

**The Last Sunday of the Church Year**  
**November 26, 2017**  
**Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church**  
**Farmington, NM**

**Jude 20-25** 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.

**“Glory to Your Guardian”**

Opening credits finally end and a scene comes into view, tranquil enough. It looks serene and peaceful. But you know it's not. The music tells you something is about to happen. Your eyes are searching. Everything isn't ok. The music turns ominous. It grows to a crescendo. Boom. Pow. Fire. Explosions. Shrapnel flying through the air. Rubble piling up on the pavement. And then you see him. The villain with an evil grin on his face. The threat looms on the horizon. A scheming villain is already at work. The good guys come to realize how dangerous it will be for ordinary, innocent civilians. So, as in Justice League, Batman and Wonder Woman work together to recruit other heroes with super powers to combat the threat to their very existence.

Something is going on and it causes Jude to write this short little gem of a letter. If you want to brag that you can read an entire book of the Bible in five minutes, go home after church and read through Jude. It's only one chapter.

Here's the backdrop. Jude tells us in verse 3: **“I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.”** He is calling his reader's attention to some dangerous people. They **“pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality”** and even go so far as to **“deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.”** (Jude 4) Logically it's a great fit. God loves to forgive. I love to sin. Let's just repeat the process over and over again. But that's not what grace is about. That's not what the Christian faith is about. God's grace changes our lives and gives us different standards for carrying out our walk. We have Jesus as Lord over our lives and struggle in the faith. Jude is saying: You have a guardian. Look to him. Glory to your Guardian.

That's how the action hero stories and superhero stories go. There is a danger looming, a bad guy is out there. The first priority is to recognize the threat. Then once we are aware of it, you can identify the source and the type of threat. Jude is just carrying out a common biblical pattern. God's Word gives us warnings and encouragements. Since there are threats

to your faith, Jude says to us: **“keep yourselves in God’s love.”** (Jude 21) The danger is real. The worst, most dangerous lie is that it can’t happen to me. So guard yourself.

Jude tells you how to guard yourself. Once you are aware of the dangers, you can start to protect yourself. Keep yourself in the love of God, **“by building yourselves up in your most holy faith.”** (Jude 20) Keep yourself in the love of God by **“praying in the Holy Spirit.”** (Jude 20) Keep yourself in God’s love by waiting **“for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.”** (Jude 21) This is Batman getting into the bat cave. Wonder Woman putting on all her gear. Superheroes getting down to business putting on the right outfit and equipping themselves with the right gear. To be the kind of guardian Jude warns us we need to be, staying in God’s love, God’s people keep on building themselves in the faith and pray and anticipates the mercy of Jesus.

There is a real blessing to keeping yourself in God’s love. You know how you are. You are secure in that love of Jesus. Then you can be a blessing to others. Once you guard yourself, then you are able to be a guardian for others to guard against spiritual enemies and spiritual dangers. Jude tells you how: **“Be merciful to those who doubt.”** (Jude 22) If we piece together the references to Jude in the rest of the New Testament, we know he isn’t Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus. In verse one Jude identifies himself as the brother of James. This can’t be the Apostle who was martyred early on by King Herod and it’s probably not the lesser known James from the Apostles. The most well known James in the early church was the half brother of Jesus. So that would make Jude also a half brother of Jesus. We know that none of the brothers of Jesus believed in him before he was crucified. So Jude knew what it was like to doubt, even not believe in Jesus. Jude doesn’t want that for anyone.

In fact, Jude knows what it is like to find yourself outside of God’s love. So he instructs guardians in the Christian faith: **“save others by snatching them from the fire.”** (Jude 23) Sometimes people are too close to see clearly. Sometimes they are surrounded by friends and family who think the Christian faith is a joke. Sometimes they let the opinions of the culture weigh in too heavily so that they see the logic of perverting God’s grace into a license for immorality. (Jude 4) Outside God’s love they are at risk of the fires of hell. Jude says your work can quite literally snatch them from those hell fires. And he says that you have to be cautious while you do that: **“to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.”** (Jude 23) While you seek to rescue others, you still need to guard your own faith. That requires a healthy fear of sin, a proper respect for the dangers to your own soul. You can’t cozy up and become buddies with something that is out to destroy your soul. Watch out so you don’t put yourself at risk while trying to help others.

It’s not always easy to be on guard all the time. You start to wear out. You’ve put the pressure on yourself. You can fix them. You are healthy enough and strong enough and firm enough in your faith. You can be there when your sister’s marriage is falling apart. You can take care of those cousins who are throwing their lives away. You haven’t been tripped up by the same dangers and temptations that so many other people fall for.

Then you realize you can't. You haven't fixed them. You aren't able to guard them in the love of God. And you probably won't no matter how hard you keep trying. And so you resign yourself to reality. If I can't fix them, if I can't make a difference to change their lives, why bother? After all, I don't want to get stained by their contamination. I have to take care of myself so I don't get dragged into their dangers and get dragged down with them into spiritual danger. I haven't turned God's grace into a license for immorality and I don't want to start now. I've been able to keep myself in God's love this far in my life, I don't want to put myself at risk. Especially if I just don't have the power to do what needs to be done to guard someone else's soul.

Even guardians grow fatigued. It feels like you are in the middle of an epic video game battle, doing your best, and then all of the sudden you look up to see you've only got one half of one bar of life left. You find yourself in the middle of the fight trying to rescue others, but you start of face the same troubles as them. You need help. You realize you aren't such a superhero. You need rescuing. Even heroes get overmatched. Humble, selfless servants trying to rescue others find themselves in danger of not being able to help the innocent, prevent innocent citizens from exposure to risk. Finding themselves in trouble, the heroes need rescuing.

My biggest lie is that I can look to myself for my strength and my confidence and my ability to face the dangers that are out there. Jude tells you where to look: **"To him who is able...to the only God our Savior be glory."** (Jude 24,25) There is only One who can be your true guardian.

We don't want to sell this Hero short by just looking to him for help. Your guardian doesn't just come when you are on the brink, when your strength is about to give out. He doesn't just appear on the scene to give you that extra surge of power to fight back against the flames of hell or provide a boost when the contamination of destructive sin is about to burst out. When you realize you don't have it in you, when you come to see you don't have the powers, that's when you can really give glory to your Guardian.

Jude tells us God isn't asking you to be the guardian at all. You already have someone to do that. Your guardian does it for you. God's love reached its ultimate climax when Jesus offered himself to spare you from certain destruction. By showing mercy throughout his life to those contaminated by sin and its consequences, Jesus takes away all the fear of sin's sting. By suffering hell on the cross, Jesus snatched you from the fires of hell. By rising miraculously, yet physically on Easter, you have nothing to doubt, because it all depends on what Jesus has already accomplished.

Jesus is the only one who can be your true guardian. Jude offers this word of praise: **"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling."** (Jude 24) God's mercy to you in Jesus Christ means you don't have to look at yourself and wonder. Jesus keeps you in the faith because his grace isn't shaky, it won't stumble. Jesus is the only one who can: **"present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy."** (Jude 24) Everything that would defile you, every stain that would stick to you has been sponged away by the

sacrifice of Jesus. You can stand before God's holy glory without fear or uncertainty, because Jesus has made you innocent.

If you've ever been on an airplane, one part of those safety instructions always stands out. In the event of an emergency, put on your oxygen mask, then help a child or neighbor. It seems selfish at first. But then you realize you aren't helping anyone else if you can't breathe. There is something interesting in the way Jude phrases your instructions for emergencies in the faith. After these serious warnings and harsh instructions, he starts just rattling off words of praise: **"To him who is able...to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord."** (Jude 24,25) It's not even good grammar. It's a long, run-on sentence. But when we see the glory and majesty and power and authority all belong to God, then we can be secure in our guardian.

Glory to the one who is uniquely able to bring you into his love and keep you in God's love. Glory to God whenever you turn to his Word and he builds you up in the faith. Glory to God when you pray in the Holy Spirit. Oswald Chambers, a Scottish Evangelist once famously said: *"Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the greater work...[it] develops the life of God in us."* By turning to God in prayer, we are realizing the source of strength and rescue for our lives. Glory to God when we realize our ultimate rescue comes from the mercy we will get when Jesus returns to take us home to heaven. Then showing mercy to others doesn't require you to be a superhero. It's just a natural extension of who you are. Showing mercy toward those at risk is just something that happens when you are living to glorify your Guardian. Being there for those who doubt will be an automatic when you are building yourself up in the holy faith. Snatching others at risk of hellfire is part of your Christian calling since you know the mercy you will enjoy eternally with Jesus. And yet glorifying your Guardian helps you remember you are still human. And so you show mercy with realistic realization of the danger of contamination.

Some movies are just fun. Most superhero movies have no Oscar ambitions. The producers know some people will go for the costumes, others for the special effects, some the sound effects. But when you strip it all away, all the computer generated animation and special effects and costumes, you still have to have a compelling story. This small book of Jude is short, but serious. So it ends on this high note. When we strip everything else away, we are left with nothing but praise and glory given to God. God has glory. God has majesty. God has power to act. God has authority to rule. He has always had those abilities and he has them now and will have them always. God is powerful. God is able. God is the one I need to rely on for my strength and confidence and ability. Glory to your guardian. Amen.

*+ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. +*