

⁵ Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁶ Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁸ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ “You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. ¹⁰ And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. ¹¹ Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Dear Friends in Christ,

A man decides to steal a car and gets caught. A politician takes a stand on a controversial issue and doesn’t get elected. A young woman decides to have an abortion and is left to deal with the emotional scars for years and years. A wide receiver runs across the middle and goes high in the air for a pass only to be nailed in mid-air by a linebacker. All of those people have at least one thing in common—they all pay a price for what they do.

You know what that’s like too. Sometimes the consequences catch us off guard, but sometimes we do something, knowing full well that we will pay a price. Even though we know that, we’re willing to do it anyway. This morning we’re going to consider something that sometimes costs us something—and I hope you consider the price worth paying. I’m talking about

PAYING THE PRICE FOR FAITH

1. IN JESUS’ DAY

2. DURING THE REFORMATION

3. TODAY

Jesus spoke the words before us today during Holy Week—Tuesday actually. Just 2 days before his Last Supper with the disciples and his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, just 3 days before being beaten, whipped, spit upon and nailed to a cross where he died. You understand then if I tell you that Jesus had a lot on his mind and even more on his heart as he thought about your sins and your soul on that Tuesday.

He had been teaching at the temple in Jerusalem and was now leaving with his disciples. They asked him questions on the walk out to the Mount of Olives. They reached the other side of the Kidron Valley and while gazing back across the valley at the temple they had just left, his followers asked Jesus about signs that might precede the end of the world. Jesus gave them some, as you heard—false Christs, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famine. Just as birth pains announce the impending birth of a child, these signs in the church and in the government and in nature announce the end of this created world. Jesus wanted his followers to be prepared as they saw these things happening. He wanted them to not be caught off guard or to be pulled away from faith in him because of any of this...and there was something else—there would be a personal price to be paid for their faith and for witnessing Jesus to the world. The same is true for you and me as we await Christ’s return.

But before we get to that, it is necessary for us to review the price Jesus paid so that you and I would have a reason for hope beyond life in this world—a place where people deceive and nations go to war and even nature feels the effects of sin on it.

Did Jesus PAY A PRICE FOR OUR FAITH? Consider this—Jesus is true God from all eternity. That means he’s perfect and holy and lives in a heaven of perfection. Although the comparison pales mightily, you might think of it this way: you know how good your bed feels on a Saturday morning or on a day off—especially if it’s that rare Tucson cold or rainy morning? You know how good it feels to just curl up all warm and comfy? You don’t want to get out of that bed unless you have to!

Now think of Jesus up in heaven. It’s perfect there. *He’s* perfect there! It’s better than nice and cozy—it’s a perfect we can’t even begin to grasp. And he’s the almighty, all-knowing God! Why would he leave—ever?! I understand that Jesus being in heaven is a far greater thing than sleeping in is for us, but the point is this: life as God in Paradise must be absolutely amazing...and Jesus left it. The reason *why* he did is amazing, I think you’ll agree.

Natural sin, which we are born with, is the not-so-wonderful heirloom passed down to us from Adam and Eve. Our *actual* sins—every breaking of God’s law and even the tiniest infractions, also count against our “record” before God. A perfect, holy God in his perfect, holy residence of heaven cannot co-exist with imperfect, gross sinners. That means no person is deserving of eternal life. So, Jesus left heaven—which he didn’t have to do—to live among sinful people, to live under the same divine expectations God places upon us, to live perfectly as a substitute for us, to offer his life as a perfect sacrifice for sin. In short, he left heaven and came to earth to do what we couldn’t do and credit the results to our accounts.

He paid a severe price for us to have faith in him! He paid the price of ridicule, gossip, lies, slander and anger. He paid the price of pain and suffering and physical death. He paid the price of hell—of God actually turning away from him as he was covered with our sins. Jesus PAID THE PRICE OF FAITH—the price necessary so we would have something, someone to put our faith in. He paid the price of the one and only Savior. That’s incredible! That is amazing love for sinners—amazing love for you and me!

Prior to his suffering and death, Jesus not only told the disciples what he would endure for the sins of the world, he also told them what they could expect to happen to them. His followers would not be exempt from some of those things that their Savior endured. They too would PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH. All of what Jesus says in verses 9-11 happened to the disciples. They were hauled before authorities and punished. They were tortured and killed for putting their faith in Jesus as their Savior.

You might remember from the Bible that King Herod had James son of Zebedee killed by the sword. History tells us about the price paid by other disciples. Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped cross. Peter was crucified upside-down. Thomas was stabbed with a spear. Simon the Zealot is said to have been sawed in half. Feeding Christians to the lions and killing people for owning the Scriptures are not just storybook stories. The disciples and other early Christians PAID THE PRICE OF FAITH—ridicule, abuse and death.

But one thing can be said about these men and countless other men and women whose names we do not know: they went to their deaths witnessing to the world about the Savior. They gave testimony to their faith as the Holy Spirit gave them strength. You see, Jesus meant it when he told them, ***Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.*** That you and I have the gospel is a testimony to those men and women, those first Christians who PAID THE PRICE OF FAITH. And we thank God for giving them strong faith and eternal life as their reward.

Jesus told his disciples, ***You must be on your guard.*** In the late 1400's and early 1500's there were some people who PAID THE PRICE OF FAITH as they stood up for the truth of the gospel and for their faith in their Savior. They were people who had to be on their guard because they were ridiculed for what they believed—and this from the church! They were people who had to be on their guard because their lives were threatened—and this from the church! Jesus also said ***You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them.*** At the time of the Reformation of the church, Christians who believed in full and free forgiveness in Christ were hauled before princes and kings and cardinals and popes and councils made up of every kind of authority.

And I bet when that happened, even God-fearing lay people, pastors and priests were more than nervous, under every kind of stress and filled with fear prior to answering for their beliefs before church and government authorities. I bet they felt like those first disciples 1400 years before them. And I bet at times like that those words of Jesus about the Holy Spirit giving them the words to speak were a tremendous help. How comforting to know that their God would not abandon them. The Holy Spirit would provide courage and the words to speak as witnesses of the gospel of salvation in Christ. Those comforts of God did not mean that there would never be consequences for standing up for Jesus. No, God had forewarned his people that they would PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH. But God promises to never leave his people during trials, persecutions, and temptations to back down from the truth of God's Word.

Martin Luther, at the council of both church and governmental leaders in the city of Worms, when asked if he would take back his Christian writings that proclaimed the gospel said, *"Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds and reasoning—and my conscience is captive to the Word of God—then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen."* That took a lot of guts and a lot of faith in God. That statement automatically made him an outlaw and he could be killed without fear of punishment. Elector Frederick, the ruler of Luther's territory took a great risk by supporting Luther and harboring this "outlaw" in his land. Katie Luther was a devout Christian woman who supported her husband, but more importantly supported the gospel of salvation in Christ. These people and many more were Christians who took comfort in God's promises and witnessed boldly in the face of persecution. They lived at a critical time in the history of the church—that time we call the Reformation of the Church—and they were God's bold witnesses.

We celebrate the Reformation to thank God for giving those men and women the strength of faith to PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH so that the gospel would no longer be hidden behind a veil of work-righteousness and pleading with saints and paying for forgiveness, but would be freely proclaimed.

Is there still a PRICE TO PAY FOR FAITH today? I believe there is.

We live in a time of tolerance in our country, a time when everyone is to be accepting of almost all thoughts, beliefs and feelings. Unfortunately at this point in our history, that courtesy is not always extended to Christians. As Christians, we believe things that the world finds unpopular, unacceptable and distasteful:

We say that the miracles recorded in Scripture actually took place just as they are written, because the Bible is true.

We say that there is a right and a wrong and that God decides what those are.

We say that there is a heaven and a hell and that each person will go to one or the other.

We say that there is only one way to be saved and that is through faith in Jesus Christ, the world's only Lord and Savior.

The world does not want to hear those things and certainly does not agree with us. And we PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH for believing and confessing those things.

As Lutheran Christians, we believe things that other Christian churches find unpopular and distasteful. We say that the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, just like Luther confessed. That belief gets us into trouble just like it got him into trouble. We say that Homosexuality is more than a lifestyle—it is actually sin in God's eyes. We say that Jesus' body and blood are really in, with and under the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. We say that Baptism saves. We say that Jesus really rose from the dead on Easter. Amazingly, other Christian churches do not want to hear those things and certainly do not agree with us. And we PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH for believing and confessing those things.

Narrow-minded, we're called—simplistic, unscientific, foolish, pharisaical, unloving, superstitious—and not only do unbelieving people call us that, those are some of the nicer things other Christians occasionally say about us! Yeah, there's a PRICE TO PAY FOR FAITH! Often we desperately want to join in with other Christian denominations that believe things that are absolutely contrary to what God's Word says. We want that because we recognize that they are Christian. But we also recognize the false doctrine. It hurts to have to withdraw from interdenominational or nondenominational events sometimes. Yeah, there's a PRICE TO PAY FOR FAITH!

Of course, you don't know all those teachings of Scripture—or know them well anyway—if you don't study the Bible and hear God explain it. If that's the case for you, you're not really prepared to take a stand like Jesus spoke of, are you? Do you think those disciples were unfamiliar with the Scriptures or that they didn't remember the words of their Savior? They *did* know them AND they believed the words of Jesus before us today! Do you think that Martin Luther and the other

Reformers went before the church and government authorities without preparing, without knowing EXACTLY what God says in the Bible? You know they didn't!

When we are pressured by others because of our faith, we can't expect to have the answer, to have the Holy Spirit bail us out, if we have not cared enough to listen to and learn God's Word. Yes, Jesus said here, ***Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit,*** but he spoke those words to disciples who had heard and knew God's will and teaching. Christians who know their God and his Word today can have the same assurance. When others put us on the spot, the Holy Spirit who lives in us, will give us words of witness!

Learn the Word of God then and thank the Holy Spirit, dear friends and fellow heirs of the Reformation! Because then you can be the co-worker who comforts the grieving friend. You can be the roommate who gives God's answer to a major life-question. You can be the student who isn't afraid to speak up when God is bad-mouthed. You can be the faithful disciple of Jesus in a world who needs him! Study the Word of God. Trust the Holy Spirit to be with you. Take your stand as a Christian who fully trusts your Savior for salvation. You may PAY THE PRICE OF FAITH in ridicule, resistance, lost friends, and so on, but you WILL NOT lose the crown of eternal life in heaven because your Savior Jesus PAID THE PRICE for you! Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, and make you witnesses to the world! Amen.