

May 17, 2026 – 1 Peter 5:6-11

The ancient Romans had an interesting expression. You see, to the Romans there was nothing more important to a man than his family. They were a proudly patriarchal society. It was every boy's dream to grow up and have a family. To be the head of a household. That was the goal of his entire life.

And that idea of being the head of the household was summed up in one Latin word: manus. A single word that summarized a husband and father's authority over his home and family.

But manus actually literally means “hand,” as in “manual” or “manipulate.” To the ancient Romans to be a husband and father was to be the manus of the family. To be the hand of the family. And they used the word “hand” because it represented so completely all of the aspects of being the head of a household to the Romans.

Hands are how you work, how you earn money. The hand of the family is the provider for all their needs. Hands are how you defend yourself and others. The hand of the family keeps them safe from harm. And hands are how you discipline and keep order. The hand of the family lays down the law.

What's interesting is that Peter appeals to this idea of the manus, the hand of the family, today in our Epistle lesson. You see, Peter has just finished a whole section on the domestic life of his readers. How they interact with the authorities in their community. How slaves obey their masters. And how wives relate to their husbands.

And then he follows this up, by saying, “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.*” Humble yourselves under the mighty manus of God. Peter didn't write this in Latin, of course. But to someone living in the Greco-Roman world, the image of God's ‘mighty hand’ would have connected perfectly with the ideas of civil and domestic authority that Peter has just laid out.

Just as citizens submit to governments and slaves to masters and wives to husbands, we submit to God's authority. He is the head of our spiritual household. He is the manus of our divine family, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ underneath Him.

And much like a Roman father rules as manus over his household. Providing for them. Defending them. Disciplining them. So also our heavenly Father rules as a manus over us. Providing for us. Defending us. Disciplining us.

And so our relationship with God is... complicated. Just as any family relationship is. Because the one who punishes us is also the one who loves us deeply. And any person called as a child of God has to recognize both sides of that relationship. Has to know that the hand that gives also takes away. The hand that defends us from the work of the devil also holds us back from the desires of our flesh.

This duality is represented in Lutheran theology by the terms Law and Gospel. And we see it all over our lesson this morning. This first verse, in fact.

“*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.*” God demands humility from us. He demands that we respect and obey and fear him as not just a manus, but a mighty manus. A mighty hand. Requiring complete humility.

And yet, what does he do with all that authority? “*So that at the proper time he may exalt you.*” The almighty God does not require complete humility simply because His ego demands it, like a petty ruler. He requires it because without it, we'll never know just how far he can exalt us out of our humble state. We'll never know just how much good God has in mind for his people.

The next verse, the same thing happens again. “*Casting all your anxieties on him.*” Life is full of anxiety. Full of fear and uncertainty about the future. Watch the news. Read the newspaper. Talk to your friends. It's everywhere. It's enough to make you wonder sometimes whether we have a heavenly Father out there at all.

And yet, how does God reassure us? *“Casting all your anxieties on him... because he cares for you.”* Life is full of anxiety and uncertainty and fear... and your Father in heaven wants to know about all of it. He wants to hear it. He wants to do something about it. He invites you – commands you – to go to him in prayer. Because he cares for you.

*“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him.”* That's what life is like. We are walking through the African savannah with a hungry lion stalking us. And what are we supposed to do? Resist him.

Well, thanks Peter. You expect me to go toe to toe with a lion. Just wrestle him with my bare hands, I suppose?

No, actually. You resist him, *“firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.”* God has given us a great gift. A great weapon. It's called faith.

But we need to be clear about something here. To live “firm in your faith” doesn't mean gritting your teeth and finding some hidden reserve of spiritual toughness deep inside yourself. Faith is not simply stubborn optimism. Faith is trust in Christ. And that faith is sustained the same way it was first created: through the gifts of God.

You resist the roaring lion not by standing alone in your own strength, but by clinging to the mighty hand of God where that hand has promised to be found. In the preaching of the Gospel. In Holy Baptism. In Absolution. In the Lord's Supper.

Because suffering has a way of making us forget. Forget that God cares for us. Forget that our sins are forgiven. Forget that Christ has defeated death. So our heavenly Father continually places His promises before us again and again and again.

Every sermon proclaims Christ crucified for sinners. Every absolution speaks to you directly: “I forgive you all your sins.” Every Baptism we witness is a reminder that we have already died and risen with Christ, and therefore the devil does not own us anymore. And every time we kneel at this altar, Christ places into our mouths the very body and blood given and shed for us, strengthening our faith for every attack of the lion yet to come.

And around the world everyday, thousands upon thousands of fellow Christians resist the work of the devil with that same weapon that we've been given. With the same Word, the same Sacraments, the same faith in Christ's death and resurrection. If it works for them, it'll work for you too.

The truth is that suffering will come. Whether it's because of the devil stalking us like a roaring lion. Or whether it's because of the anxieties that the world shoves in our faces. Or whether it's because of our own sinful nature that can never fully humble itself to God's authority.

We suffer. Peter says that plainly. *“And after you have suffered a little while.”* Not 'if you suffer a little while.' No, it's just assumed. You will suffer. Even if it's only for a little while.

And yet, afterwards, *“the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”* And there's the Gospel.

The Law says that sin brings suffering and death. The mighty hand of God says that we must be disciplined. That there must be rules to our heavenly household. There must be expectations for God's divine children.

But the Gospel says that we have a God of all grace. That the mighty hand of God is mighty not just to punish, but also mighty to save. To call us into eternal glory in Christ. Because He Himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us.

He himself. That's an interesting emphasis. We destroy ourselves with our sin and separate ourselves from our Lord. But God himself reverses the damage we've done. He isn't the author of sin and evil. But He enters into the wreckage sin has caused and restores what we destroyed. He didn't cause it. But he fixes it.

The mighty hand of God, who provides, defends, and disciplines just like a human father. But then he goes one step farther. He restores us, in a way that no human father could.

Restores us as his children when we turn away. Restores our bodies when they're destroyed by sin and death. Restores our home – this earth – which has been corrupted by the devil's work.

The mighty hand of God restores us and all things to the creation that he had planned from the beginning of time. He restores us to a dominion that will be forever and ever. Amen.