

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Back when our son was still in junior high school and confirmation, he and one of his best friends, a pastor's son, came and asked me if I knew "that verse about fighting and racing." I thought they were probably referring to 2 Timothy 4:7 where the Apostle Paul writes "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith", so I quoted that verse and asked if that was the one. It was so they got the reference from me, asked me to repeat it a couple times and went off. I thought at the time it was probably the athletic references that got their interest, but it might have been more than that. I no longer remember why I knew that verse, but I did know it, and I've thought about it many times since. The idea of fighting the good fight of the faith, finishing the race, keeping the faith.

Now speaking for myself, I've been a Christian, and Lutheran, a believer, all my life. I'm not sure I've ever found it tough or difficult to be a Christian, I've never been threatened because of my faith, aside from the occasional snide comment and maybe a little discrimination. There have been tough times, struggles, temptations plenty, there have been falls, slips, slides upon occasion. But there has always been the comfort of knowing that we are saved by grace through faith, not through our works, not through any form of works righteousness.

There has been the loss of loved ones, uncertainty over employment, health, finances, but I think I've always known that there has never been any promise that life would be easy even for a Christian. It's not always been easy to witness to faith, and nowadays we hear constantly how people are leaving the church, not just mainstream churches but all churches, that people are more spiritual but they're not religious. But none of this is new, to one extent or another, this has been the case for 2,000 years. But let's consider our gospel, as Jesus is talking with his disciples and with many who were interested in him and his message, but not quite committed.

The message heard by the folks around Jesus back then was a tough message, hard to believe, hard to swallow if you will. Eat his flesh, drink his blood? They would have considered that barbaric, even repulsive, unacceptable. We hear the words of institution every week, and often don't really give the words much thought. We're accustomed to hearing those words, we know that in some way we don't understand Jesus is present in the bread and wine, it becomes his flesh and blood, he gave his life that you and I might live.

And there's no way around it. Jesus has told us: "I am the bread of life." "I am the way and the truth and the life." "Apart from me you can do nothing." The Sacrament of Communion is not simply a remembrance of what he did for us, nor are the bread and the wine simply symbols of his body and blood. Jesus is present, and when we eat this bread and drink this wine we abide in him and he in us.

In Jesus we find life, he is life, he is the giver of life, literally now and for eternity. Jesus gives us life whenever we hear how he suffered, died, was buried and rose

from death. He gives us life whenever we receive the bread and wine, his body and blood.

Sometimes it's hard to believe that Jesus is the only way, the giver of life for those of faith. It's hard to trust sometimes, to read this text and hear Jesus' words. He asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?"

May you and I, my dear ones, always answer with Simon Peter "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

AMEN