort** and **hope**. THERE ALONE in Word and Sacrament is the only way we can ***"be strong in the Lord."***

Another lesson – DON'T BE FOOLISH! Trust God but don't tempt God. ***"Fox six years"*** they kept Joash hidden from Athaliah. They didn't foolishly expose him to danger – **foolishly** pick a fight with Athaliah. They patiently trusted GOD'S **ways** and **timing**. God will act WHEN HE'S READY to. God always keeps His promises and ALWAYS at just the right time ACCORDING to **His** schedule and plans. ***"Be strong in the Lord"*** because…

III. The Lord remains faithful.

After hiding Joash for six years the time had come to BRING AN END to Athaliah's murderous reign and **idolatry**. The **high priest** Jehoiada enlists the help of the Levites and temple guards. To the surprise and joy of the **faithful** at the temple ***"Jehoiada brought out the king's son and set the crown on him and gave him the Testimony, and they made him king. They anointed him and clapped their hands and said, 'Long live the king!'"*** Athaliah ends up **captured** and **killed**. Baal's temple in Jerusalem is destroyed.

Don't overlook the IMPORTANT ***"Jehoiada gave him (Joash) the Testimony"*** – a copy of God's Word AND ***"Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and people that they would be the LORD's people."*** God's Word was to rule Joash's life as a believer **and** as king over God's people. FORGET politics and **polls** – WHAT GOD SAYS and wants that's what matters. That's TRUE NOT JUST for **king** but for the people as well. **Priest** – **king** – and **people** all rededicated themselves to BEING and LIVING **as God's people**.

"Be strong in the Lord" by being in His Word – FAITHFULLY hearing – **faithfully** living it – **faithfully** sharing it. That WON'T ALWAYS be easy **Sometimes** our sinful natures wish that God would TONE THINGS DOWN some – not be SO STRICT or **clear**. That would make our lives SO MUCH EASIER! Faithfulness to ALL of God's Word won't win us popularity in the **world** – maybe not even in our **families**. Go back to what Jesus said in the gospel reading. Our loyalty is FIRST TO GOD and His Word then to family and others. To reverse that is IDOLATRY – putting others ahead of God in our lives. **Again**, we're not talking about being OBNOXIOUS – in-your-face, etc., but IN CHRISTIAN LOVE and **humility** we must stand up for what God says WHETHER it's in what we believe or **how we are to live** our lives.

It is a REAL BATTLE "out there." God help us to ***"be strong in the Lord and His mighty power!"*** Amen.

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