

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

On October 10, 2018, Hurricane Michael struck the panhandle of Florida, with Category 5 winds. It was the worst storm since Andrew in 1992 to strike the U.S. mainland. At least 74 were dead. There was 25 billion dollars in damages, and thousands of people were displaced from their destroyed homes.

People look at Michael, and other natural disasters around the world, and **doubt that God is in control of this world.** Is it reasonable to believe that Jesus can control the weather, governments, leaders, the billions of celestial bodies in the heavens, and even the spiritual world, right down to your very existence in His kingdom of Grace?

This has been **Satan's ploy for centuries:** to get every believer in Jesus Christ to doubt God's holy word. And what are those words? For starters, listen to St. Paul, in Philippians chapter 3: "*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,*<sup>21</sup> *who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which **He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.***" (3:20-21, NKJV). Notice those last words: "He is able even to *subdue all things* to Himself." Next, we have the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: "*[Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and **He upholds the universe by the word of His power***" (1:3, ESV). And what about Jesus' own words to His Father, the night before His death on Good Friday? We read from John chapter 17: "*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since **you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him***" (v. 1-2, ESV). I give you one final reading to contemplate, Colossians chapter 2: "*For in [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is **the head of all rule and authority***" (v. 9-10).

So, we're told in Scripture that **Jesus, 1),** is the head of all rule and authority, **2),** He has authority over all flesh, even to give us eternal life, **3),** He upholds the universe by His powerful word, and **4),** He is able to subdue all things to Himself. That's absolute and complete control over everything – over the spiritual world, over the planets and stars and heavenly bodies, and over everything that exists and happens on earth. **That's total and complete control! But do you believe it?** Like the disciples going back to fishing in the Sea of Galilee, we sometimes go about our earthly life **without** the conviction that **Christ is in control** – that **everything has changed** due to His resurrection on Easter morning, nearly 2000 years ago.

Yes, the **consequences of sin** that began in the Garden of Eden, **are still evident in nature:** hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, droughts, diseases, plagues and pestilence. But the end is rapidly approaching. And **even in the face of such destruction, God's plan for us cannot be hindered.**

**What is often perplexing to us, His saints on earth, is how God uses trials and hardships (yes, even calamities) to grow us to be strong in Christ.** St. Paul reminds us in Romans

chapter 5: *"We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"*(v. 3-5).

So, when we look at suffering, even suffering that leads to death, we're reminded that **God's plan for suffering is the same as His plan for our blessing: it all leads to our eternal good.** To those who think God's plan for our life has too much suffering and not enough blessing – rest assured, **He has you completely and securely in the palm of His hand.** Romans chapter 8 reminds us: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"*(v. 35-39).

**Jesus has made us conquerors with Him, for He shares His victory over sin, death and the devil – with you and me.** In fact, **we are more than conquerors – we are coheirs of His kingdom.** We will share His reign, when He returns! Since our Lord is in complete control, you can rest assured that **this is most certainly true!**

Pastor Travis