

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

“Stay out of trouble.”

- Perhaps you’ve heard me say that before.
- Perhaps you’ve said it before.
- We often use that phrase as casual conversation or to make light of something.
- Sometimes we use it as an informal way of saying “good bye.”

And used in that context it usually refers to not having a problem or run in with those in authority.

- But thinking deeper there are other ways we can have trouble.
- We can have troubles with others, our neighbors or even our friends of family.
- And we certainly can have troubles within ourselves. Who of us have not at one time or another, had a troubled heart.

Stay out of trouble.

- How do you define trouble?
- Are you currently in any trouble?
- And how do you stay out of trouble?

If you go to the dictionary to see what Webster has to say about all this.....he actually gives 3 definitions.

- Trouble can be public unrest or disorder.
- Trouble can be difficulties or problems faced.

And trouble can also be a verb.

- To cause distress or anxiety or problems for others or yourself.

A quick account illustrates this well. I actually came home from church a few weeks ago and caught the last details of this on a news broadcast.

- There was a young boy arrested at school. He was of small, meek stature and I would guess him about junior high age.

He had apparently made threats of some sort at school that had to be taken seriously.

- The police were called in.

- You could say there was trouble in the school.

The police arrested the young boy.

- As he left school handcuffed and was put in the police car, he looked scared to death.
- The police officer conveyed to the young boy that once the school authorities called, he had to be arrested and taken to the police station.

The police officer then asked the boy, “Are you doing okay?”

- The boy’s response was “no.”

The police officer inquired further.

- And the boy said he was in big trouble.
- And then.....as this was all reported to his parents.....they too were troubled.
- There was trouble in the school, the boy was in trouble, the boy was troubled in his heart, and his parents were troubled.

Troubles come from many sources.

- It can be some action we do that brings it on ourselves.
- It can be worry, anxiety, or doubt.
- It can be from something that lies ahead.
- And it can be from worry and concern for someone else and what they have done.

And they can be in different shapes and sizes and times for each of us.

- One day, according to a time-honored story, St. Francis of Assisi longed to see his brothers.
- They agreed to meet in a remote monastery in the mountains of central Italy.

After arriving and enjoying their reunion, each reported what trouble each had experienced on the road.

- One Franciscan brother who had traveled on muleback said, “God protected me in a miraculous way.”
- When I was crossing a narrow bridge over a deep mountain gorge, the mule jumped.
- I fell and narrowly escaped falling over the wall of the bridge into the gorge.
- God by his love, saved my life.

A second brother said, “I had to cross a river and I slipped and fell.

- The waters carried me down the river.
- But God in His grace provided a tree which had fallen across the river.
- I could grasp a branch of that tree and pull myself ashore, thanks to God's miraculous mercy."

Then St. Francis said.....

- Let us thank God for his wonderful works.
- I did experience the greatest miracle of all on my way.
- I had the smoothest, most pleasant, completely uneventful trip.

In our first reading for today regarding Stephen and the Sanhedrin, there is plenty of trouble.

- We are introduced to Stephen.....
- And we are told he was full of grace and power and was doing great wonders and signs among the people.

But that was trouble for the Sanhedrin.

- And we are told some of them rose up and disputed with Stephen.

And Stephen stands up and tells it like it is.

- He gives a great testimony to Christ.
- He calls them a stiff-necked people.
- He said they had uncircumcised hearts and ears and always resisted the Holy Spirit.
- He said they have persecuted the prophets and killed them.
- And now they have betrayed and murdered the Righteous One.
- He says they have not kept the Law.
- Stephen was saying.....they are in trouble!

From casual observance, you could say.....

- Stephen is in trouble.
- The Sanhedrin is troubled.
- And there is trouble in the council.

We're told that when the Sanhedrin heard these things that Stephen said, they were enraged and ground their teeth at him.

- Perhaps Webster could incorporate that somewhere into his definition of trouble!

But then we are told Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

- But not so for the Sanhedrin.
- We are told they shouted and stopped their ears and rushed together at him.
- And they took him out of the city and stoned him.

And as they were stoning him, we are told Stephen called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

- And as he was being stoned, in a peaceful, reconciling mind he asked the Lord to not hold this against them.
- And Stephen became the first martyr of the New Testament church.
- The words in Scripture.....”He fell asleep.”

So I ask you, in this account who was the one REALLY troubled?

- Who was the one REALLY causing the unrest?
- And who was the one REALLY experiencing the unrest.

I will argue that it is the Sanhedrin.

- Stephen on the other hand is facing an angry crowd.
- And he is doing the will of God.
- He is being executed, soon to die.

And he sees heaven opened.

- He asks God to receive his spirit.
- And he asks God to forgive those persecuting him.

From the lens and perspective of the world, it would seem that Stephen is the one in trouble.

- But he is at peace, even facing death and falls asleep in the Lord.
- By my definition Stephen is at rest and peace.
- By Webster’s definition, the opposite of trouble.

And why is that?

- What is going on here?

I invite you, with me, now to turn our focus to our Gospel reading.

- Jesus gives us the answer to all this.

- Jesus is in the upper room with His disciples.
- He is soon to be betrayed, arrested, beaten and crucified.
- His disciples, by human standards have every reason to be troubled.

And Jesus says, in the first verse of our Gospel reading for today.....

- “Don’t let your hearts be TROUBLED.”
- Jesus recognizes the source and cause of trouble and He also recognizes that we will be troubled.

“Let not your hearts be troubled.”

- How?
- Jesus says, “By believing in God. Believing also in Me.”

Believing/trusting in Jesus.

- Following His will.
- And living in the refuge of confidence and peace and strength of our Good Shepherd.

Recall last week we talked about how we are sheep and are needful and dependent on a good shepherd.

- And we have that.
- And we can live in the refuge of His protection and providing no matter what we face.

Look at what Jesus tells us in the last words of our Gospel reading.

- “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”
- “If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”
- Anything that is, in accordance with God’s will and that will bring Him glory.
- He will do it.
- And we can trust in His love and mercy and wisdom and strength.

Jesus also in our Gospel reading gives us one of those beautiful I Am statements.

- “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”
- I am the way. As we journey this earth, we must keep on trusting in Him. He is the source to peace and eternal life.
- I am the truth. We can trust Jesus because all that is real and true is found in Him. He is truth and that is difficult to find in this world.

- I am the life. Jesus is the source of physical and spiritual life. Whoever believes in Him will have eternal life.

Do not be troubled.

- We see the perfect example of this with Stephen.
- He is living according to God's will. Full of grace and peace.
- He is brought in before the Sanhedrin. Yet he stays true to God's Word in his testimony.

He is drug out of the city.

- And he is filled with the Holy Spirit and looked to heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

And they stoned him.

- Yet as they did he called out to Jesus, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit."
- And even asked that their sin be not held against them.
- And the description of his death, "He fell asleep."

No matter what you face, do not let your heart be troubled.

- Maybe at times you feel as if you are in the fire and on trial. That you are standing before those ready to stone you.
- Maybe with all you face you feel that it is too much of a stretch not to be troubled.
- But we hang on to and are anchored in the promise, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

As I bring this message to a close.....have you paid attention or considered all that Scripture promises and has to say to us regarding troubles?

- In fact, there is so much, the toughest part of this sermon was how to choose and limit the number of verses shared.
- Let me give you some of them.
- Please just listen and reflect on these verses. I will do a number of them but do them quickly.
- I give them not only for awareness but for comfort and peace as you face your troubles.

Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in TROUBLE.

Psalm 9:9, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of TROUBLE."

Nahum 1:7, this is our Scripture posted for this week, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of TROUBLE. He cares for those who trust Him.

Psalm 32:7, “You are my hiding place; You will protect me from TROUBLE and surround me with songs of deliverance.”

Psalm 59:16, “But I will sing of Your strength, in the morning I will sing of Your love; for You are my fortress, my refuge in times of TROUBLE.”

John 16:33, “I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.”

Psalm 34:6, “The poor man called, and the Lord heard him; He saved him out of all his TROUBLES.”

And finally Psalm 34:17-18, “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Dear fellow redeemed and saints at Hope.....

- Stay out of trouble.....in the refuge and strength of our Lord.
- Amen.

(Please stand) And now, may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Having heard the Word of God we now prepare our hearts and minds to confess the words of the Nicene Creed as found on page 158 in your hymnal.