

*The Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost*

August 18, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Hebrews 12:1-13

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. (NIV)*

To tell you the truth I don't even remember what I had done. But I do remember my dad grabbing his belt and doing what many dads used to do when their children stepped out of line. I also recall my father saying: *"This hurts me more than it is going to hurt you."* I was thinking to myself: *"Yeah right it is, what in the world is that supposed to mean?"* But now I understand. I get it. And it wasn't until I became a father myself that those words became clear to me. It does hurt me when I have to discipline my children. It is a hard thing to do when you have to be firm and correct your kids so that they stay in line. I don't like bringing tears to my children's eyes or sadness to their hearts. Yet, I now understand there are times this is needed. So even though it may hurt me more than it hurts them I will discipline them the best I am able to because I want what is best for them.

It is this example of discipline from our earthly fathers that God sets before us today to teach some things about God's discipline. Yet, *"our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good."* God's discipline goes above and beyond that of our earthly fathers because God always knows what He is doing. While we as sinful human parents can only try to do what we think is best, God's discipline is always fair and right and truly for our best. While earthly fathers make mistakes, with God there are no errors. So open your ears to listen as God speaks these words to us which reveal how: **Our Father disciplines us as His own children!**

This letter called Hebrews is written to people who had faced persecution in the past and by all appearances will be facing more in the near future. There was a strong push for

them to abandon Christ and go back to the legalism of Judaism with all its Old Testament laws and regulations. Here was the catch – Judaism was protected under Roman law but Christianity was not. Why not go back to their former way of life and live under this safety net? Why endure the hardships that went along with being a Christian? If you read the first 11 chapters of this letter they are clearly reminded why – nothing is able to replace Jesus. Christ is the only and all-sufficient Savior every person needs. Christ is superior to anything they had before and is better than anything else they will ever find. Now may they suffer for Christ? Yes. But we are also reminded why God at times allows such suffering in the lives of His people. ***“The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”***

At this time I think it would be beneficial to talk about what we mean when we say that God our Father disciplines His children. The translation of the quote here from Proverbs uses punishes and disciplines as interchangeable words. We do the same today. However, there is a difference worth pointing out. God doesn't punish us for our sins. We don't or can't pay for a single one of our sins. God instead punished Jesus on the cross for our sins – for each and every one of them in fact. However, there are times when God allows us to suffer earthly consequences for our sins. There are times God allows us just to suffer because of sin in general in this world. Please understand God is also not ever the cause of sin. He doesn't command people to persecute the church. God doesn't send out enemies in this world or the devil to get us. God is not the reason people are homeless or starving or dying from disease. One more truth to remember is God has the power to put a stop to any suffering or hardship at anytime. Our Father is Almighty!

So why do we ever suffer? Why should we ever come across any kind of hardships? Didn't God's Word just answer those questions for us? ***“Because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son...God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?”*** Our Father understands there are times we will listen to Him a lot more carefully when we are shivering in a storm rather than basking in the sunshine. So whatever troubles or hardship we face we can be certain of this one thing – our Father allowed it. He allowed it because He wants to teach us something, He wants to keep us in line, and He wants us to listen to His Word. He allowed it because He knows what is best for us. ***“God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.”*** This is the ultimate purpose behind all God's discipline for us. He cares about our faith in Jesus. He doesn't want sin to tear us away from the Savior. He wants us to share in his holiness. He wants us in heaven. Our Father disciplines us as His own children because He loves us!

Therefore, we have a couple important commands to pay attention to here. ***“Do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you.”*** Don't just blow off troubles as if they are a bad break or that they just happen. Don't ignore them or take them lightly saying they happen to everyone. But on the other hand do not let them overwhelm you either. Do not lose heart over them. Instead, ***“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons.”***

We have all faced God's discipline. Sometimes it comes sharp and swift almost taking our breath away. Other times it comes in slow and steady waves, almost wearing us out. So how do you act when the Lord disciplines you? I know how I often react. Too often I act like I did when my dad got out his belt that one day. I act like a spoiled brat. Do we grumble and complain when we have trouble? Do we perhaps even get a bit angry with God when a hardship hits? Might we even question or doubt God's motives? Whenever we sin this way

and start to slide down this dangerous slope it would be wise to open up this chapter of Scripture. Remember what God wants for you. Understand that the Father in heaven is treating you as His own child.

Then also listen to the most important thing to do in any and every situation. ***“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** When we fix our eyes on Jesus we see the only Son of God who never needed any kind of discipline because He never got out of line. When we fix our eyes on Jesus we see the only Son of God who was punished for the sins of us all. Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith. When we fix our eyes on Jesus we see the Savior who went willingly to suffer the punishment and death we deserve, a Savior ***‘who for the joy set before him endured the cross.’*** How could Jesus endure the scourging, the ridicule, the pain, the nails, the cross, and the wrath of God upon all sin with joy? Jesus saw what was on the other side. He had victory in sight – the victory that is now ours. Jesus knew His tomb and now my grave and your grave will be empty because of what He has done. Jesus saw the joy and peace that would be ours as His blood would wash all our sins away and we would be freed from the devil forever. Jesus understood He would be going to God’s right hand where He rules everything for the good of God’s people. Jesus knew that now through Him we could become the children of God.

By fixing our eyes on Jesus God gives us the strength to endure hardship in the same way. For with our Father in heaven every time we come out the other end of the tunnel there is blessing and victory. ***“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*** So with borrowed language from Isaiah this writer urges, ***“Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.”*** Keep fighting the good fight and running the Christian race! And with borrowed language again from Proverbs, ***“Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.*** God has already shown you the right path or course in Christ. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus as you run the race of life.

So what will we do the next time we face hardship or trouble? Have we learned anything today? I pray we understand. I pray we get it. God wants us to ***“throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.”*** God wants us to ***“fix our eyes on Jesus.”*** So the next time it feels like God is taking out a big belt as life’s problems seem to be giving us a pretty painful whipping remember why loving parents discipline their own children. Then remember how much more our heavenly Father loves us. The Father disciplines us because He loves us as His own children. I pray we listen and learn from it so that such discipline makes each of us stronger disciples! Amen.