Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen. The text for this morning’s message comes from the Epistle lesson from 1 Peter 5: 6&7: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

On a visit to a museum in Bonn, a young American student became fascinated by the piano on which Beethoven had composed some of his greatest works. She asked the guard if she might play a few bars on it. To help persuade the guard, she also slipped him a lavish tip. The guard agreed and the girl went to the piano and played a short portion of Moonlight Sonata. As she was leaving she said to the guard, “I suppose all the great pianists who come here want to play on that piano.” The guard shook his head and said, “Paderewski [the famed Polish pianist] was here a few years ago, and he said he wasn’t worthy to touch it.”

All she wanted was the chance to play the piano that Beethoven had played; instead she got a valuable lesson in humility. Humility - the fitting response to greatness; not only to the likes of a Beethoven, but most especially to God. It is at the core of our text for this morning’s message and particularly poignant as we install our newly elected Church Council with many exciting tasks and daunting challenges before them. Poignant as well as we go to trial this week to settle a dispute over fair market rental rates.

Peter’s powerful words, you see, point not to an attitude of humility – an act of humbling yourself (like kneeling, bowing or yielding of your own accord) rather he points people to a process of humbling, allowing yourself to be humbled by God, allowing the hand of God to take you down to that place where you can rise in God’s grace, renewed, remade, reborn.

That image fits so well with Peter’s words about baptism, the image of The Flood of Noah washing away all that was impure, of being made whole are ready for heaven by the work of God – God Who alone confirms that faith raising us to new and eternal life as we come up out of the waters of baptism. Because we so rely on God’s action – as we rightly should, Lutherans have always been reluctant to nail down the process of Sanctification - being transformed through the work of the Holy Spirit into the image and character of God’s Son, the Lord Jesus. Paul told the Romans that was what God has in mind,

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose…to become conformed to the image of His Son.
Before the birth of Christ God spoke to Israel through the prophets about this process of being humbled. Isaiah said the people were trying to fill a void, an emptiness in themselves with the “things of the world.” (which in their world were gold, silver, treasures, idols, things they had made with their hands – not so different except our hands are filled with remote control devices or carcinogenic cell phones?)

Later in Isaiah there are two more illustrations – people lighting their own firebrands to light their own path. God promised them they would lie down in torment for refusing to be led and guided by God’s light. OUCH!

Finally Isaiah compares the people to sheep who go their own way – lose their own way by going astray – not following or allowing themselves to be led by the Shepherd. Baa – the grass seemed greener! And the next thing you know you’re lost.

Stubborn Israel still wasn’t getting the picture from Isaiah so Jeremiah came with two more illustrations. The first of people building their own cisterns to gather their water and save this most precious of resources in a desert country – but cisterns made of their own hands, their own works – cisterns that are faulty and broken. Instead of having God guide their hands and quench their thirst they sought their own way. People really haven’t changed, you see, we are always planning our own best solutions to expedite matters.

That wasn’t a strong enough message, apparently, because Jeremiah came back with one more: The Charles Atlas/Arnold Schwarzenegger method – putting your confidence in the muscle you build – a strong physique – big guns and a muscle t-shirt or Kelly Ripa biceps. Like all the others this one emphasizes a reliance on flesh you can bulk up, on one’s own resources – finding security, significance, peace, satisfaction and purpose apart from being conformed to the image of a servant – the ultimate “suffering servant,” Jesus Christ – whose power was shown in humility and whom God raised to that place above all others where He reigns at God’s right hand.

If only humility weren’t so, well, humiliating! If only the process of being conformed didn’t seem to take as long as the court system seems to take! If only as new-born, redeemed Children of God and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven we were no longer in need of chastening from God, pruning to bear fruit, of situations and circumstances that turned our sinful hearts back to God for renewal and healing. If only 1 Peter didn’t have the word “suffer” or the concept of suffering for the faith 15 times. But, just like the disciples who felt so suddenly lost in our Gospel looking at the sky now empty and wondering where Jesus had gone and how they’d live without His presence every day we have not been left bereft or alone – the promised gift of the Holy Spirit has come – as you’ll hear more fully next week, and as they learned in all that lay before them in ministry the sufferings of (their and) this present time are nothing compared to the glory to be revealed.
Christian poet, songwriter and singer Laura Story put it this way in a song released just weeks ago called BLESSINGS

**BLESSINGS Lyrics**

Laura Story

We pray for blessings
We pray for peace
Comfort for family
Protection while we sleep

We pray for healing
For prosperity
We pray for Your mighty hand
to ease our suffering

And all the while
You hear each spoken need
Yet (Your) love is way too much to give us lesser things

Cuz what if Your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know you’re near
What if trials of this life
Are Your mercies in disguise?

We pray for wisdom
Your voice to hear
We cry in anger when we cannot feel You near
We doubt Your goodness
We doubt Your love
As if every promise from Your Word(and Sacrament) is not enough

And all the while You hear each desperate plea
And long that we’d have faith to believe

Cuz what if Your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know you’re near
What if trials of this life
Are Your mercies in disguise?

When friends betray us
When darkness seems to win
We know the pain reminds this heart
That this is not
This is not our home

Cuz what if Your blessings come through raindrops
What if Your healing comes through tears
What if a thousand sleepless nights
Are what it takes to know you’re near
What if trials of this life
Are Your mercies in disguise?

What if my greatest disappointments
Or the aching of this life
is the revealing of a greater thirst
This world can’t satisfy?
And what if trials of this life
The rain
The storms
The hardest nights
are your mercies in disguise?

Makes me want to read more Christian poetry and I could leave things there but we have only covered one verse in our text: Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. For those waiting for employment – some after years of unemployment or under-employment – or those fearing cutbacks or downsizing to end things there would seem like the cliff-hanger being endured, but there’s more: Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.

Now it is never a bad thing to leave a sermon with everyone casting their cares on Jesus – not only does it echo an old Gospel hymn it reflects the Greek verb EPIRIPITO which was used of casting garments on a beast of burden. Again the image of Jesus who bore our burdens as the Psalmist said, “Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, The God who is our salvation.”

In the trial and in the trials that this week, that the forthcoming years of service on the Church Council will bring, and in our own personal struggles may we look to the waters of baptism for renewal, to the Lord’s Table for strength and assurance, and in the fellowship of
believers in this place and in the greater bride of Christ – the church throughout the world may we find encouragement, equipment for service and joy in the tasks given to us by our God, who is our salvation, who humbles us to lift us up!

Please take the hand of the person/people next to you as we close this message in prayer as Jesus prayed in the Gospel for this day. Don’t worry, it won’t hurt but it might be awkward. Just grab each others hands—that’s all—don’t worry about sweaty palms or dirty finger nails. Just hold on to each other:

Gracious God, we come before you humbly today, Your children called by your grace to cast our anxieties for the future for all the situations in our congregation and in our lives into Your loving care. After so much destruction in a season where floods and storms have harmed so many, in a time when our world is still waging war and so many innocent lives are being lost, where tears are still shed—in this sacred minute, Gracious God, may we move a little closer to becoming the answer to Jesus prayer—that we may be one with each other just as He is with You, our Father in Heaven. AMEN