

“WHEN WE STUMBLE”
AUGUST 16, 2020 SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
(abbreviated COVID 19 service/50% seating capacity)
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church

PRELUDE: Carol Gustafson

HYMN (#471 AH) (# ? OVH): “I Am Thine, O Lord”

1. I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith
And be closer drawn to Thee.

Refrain:

Draw me nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer blessed Lord,
To Thy precious, bleeding side.

2. Consecrate me now to Thy service, Lord,
By the pow’r of grace divine;
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
And my will be lost in Thine. [Refrain]

3. Oh, the pure delight of a single hour
That before Thy throne I spend,
When I kneel in prayer, and with Thee, my God
I commune as friend with friend! [Refrain]

4. There are depths of love that I cannot know
Till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach
Till I rest in peace with Thee. [Refrain]

PRAYER

CHILDREN’S SERMON: *Romans 11:23 “Grafting a branch into a vine...”*

EPISTLE LESSON: *Romans 11:11&12; 19-24; 28-32* **Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! ...19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either...22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated**

olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! ...28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, 29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

CONFESSION OF FAITH: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen

PRAISE SONG:

SERMON TITLE: "WHEN WE STUMBLE" Romans 11; Pastor Tom Olson; August 16, 2020

CONFERENCE: We had a good time at the AFLC Annual Conference at the Association Retreat Center on Monday to Wednesday. Sharon and Rebekah attended WMF day with the theme "Victory in Jesus." The theme of the conference was "Will He Find Faith?" They even had our giant tent up we donated to them and had VBS under it.

FALWELL: This week we saw the apocalyptic destruction of ten million acres of crops in Iowa with a catastrophic storm. Another type of "storm" is brewing in Virginia where the Rev. Jerry Falwell, Jr. had to step down as head of Liberty University as a result of numerous accusations against him for breaking the strict dress and conduct codes of the school that students have to abide by with his own cavalier and sexually titillating photos and comments he has been sharing with staff over the years and other issues large financial payoffs and racy photos of his wife. ...a party on a yacht with scant clothing, drinks and crude behavior was the last straw that called his chancellors to demand he step down.

QUESTION: I am not speaking as a person who feels I am better than he or less sinful, but I am speaking as a pastor observing another scandal that rocks the church and asking myself a question. That question is just as much for me as it is for Rev. Falwell. Here it is, "How can a person with so many spiritual opportunities and advantages end up at such a party, on a yacht, with his pants unzipped right in front of a scantily clad young woman with drinks in hand?" Answer: The same way it happened to Israel and the same way it can happen to you and me...one small misstep at a time. Let's talk about it.

I. ISRAEL STUMBLED AND FELL

Romans 11:11&12 Again I ask: Did **they stumble** so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. 12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

ISRAEL: Paul wants us to note that ISRAEL STUMBLED AND FELL. This is the culmination of a discussion starting in chapter 9 about the fall of Israel. In chapter 9 he reminds us that Israel had every advantage and opportunity to walk with God and receive Christ as Messiah. In 9:4&5 we see that they had adoption by God,

the glorious presence of God, the temple worship, the great patriarchs, and God's Word that doesn't fail. Yet still when the fulness of time came and Jesus prophetically rode into Jerusalem, they sent him to the cross to die when he didn't fulfill their expectations.

ADVANTAGE: When I grew up, we all had tremendous spiritual advantage like Israel. We had good parents (patriarchs), Sunday school and Vacation Bible School, regular church services with songs and preaching...most of us got a Bible given to us in about the fourth grade. Almost all of us studied the Word of God with the pastor in confirmation classes. We said our vows, took the obligatory confirmation photo and then most of the young people disappeared from the church the next Sunday. We, like Israel, have had every advantage that others cannot even dream of having in other parts of the world. Yet most of my childhood friends have nothing to do with God and His Word and church today.

BAPTIST: Rev. Falwell attended private Christian school and Liberty University and then graduated from the Virginia University law school. His father was a famous pastor. His church had every program and advantage that could be given to someone spiritually. Yet he ended up resigning in disgrace. But it was not for lack of advantage? No.

US: We have it TOO GOOD. Many people don't even have the Bible in their language. Yet all of us own Bibles and are near churches. We are trying to provide every possible way for you to hear the Word of God at home, in your car and in church. We have so many advantages spiritually as well.

FALL: But what happened to Israel? They rejected the Savior and let the gospel go to the Gentiles. God let others have His Word. I am sure that even applies to church buildings. If we use this building well and fully to the glory of God, I know we will keep it. But if we don't, God will let others have it for His purposes. How are we using what God has given us? We are trying to use it well...and I am praying for teens to use the youth room also. We don't want to stumble and fall like Israel.

II. WE ALL WALK IN DANGER OF BEING CUT OFF

*...19 You will say then, "**Branches were broken off** so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either...22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for **God is able to graft them in again.** 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree! ...28 As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs,*

BROKEN: Notice that "the branches were broken off" in verse 19. We have worked a lot with wood cutting over the years and have seen a lot of broken off branches. In fact, I have a bunch of broken branches that I have to cut up at our hobby farm. There is a lot you can learn from broken branches. Most of those broken branches have a reason for breaking down in a snow, or ice or windstorm. Some are simply dead on the tree. Others have spots on them where there is rot or damage from outside sources. Some of them are simply too long and far extended out from the tree to be supported by the small attachment to the tree...they can't carry the load that is put on them.

SIMILAR: Most people who stumble as Christians have similar problems. Some are just dead on the vine, they are members of the church in name but they don't have any personal relationship with Christ. Others are over

extended and have taken on too many tasks and not focused on the spot where they are attached to Christ. Others have gotten involved with people and activities that bring a weakness into a key spot in their hearts that cannot stand up to a time of testing and they stumble. Israel was so proud of their outward religious temple, Scriptures, and traditions but that was not enough to keep them on the path of faith.

HOPE: But it is not hopeless. Notice in verse 23 that “God is able to graft them in again.” Even though Israel rejected their Messiah and opened the door for us Gentiles to become believers, they can come back to the Lord and be grafted back into God’s vine. (And we can be cut off!) Since salvation is by grace, through faith, all it takes is for them to respond to God’s Word in faith and believe that Jesus is their Savior too and God will graft them back in.

PATIENT: If you or someone you know has turned their back on their upbringing in the Lord, don’t give up on them. God’s Word is still working in their hearts. God can graft them back into the body. Thousands of Jews have embraced Jesus as their Savior and Messiah. They call themselves “completed Jews.” The Bible indicates that in the last days that Israel will once again embrace Jesus as their Savior. ***Romans 11:25&26 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved...***

III. GOD’S RELENTLESS CAUSE IS TO REDEEM THOSE WHO STUMBLE

29 for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. 30 Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. 32 For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

RESTORATION: What about Rev. Fallwell? He too is welcome to return to the Lord. Does that mean he should be president of Liberty University? Of course not, he needs to earn people’s trust. If he is repentant, he would be more than willing to take a humble place of service in the kingdom of God. That is the test for him right now. Being forgiven is one thing, but being reinstated to a position of responsibility and the same temptations is another. Some other man can take that position who is more mature and not be tempted by money, sensuality, yacht parties and the lure of the rich and powerful people. But restoration to God is available to him and you and me right now, no matter how we have sinned. God wants Israel to be saved and he wants all of us to come back to Him. **THAT IS WHY JESUS GAVE HIS LIFE ON THE CROSS.**

IRREVOCABLE: So, what does it mean that “God’s gifts and calling are irrevocable?” Let’s just say you are a gifted singer. When you sin against God and turn your back on God, you still can sing. God doesn’t take that gift from you. Several prominent contemporary church musicians have announced that they no longer are believers and that they want to sing secular music. God lets them keep their gift. And their calling to sing for the Lord is irrevocable. They may have to start at the bottom of the church music world again until trust can be restored, but they can come back and sing for the Lord any time they come back to faith.

EXAMPLE: My friend Doug, who you must meet, was called to be a pastor at age 12, it took until age 40 to get saved and until age 65 for him to finally be willing to become a pastor. And the past ten years of preaching and ministry have been ten of the best years of his life. The calling at age 12 was irrevocable. God’s gifting and calling in your life is irrevocable. Are you using it?

SANCTIFICATION: Notice the sweet words in **verse 32, “so that he may have mercy on them all.”** Our God does not want to be harsh. He wants to be merciful. He wants to see us all enjoying the great callings in life He created for us to experience. He wants us to be fulfilled and fruitful. He wants to shower His love on all

people. God is above all else loving and merciful. But He is also Holy...and that is why we come to him through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross in our place. Christ makes us holy when we believe in Him.

STAY: What are the lessons for today? Firstly, if you stumble and fall, repent, come back to the cross, find forgiveness mercy and the path to restoration. Secondly, stay near the Lord, stay close to home, stay in the church, stay away from yacht parties or anything else that makes you vulnerable...and then you won't stumble and fall and face the pain that the Fallwell family is experiencing right now.

TESTIMONY: A GREAT testimony is someone who fell into sin and returned to the Lord. A GREATER testimony is someone who stayed close to the Savior and never fell into the devil's trap. I have met a lot of people who have regretted sinning, but I never have met anyone who regretted living a clean and pure life of faith and love and humility. I am sure Rev. Falwell regrets unzipping his pants...at least I hope he does. The farther we stray from godly friends the more likely we will be to fall. That is why we have our church...to keep people close to God, God's Word and God's people...THEY KEEP US FROM STUMBLING. Amen

PRAISE SONG:

PRAYER & LORD'S PRAYER: *Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen*

BENEDICTION: The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

CLOSING SONG: Chosen by Carol
Drive Up Service: DOXOLOGY

POSTLUDE: Carol Gustafson