**11-17-19**

 **By Your Patience Possess Your Souls**

**By Rev. Sheryl Stewart**

Isaiah 65: 17-25; Malachi 4: 1-2(a) 2 Thess. 3: 6-13 Luke 21: 5-19

RR: Psalm 98

**Summary: Patience, perseverance, endurance, standing firm: this is how Jesus won us, and it is how we will confirm ourselves as His inheritance.**

 The title of this sermon was inspired by the words Jesus spoke as He answered the disciples, who were wondering about the signs which would give evidence that the beautiful Temple would be torn down. This event has already happened, and only the famous “wailing wall” still stands. Jesus predicts wars and persecution, hard times that will be an opportunity for His followers to testify to God’s great work of salvation.

 It is not this prophecy itself which compelled me or the following predictions that foretell the return of Christ, but those words about gaining our souls. Jesus has won our souls, but our faithfulness must confirm His salvation. We sang that old witnessing hymn, “Throw out the lifeline.” The lifeline is salvation to anyone struggling in the water; yet to work, the struggling swimmer must grab onto that line! Salvation and confirmation go together; the rope won’t save you if you never grasp it and hold on.

 Those words of Jesus advice are translated many ways: “in our patience, our perseverance, our endurance, our standing firm,” we confirm what is done for us and let God do the work of hauling us to Heaven’s shore.

Isaiah speaks of the beauty of God’s promised heaven, and Malachi confirms the coming Day of Judgment as destruction for evil and joy for those who hold fast to God. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul encourages a disciplined life, saying that all who work will eat. So, do not to tire in the effort of doing good. Our labors are not to earn salvation, but to confirm it and let the ways of Jesus become our ways.

When I felt the call of God to preach the Gospel, the thought in my mind was that this way would keep me faithful in seeking God. I knew that I required discipline and that I would be distracted if I immersed myself in other endeavors. This has been the case: nursing provided me a chance to care and yet nursing in prison also had a coarsening effect. Loving a man has been an inexpressible joy; yet the cares of being a wife make me like Martha, “concerned over many things,” neglecting to learn like Mary at Jesus’ feet.

Nonetheless, as I persist in preaching, I have been shaped by God. I am most myself when I use what God gives me, when I pray with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was God who taught me to pray; prayer was itself an answer to prayer. I’d not thought about this much, but Rev. Jim shared something Mike, our bulletin designer, said about me. Mike said, “Sheryl starts praying and the Holy Spirit comes down with a thud!” I cannot take credit for that, but it is an amazing testimony to the faithfulness of God.

Therefore, “Follow the Gleam” was very evocative for me as a child. Those great Arthurian knights and ladies of God quested for the Holy Grail; the cup Jesus used when He instituted Holy Communion during the Last Supper. And, the challenge of the Grail still holds today: “Standards of worth, o’er all the earth; follow, follow the gleam of the light that shall bring the dawn.”

The dawn will come, of course, without my efforts; yet if I persist in a quest for those standards of worth, then the dawn will find me faithful. As I have worked, so will I eat of the bread and wine God has provided. And so, will you. Amen!