

Jude

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James,
To those who have been called, who are loved in God the Father
and kept for Jesus Christ:*

² *Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance.*

³ *Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you **to contend for the faith** that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.*

⁴ *For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*

⁵ *Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling – these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

⁸ *In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"*

¹⁰ *Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct – as irrational animals do – will destroy them.*

¹¹ *Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.*

¹² *These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

¹⁴ *Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." ¹⁶ These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.*

¹⁷ *But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.*

²⁰ *But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*

²² *Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear – hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

²⁴ *To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – ²⁵ to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. [NIV]*

It has been three and a half months since our world was first rocked by this coronavirus, and – unless you're a

hermit living in a cave somewhere – we've all experienced, to some degree, an upending of life or schedule.

And ongoingly so. The virus is still very much with us, and still changing things in our world.

In last week's pastoral prayer, I asked that you'd pray for leaders that you know – leaders of people, both in our nation and around the world, because anyone who is responsible for making decisions where the care of people is concerned is under, at least, **some** stress. Leaders of families, businesses, churches, teams, clubs and governments.

Here close to home, I've thought a lot about the leaders of our local institutions. They all need our prayers – several of them are in our church here. I've thought especially about Kevin Brown, the president of Asbury University, because this is his first year as president – and not just of Asbury, but of anywhere.

So, learning that job – learning to be president – with all that this year has brought – and especially this virus stuff: it's just an incredible load to carry.

I've often thought – and actually wrote to him, "You know, if you make it through this year, the rest of your tenure as president – the rest of your **life**, for that matter – will seem like a walk in the park!"

In an atmosphere like today's, any Christian leader of people, and especially any pastor, wants to be able to help people with perspective – to engage both Scripture and the reality of our days in such a way that encourages hope and faith, and **not** fear or anger.

To let what the **Bible** says about the realities of life shape our response to not-business-as-usual times: that's the challenge and hope, because our increasingly chaotic world needs to see **steadiness** from the Church – **steadiness** from followers of Jesus.

In the end, that's one of the most evangelistic things we can do or be: **steady** in the face of unknown and even fearsome circumstances.

While the world convulses and runs this way and that, Christians stay the course – not arrogantly or in any kind of unfeeling way, but with a confidence about who we are and what we're doing – and a confidence about tomorrow, come what may.

There ought to be a steadiness about followers of Christ, especially in challenging times, that keeps us from – as James says – being tossed about like a wave on the sea.

"But greater still, the calm assurance: this child (or anyone) can face uncertain days because He (Jesus) lives," as the Gaithers put it.

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because He lives, all fear is gone.

Because I know He holds the future

And life is worth the living, just because He lives.

To actually live in that kind of calm assurance, though, requires that we know a few things about God and Christ and how the world works – and not just that we know it up here. We have to know those things deep down – we have to have eaten them and digested them, such that they’ve become a part of us.

That’s how you respond to wacky days with steady faith, and this was the declaration and the call of Jude to the Christians to whom he wrote, which is why we’re beginning a study of this little book – this little letter of his – today.

“Contend for the faith, especially in the midst of difficult days.”

“Contend for the faith.”

That was Jude’s leading charge there in verse 3:

“I urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

Contend. Contend. Contend.

So what does it mean to contend?

In short, it means to fight for something.

At least for me, the word, “contend,” or, “contending” brings boxing to mind. I guess because in boxing, we call those who are capable of winning the fight or the prize, “contenders.” They’ve trained for it – they know how to do it – they know what it takes – but they’re not just granted it. You don’t get the prize for just showing up. Boxers have to, literally, fight for it – they have to fight to gain it.

And this was Jude’s challenge to the original readers of this letter: to contend for their faith – to fight for it.

And it was a necessary challenge, because they were in danger of losing their faith.

Now, Jude didn’t want to write this letter. It was not his original intention to write this letter. Jude found he had to change his letter from one that was originally intended to explore the *deeper* things of faith to one that urges against the *loss* of faith.

We hear from other New Testament writers the same thing: they thought those to whom they wrote were farther along in the faith than they actually were.

Jude puts it this way, as he says there in verse 3, *“Although I was eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write to urge you to contend for the faith.”*

You see, these folk to whom Jude wrote were up against circumstances that threatened to rob them of their very salvation.

And the reason they were in this danger, we find, is because they’d grown soft. They’d grown lax. They had not kept up their *training* in faith.

They spent years learning and training and building the muscles of faith and trust in Christ, but at some point along the way, they let that training go. They stopped working out. They got to a point where they thought their faith muscles would just always be there, no matter what they did or didn’t do.

In a word, they became presumptuous.

You know, over these past few months, with the gyms being closed, a lot of people are finding out what happens when you stop lifting weights – when you stop working out.

Everything you worked hard to build sort of goes soft, doesn’t it?

And the result is that things you used to be able to do, you can’t do anymore.

Things you used to be able to lift, suddenly you can’t lift them anymore.

And that can be dangerous, because you’ll put yourself in a situation where you think, “Oh, I can handle that.”

But suddenly you find out you can’t.

Spiritually speaking, you see – that’s where Jude’s readers were.

At one time, they had been faith-filled.

At one time, their trust in Christ was vibrant.

At one time, they knew what they believed and could easily articulate it.

At one time, they could have handled the spiritual challenges they were now facing.

But due to neglect and presumption – because they assumed that what they knew, and how they thought, and what they had, would always be there – they’d let that faith muscle diminish.

And that put them in great danger of losing it all.

This is what Jude is hoping to point out and to help them avoid: the disastrous results of a faith gone flabby.

He wants to teach them to contend.

So, one thing all this means is that *Jude* is a hard letter.

That may be why it’s one of the most neglected books of the Bible.

Hard letters are hard to infuse with the kind of warm, fuzzy feelings that many people prefer to hear. People don’t tend to warm up to messages about the final judgment and going to battle against false teachers.

In our postmodern world, with its emphasis on radical pluralism and tolerance and its soft approach to theological issues, Jude’s demand for truth and action and his outright condemnation of those who reject truth strikes a difficult chord.

Yet you know, even in difficult times, and maybe *especially* in difficult times:

- times when it’s easy to be distracted,
- times when our schedules are uncertain and the days are different, and maybe we slack off in our personal devotions or corporate worship or study,
- in times when we don’t experience the consistent sharpening effect of fellowship,
- in times when we don’t have that subtle pressure that comes with regularly meeting together,
- in times when we’re a little more weary or weak due to the happenings in our world,

so often, we stop our spiritual workouts. Often, those are the times when our faith gets flabby. Those are the times when we may be most spiritually vulnerable.

Which is why we need to hear, again, a message like Jude’s: a message about the importance of being theologically engaged and aware –

so we don’t get sloppy;

so we can hear the Spirit accurately;

so we can recognize truth quickly;

and so we can just as quickly reject the spiritual lies that our culture tries to slip by us.

All of this is why we're going to explore this letter over the next few weeks:

- to get our attention off of all that is happening in our world that would distract us, and
- to help develop the spiritual fortitude to get through it with faith.

To get through it with faith that is not just intact, but improved — deepened — strengthened — solid — steady, for our own sake, and for the sake of the world around us.

Jude has something to say to us today about fighting for a faith that the world would love to stomp out.

Jude tells us all how to contend.

Of course, any steady faith begins and ends with time spent with the Lord:

- in studying His word,
- in prayer, hearing his voice,
- in connection with other believers — His Church,
- and simply being with Him at His table, which we get to do here today.

This is all part of the training by which we'll be contenders. That's how you have to look at it — training to win the prize, which is what Jesus wants for all of us.

That's why He invites us to Himself.

And that's why we gratefully come.

Service of Holy Communion

I'll lead us through the liturgy of the table — where Jesus meets us and offers the grace for transformed minds and hearts. Would you hear the invitation?

*You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
who live in love and peace with your neighbors,
and who intend to lead a new life,
following the commandments of God and walking in His
holy ways,
draw near with faith,
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;
and humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to
Almighty God.*

Let's pray the General Confession together:

**Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
maker of all things, judge of all people,
we confess that we have sinned,
and we are deeply grieved as we remember
the wickedness of our past lives.
We have sinned against You, Your holiness and
Your love,
and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.
We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry
for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the
things we should.
Our hearts are grieved,
and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without
Your grace.
Have mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father,
for the sake of Your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,
who died for us.
Forgive us.
Cleanse us.
Give us strength to serve and please You in
newness of life,**

**And to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus
Christ our Lord.**

Amen.

We continue our confession as we pray together the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy
name.**

**Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it
is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us
our debts, as we forgive our debtors.**

**And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil:**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the
glory, forever. Amen.**

I'll pray the Collect:

*O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great
mercy
has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You
with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon
us,
pardon and deliver us from our sins,
make us strong and faithful in all goodness
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.*

Let us pray together for inner cleansing:

**Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are
hid:**

**cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the
inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love You and worthily
magnify Your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love
Your only Son, Jesus Christ,
to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption,
who by His sacrifice, offered once for all,
did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the
sins of the whole world,
we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son,
Jesus Christ,
who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a
memory of His death until He comes again.
Hear us, O merciful Father, we ask, and grant that as we
receive this bread and this cup,
may take into ourselves His most blessed body and blood.
Amen.*

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks,

He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said,
"Take and eat; this is My body — given for you; do this
in remembrance of Me."

And then, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks,

He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of this, all of you,
for this is My blood of the New Testament,
which is shed for you and for many, for the remission
of sins;

do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of
Me."

This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you.
Take it and eat, remembering always that Christ died
for you.

Feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with
thanksgiving.

[Eat]

This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was
shed for you.

Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was
shed for you and be thankful.

[Drink]

Prayer

Solo

Benediction:

Well, it seems to me that if we're going to study the
book of *Jude*, it is fitting to close today with the doxology
which is at the end of it— which is likely the only part of
Jude that many people have ever heard, and it is so very
worth hearing, and it's affirming for us as Christ's church.

*To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present
you before his glorious presence without fault and with great
joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and
authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and
forevermore! Amen*

The Lord bless you and keep you and give you a great
Lord's Day!