

JANUARY 25, 2026 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

**"The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,  
and his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold,  
and the sheen of their spears shone like stars on the sea,  
and the blue wave rolled mightily over deep Galilee."**

These are the words written by the poet, Lord Byron, who died in 1924, and it's taken from the poem, *The Defeat of Sennacherib*. Sennacherib had been besieging Jerusalem and Judea and was threatening King Hezekiah, good King Hezekiah. And Isaiah told Hezekiah, "Do not be afraid. Even though he's got a great army, he will not defeat you." And Hezekiah trusted in the Lord.

And as we read in 2 Kings chapter 19, an angel of the Lord came, and the next day, 185,000 soldiers of Sennacherib were found dead outside Jerusalem, and Sennacherib returned to Nineveh. And in the scrolls of Sennacherib, we hear the words, "Hezekiah was not defeated."

But the kings that followed Hezekiah were not of the same standard as Hezekiah. They began to deal with idols. They began to make alliances with the foreign leaders. And soon, they were taken into Babylon by King Tiglath-Pileser III. And we hear those beautiful psalms: *"By the Rivers of Babylon."* Unfortunately, Boney M. and other songwriters have made it into a hip-hop song, when it's a very sad song, indeed:

*"By the rivers of Babylon,  
we hang our harps on the trees.  
They asked us to sing a song.  
How can we sing in a foreign land?  
May my tongue cleave to my mouth,*

*and may a hand wither,  
if I should forget you, O Jerusalem."*

But Isaiah told the people, "You no longer are in darkness because the Lord himself has come to deliver you. He will take away the weapons that will torture you, the rod, the bar, and the yoke."

When we come to Paul in the Letter to the Corinthians, we find that Paul has got a different type of stress from the people in Jerusalem and Judea. Here, Paul is in the land, is in the church at Ephesus. And he has kept in Corinth a group of people who are elders, who take care of the church. They keep them in unity. And as we celebrate this week, the prayer for unity, we find the story has been there as a part of our church all the way back to Jesus Christ and the Apostles.

Here, Chloe, who is the woman of great stature, writes to Paul, and she says, "There's confusion in our community over here. There are some people who are fallen into cliques, and they call themselves after you, Paul, after Cephas, after Apollo, and even after Jesus Christ, as if to say, we are separated." And Paul nips this problem in the bud immediately. He says, "What nonsense is this? You are one body, you are one baptism, and you have one Lord, Jesus Christ. Don't split up into different factions."

The story of splitting into different factions has become a part of our lifestyle. We see differences rather than seeing so many common factors in our lives today. And so, we are separated, we have Christian groups. And I remember Mahatma Gandhi saying, "You know, your Christians have got probably the best standards of ethics and morals in the world, but you don't keep it. Otherwise, I would become one like you." And so, Paul nips it in the bud and says, "You are one church and you have been

saved by one person, Jesus Christ, who, by his death and resurrection, has brought your salvation."

As we come to the Gospel, we have a tsunami of events. Herod has captured John the Baptist and he wants to capture Jesus, as well. So, Jesus escapes north to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. That appears in our first reading, that appears in the Gospel, that appears in the quotations from Isaiah. And if you've been fortunate enough to go to the Holy Land, it starts from Caesarea Philippi in the north, comes down to Capernaum, then to Dabga, to Magdala, and down to Tiberias. It is in these places that Jesus worked.

And we see, in one week, he moves to Capernaum, he gets the apostles, James and John, and Peter and Andrew, and we think that, "My goodness me, how fast did Jesus work?" But in reality, it probably took two or three weeks, if not two or three months, before Jesus would gather them. And he set a target for them: "If you want to be my disciples, you have to carry your cross daily. If you want to be my disciples, you have to put the kingdom of God first, before family, friends, profession, and even your own life." And we see that in the case of James and John. They do it literally. They leave their boats and their nets, and even their father Zebedee, and they follow Jesus.

What do they follow and why do they follow? We are not told in the Gospel yet. Matthew is just introducing Jesus as the Messiah, and in him, we move and live and have our being.

**God bless you all.**