

I've got a riddle for you. I apologize if you've heard it before; it's a pretty common one. What walks on four legs at dawn, two legs at noon, and 3 legs at dusk? For those who haven't heard it before, the answer is a person. In the dawn of our lives, as infants, we crawl on all fours. During the middle years of our lives, we walk around on two legs. As our lives wear on, we need more support, and many walk with the assistance of a cane: a third leg, if you will.

Think back to a time when walking was difficult because something was no longer reliable: you had an injury or a medical problem, or you were walking on difficult or unstable terrain. Before that incident, walking was easy; but suddenly that simple task wasn't so simple. You needed some extra support to walk around: a cane, a walker, or another person. We face many difficult situations, even in our spiritual lives. When we face suffering and difficulty, we need extra support because our own abilities aren't enough. When we need support, our lesson tells us about the reliable Word of God. Rely on the Gospel, Lean on what God says, and Stand firm on reality.

Let's go back in time to when Peter wrote this letter. He knew he was nearing the end of his life. Peter was likely in his 60's, an old man for those days, and he was in prison for preaching the gospel. He knew he was going to be executed soon. He wanted to make sure his readers always had the pure gospel to rely on when he was gone.

The Holy Spirit wanted Peter's readers to have the gospel, too. God inspired Peter to write this letter, and the Holy Spirit led Peter to write about his experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter had told many people about Jesus' transfiguration before. Peter's experience seeing Jesus' power and glory before his death showed that Jesus really is God in the flesh and the Savior of the world.

But Peter didn't just point to Jesus' power and glory. Peter pointed to the words that he heard that day on the Mount of Transfiguration. God the Father said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." When Peter was in prison and with execution looming over him, he remembered what God the Father told him about Jesus, and he leaned on God's words in his time of difficulty.

The Holy Spirit wants you to lean on the gospel when you face difficulty. God tells you in his word that Jesus has kept God's law for you. However, there are a lot of messages we hear about Jesus. Where do you go to hear what God says? Now, being good Lutherans, we all say that we turn to the Bible, to Scripture alone, just like Martin Luther. But very often, instead of leaning on what God says in Scripture, we're really leaning on what some one else has made up.

There are a lot of messages that seem very godly, but if you listen to them closely, they miss the mark. I remember hearing a short ad on Christian radio that said: "God's blessings come to us by the power of our obedience to his commands." That's not the reliable gospel. That is pure law, and the law can only condemn us. The same kinds of messages exist everywhere: people say, "If you would only trust God more," or "If only you were more faithful."

Those examples I mentioned use God's Word for a purpose God never intended. And we like to listen to those messages. But the Bible is not an instruction book for moral living. The Bible is not a self-help book. God did not give us his word so that we can learn to be good or to improve our health and happiness. Leaning on human ideas, instead of what God says, is dangerous, because you're leaning on your own ability, instead of on God's power.

Relying on human ideas is like leaning on a cane made of cardboard: it might seem solid when you don't need it, but when you lean on it, it buckles and you fall. When difficulties come into your life—sickness, weakness, death—those human messages might seem impressive, but you can't lean on them, because they don't provide any real support. They make you focus on what you can do.

Peter urges us to lean on what God says. We need to rely on the gospel. Peter tells us about the word of God he heard at Jesus' Transfiguration: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." That is the message of the Bible: Jesus is the Son of God, our Savior from sin, death, and the devil. You can lean on the what God says because God tells you that Jesus has pleased God in your place. Where you can't lean on your own ability to face difficulty, you can lean on Jesus' power to save.

The power of the gospel is Jesus. He showed that power when he revealed his glory at Transfiguration. He would show that power again when he victoriously rose from the dead on Easter

Sunday. Lean on the power of what God says: Jesus has saved you from sin, death and the devil. When trials and troubles come into your life, do not rely on yourself. Rely on the gospel; lean on what God says.

You can lean on what God says because the Bible is centered on your Savior: Jesus. Jesus lived the perfect life God commanded. Jesus died an innocent death in our place. Jesus accomplished our salvation. The historical facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection mean that when you rely on the gospel and lean on what God says, you're standing firm on reality.

In Peter's day, there were those who claimed that Peter had made up the stories he told about Jesus. They said that the account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection was a valuable story. They even said that learning that story was necessary. However, they claimed that none of it really happened.

These false teachers said that the stories about Jesus were important to teach spiritual truths. They said that all of those stories about Jesus helping the needy and healing the sick were intended to teach us how to be kind and caring to others. Those false teachers taught that Jesus' life was only meant to show how we could live better lives.

They even taught that, if you studied those stories closely enough, you could uncover a secret method to get God on your side. They talked about faith as if it were a shortcut to God's good side. They told people that if they believed hard enough and gave generously to their leaders, God would give them special treatment: prosperity, wisdom, and success greater than those who were less faithful.

We hear those messages today. There are still teachers who abuse the Bible and make it into a guidebook to a better life. I hear about all kinds of people who say that God only wants us to be happy. They claim that God wants us to be healthy and wealthy, and if you do things just right, he will have to bless you. They say that Jesus came to teach us how to be kind and loving and earn God's favor. And our sinful nature likes to hear that. We like it when people tell us that we can be smart enough or good enough to make God happy.

That message is not the reliable gospel. It's a false, human interpretation. These false teachers have taken the truth of God's Word and turned it into a moral fable. When human beings don't take the reality of Jesus' life seriously, they think they can change what God says to suit their needs. We hear it all the time: claims that the Bible was written for a different day and age. Or the idea that what God says in his law is not so important anymore; God just wants us to show love and be blessed.

Those claims are false. Do not listen to them. God's Word is not a myth or a fable; There is no secret way for us to unlock God's favor, because we cannot earn it. God is not our butler who will make us healthy and wealthy. He wants us to turn from our evil ways and trust him. God's Word was not just written for people living thousands of years ago, it was written for all people of all time—it was written for you and me—and the message of God's law is no different: God hates sin, and he will justly punish all those who abuse his Word. God's Word is the unchanging truth, and the law is part of that unchanging truth.

But so is the gospel. The gospel is not just a moral story. The gospel is history. Jesus' life and ministry teach us important truths, but not so that we can live a better life. Jesus' life and ministry teach us about God's incredible saving love. The most important truth we learn from the gospel is that Jesus really lived and died to win our forgiveness.

Listen to what Peter says, "we were not following cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the powerful appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "no prophecy of Scripture comes about from someone's own interpretation." Peter and the other apostles relied on the true Gospel and shared it. They spread that gospel with their words and the Holy Spirit inspired them to write the New Testament so we could also stand firm on the reality of Jesus' work.

Think about the reality of Jesus: The Lord of heaven and earth was born a human baby. God himself lived as a humble human being. He showed his love by helping the needy; but more importantly, he showed his real, saving love by preaching law and gospel. All of those examples of love and power you remember from Sunday School or from church services are the true history of our Lord Jesus. All of those lessons show us the reality that Jesus has saved us.

The reality of Jesus' saving work is not limited to those physical, visible acts. Jesus showed his love to be real when he allowed himself to be beaten, spit on, and killed. Jesus showed his real power to

save when he said, “it is finished,” and he paid the price for our redemption. Jesus showed that our salvation is real when he rose victorious from the dead. God gave us the gospel so that we can rely on it and stand firm on the reality that Christ has saved us from sin.

When Peter wrote this letter, he was nearing his execution. In those dire circumstances, he relied on what God revealed to him about his Lord and Savior Jesus. He relied on what he experienced and what he heard from God the Father. Not only did he rely on it, he shared it: he spread that gospel message wherever he went. He wrote it down by the Holy Spirit’s inspiration so that we also benefit from the gospel message. We have that same reliable word of God. Lean on what God says. Stand firm on the reality of your salvation. Rely on the gospel.