

Sermon for January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

READINGS

Genesis 46:1-7

**1** So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. **2** And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” **3** Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. **4** I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.” **5** Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. **6** They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, **7** his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Psalm 77:11-20

**11** I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes, I will remember your wonders of old.  
**12** I will ponder all your work,  
and meditate on your mighty deeds.  
**13** Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is great like our God?  
**14** You are the God who works wonders;  
you have made known your might among the peoples.  
**15** You with your arm redeemed your people,  
the children of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*  
**16** When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
indeed, the deep trembled.  
**17** The clouds poured out water;  
the skies gave forth thunder;  
your arrows flashed on every side.  
**18** The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lighted up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.  
**19** Your way was through the sea,  
your path through the great waters;  
yet your footprints were unseen.  
**20** You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

1 Peter 4:12-19

**12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. **13** But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. **14** If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. **15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. **16** Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let

him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. **17** For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18** And

“If the righteous is scarcely saved,  
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”

**19** Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

#### Matthew 2:13-23

**13** Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” **14** And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt **15** and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

**16** Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. **17** Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah:

**18** “A voice was heard in Ramah,  
weeping and loud lamentation,  
Rachel weeping for her children;  
she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.”

**19** But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **20** saying, “Rise, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead.” **21** And he rose and took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. **23** And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Christmas is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

The lectionary includes this reading, on the Massacre of the Innocents, for a reason beloved. One might say that it is there to splash cold water on our faces right after Christmas, a kind of wake-up call amidst the intoxicating joy of our celebrations. Let us bravely face it and so appreciate our Lord's mercy.

### **Herodian Wickedness**

Herod leaves us a pile of dead children, and we ought not be surprised. The devil knew that Christ had arrived, being much more intelligent than the Magi could ever be. The Magi knew that a King had been born and followed His star to greet Him with gifts; the devil knew who Christ was, where He was born, and the damage this Messiah intended for the kingdom of darkness. Of course he would take Herod, a man who proclaimed belief in God but had a hollow faith, and inspire him to indiscriminately kill the children of Bethlehem – Christianity's first martyrs. The devil must have panicked when he realized that the Incarnation had taken place, and so violence was his first choice.

Historians love to deny that Herod would destroy the babies and toddlers in Bethlehem, because

there is no mention of it found in Josephus or Herod's associate Nicolaus; they say this with full acknowledgement that Herod had killed his own sons. He placed no value on human life whatsoever, and *any* threat to his power whatsoever was met with the sword of his fury. A defenseless little village with no way to fight back, no advanced notice for the sake of escape, and no advocate to protect them from this massacre would hardly be mentioned by anyone at the time: it was business as usual for the Herodians. Our learned men, our *scholars*, are unwilling to admit how consistent it was with Herod's character, because otherwise they would have to summarize his life and reign as nothing more than a pile of dead children. Just like everything else about human society and history.

### **Humanity's Herodian Wickedness**

Truth be told, satan didn't have to work very hard to make this happen given human history. If you want a concise picture of the history of mankind, do not imagine the heights of royal majesty or the crowning achievements of humanity - just imagine a pile of dead children, and you'll have a good grasp of it. This characterizes our present situation as well, from the Israeli bombs destroying orphanages and hospitals to American women braying for the blood of their own babies - voting by the millions for the right to terminate life in their wombs. Our current era is nothing but a pile of dead children. The same goes for the future as well. Orwell said that the future should be envisioned as a boot stomping on a man's face forever, but Orwell was not wise enough to understand that the future of this world before Christ's return is, like the past and present, just a pile of dead children.

We have no right to think that Herod was special: he was only doing what humanity loves to do. Euphemisms abound in the language of culture and academia surrounding this love - love! - that humanity has for infanticide. The most stark, ugly part of our sinful nature culminates in destroying the most innocent and heartwarming beings in all Creation, infants and toddlers. Like Herod, the moment our pleasure or our wallet or our time is threatened, our sinful flesh says to us that the children must go. In political circles, people *roll their eyes* whenever someone tells them we ought to think of the children, but it isn't because they believe family centered politics is overdone - it's because they *like* bowling over the needs of children by their murderous political fantasies.

But we cannot bring ourselves to admit it. We call it "reproductive freedom," "collateral damage," "casualties of war," "birth control," and any other number of sanitized, professional-sounding terms, because otherwise we would recognize that killing children is embedded in our dark hearts. When a man in Nice, France, drove through a crowd of people, aiming for White children and ramming their lives to an end, or with the recent school shooting in Wisconsin, we scream our indignation at the violence while murdering our children on the side through abortion and abuse; it has become clear that we aren't mad that these terrorists killed children, but we are instead upset that they killed our children before we had the opportunity to do it ourselves. Perhaps there was mourning over them because it left many in our nation from performing their *other* favorite pasttime: violating children of their innocence through child sex trafficking, free online pornography, degenerate media, puberty-blocking hormones, pride parades and "story hours" conducted by demonized men... you get the picture.

### **Herodian Wickedness found in the Church**

"But I would never harm a child!" you may say to me. If so you are part of a tiny minority in humanity, and it is evidence of your faith in Christ. He says "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." (Matthew 7:13-14). A fruit of the Spirit is a general love for all mankind (Gal.5:22), and that *includes* supporting the well-being of children instead of seeking their harm. It is one of the reasons Christians were the first people to establish orphanages.

But let's not feel so superior just because we are Christians. Oh certainly the world is run by heathen now, and Christians today abhor the death of children, but when *we* were running things we were hardly any better. In medieval Europe, considered the height of Christendom by many, infanticide was *de facto* legal. Oh yes, we established the first orphanages in the Roman empire, but in "Christendom" women were free to expose their children to the elements, throw them in rivers, or snap their necks and bury them. To this day, entire Christian denominations are supportive of abortion. On what grounds do we stand to judge nonbelievers here? Sin worked its way into the Church and the Christian kingdoms, and eventually that old Adam's urge to destroy children reared its ugly head. Because the uglier we are, the more we wish to destroy that which is pure.

It gets worse. We went further than the nonbelievers, didn't we? The desire to destroy children metastasizes in Church history with some theologians, men who couldn't stand the thought of God being merciful to dead babies, deciding to sacrifice the souls of the innocent on the altar of theological spergery. Oh no, you see, theologians like Augustine and Chris White insist that God has the freedom, authority, and possibly even the desire to damn infants to hell forever, babies burning in great torment for all eternity because believing otherwise would damage his calvinistic understanding of original sin.<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards *enthusiastically* embraced the notion from the same perspective, saying that the damnation of dead infants is "most just, exceeding just."<sup>2</sup> I suppose when your soteriology hinges on whether you were lucky enough to be chosen, infants will inevitably be caught in the crosshairs of cruel misfortune. The Papist theologians have a doctrine of Limbo, where unbaptized dead infants are sorrowful for all eternity – poor babies, it appears that they weren't lucky enough to be afforded mercy by God. The "decision theology" people are no better off, since their logic of making a "decision" for Christ leaves infants – who cannot choose anything – in the fires. And why do our learned theologians insist that this is the case? If I'm being honest, I believe it is because these men did not recognize the sinfulness of their desire to see children harmed, and they sublimated it into their theology; a doctrine like "infants shall be damned" does not come about unless one *wishes* for infants to be damned.

## The Point

The Birth of Christ is met with the massacre of the innocents. The devil responds to the purity and righteousness of Jesus by inspiring extreme wickedness on the part of Herod. But that same evil that Herod worked is something that dwells in the vile heart of humanity – killing children whenever they are inconvenient. Women abort their babies because they get in the way of a hedonistic lifestyle or climbing the corporate ladder. Men abandon their children, feeding them to the wolves of a wicked culture because raising children is hard and they simply don't want the responsibility. Theologians posit the damnation of children because dead infants are inconvenient to their nice, neat little theological packages. The Church tolerated and tolerates infanticide because the Church is full of sinners in need of a Savior just as much as the rest of the world is.

So we cannot judge Herod too harshly, for we must confront our own evil here and lay it at the foot of the Cross. The blood of children is on the hands of all humanity, and it is for this that Christ the Son of God shed *His* Blood. We cannot forget that He died for the sins of Herod just as much as He died for our own; let us take comfort that even the greatest depth of human depravity is not beyond the mercy He offers us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/mO3PIt5wk70>

<sup>2</sup> <http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaglsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/Yy4xMjo0OjEud2plby41NjQ4NTI=>

Sermon for January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

1 Kings 8:1-13

**1** Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers' houses of the people of Israel, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of the city of David, which is Zion. **2** And all the men of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the feast in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. **3** And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark. **4** And they brought up the ark of the LORD, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. **5** And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered.

**5** And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were within before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. **6** Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD to its place in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. **7** For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim overshadowed the ark and its poles. **8** And the poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the Holy Place before the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside. And they are there to this day. **9** There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses put there at Horeb, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel, when they came out of the land of Egypt. **10** And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, **11** so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

**12** Then Solomon said, "The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. **13** I have indeed built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever."

Psalm 50:1-15

The Mighty One, God the LORD,  
speaks and summons the earth  
from the rising of the sun to its setting.

**2** Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,  
God shines forth.

**3** Our God comes; he does not keep silence;  
before him is a devouring fire,  
around him a mighty tempest.

**4** He calls to the heavens above  
and to the earth, that he may judge his people:

**5** "Gather to me my faithful ones,  
who made a covenant with me by sacrifice!"

**6** The heavens declare his righteousness,  
for God himself is judge! *Selah*

**7** "Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.

**8** Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

**9** I will not accept a bull from your house  
 or goats from your folds.  
**10** For every beast of the forest is mine,  
 the cattle on a thousand hills.  
**11** I know all the birds of the hills,  
 and all that moves in the field is mine.  
**12** “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
 for the world and its fullness are mine.  
**13** Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
 or drink the blood of goats?  
**14** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
 and perform your vows to the Most High,  
**15** and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
 I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Romans 12:1-8

**1** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. **2** Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.  
**3** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. **4** For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, **5** so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. **6** Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; **7** if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; **8** the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

Luke 2:41-52

**41** Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. **42** And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom. **43** And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, **44** but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, **45** and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him. **46** After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. **47** And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. **48** And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress.” **49** And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” **50** And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. **51** And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them. And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart.  
**52** And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Epiphany is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## A Brief Discussion of a Scandalous Temple

Our reading for today ought to be something of a scandal, but unfortunately the offensive aspect of it is often overlooked as people meditate on the cloud of God's Glory. You see, for a people who were bound to the Law of Moses by covenant, with threats of death and dissipation for any failure to keep it, it is astounding to see this massive departure from the Law. King Solomon builds a Temple knowing that the Mosaic Law says the meeting place between God and men is the Tabernacle. He builds it without much inspiration from the Law concerning the construction of the Tabernacle either: much of its construction is independent of the guidelines given to Moses.<sup>1</sup> There is no way King Solomon could rationalize this Temple project as merely being a "New Tabernacle" or anything of the sort. On his initiative, with direction from his father King David, King Solomon departs from the Law with the hope that his actions will please God more than simple obedience to the Mosaic code. He brings the Tabernacle with him to the Temple as a sign of this hope.

The children of Israel must have felt quite nervous, as everything *looked* right but *wasn't up to God's standards*. Earthen or uncut stone altar?<sup>2</sup> Nope, here it is metal.<sup>3</sup> Woven walls? No, this time it is solid material. They also did not use any of the original implements crafted during the wilderness wanderings – everything was new, like a replacement for what furnished the Tabernacle services. Beloved, this should scandalize people far more than it does. What I am saying is, King Solomon *\*broke\** the Law, and he did so with the intent of *glorifying* our Lord!<sup>4</sup> And they all knew it, because there were countless sacrifices being made as the Ark of the Covenant was being brought into the Temple.

Imagine the mess being made as the Ark goes into Jerusalem. Sacrifices without number, the text says. Animals braying as they are slaughtered, the stench of offal rising as their noise dies down. The city is more crowded than it has *ever* been, as the author states all the men of Israel attended this occasion. The priests are moving at a snail's pace because their countrymen are wandering around and gawking at them. They barely have space to slit the throats of the animals and burn them without setting the whole city on fire. One has to wonder if anyone got hurt slipping on blood and falling on the floor – with the veritable *ocean* of blood covering the city, what else could possibly have happened? Did children get lost? Were there fights among the confusion?

When King David brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem, there was jubilation, even in the face of someone dying.<sup>5</sup> King David dances in triumph before the ark, gives gifts to the people, and the whole city rises up in joy. Yes, there were sacrifices here as well, but it was orderly, one sacrifice per six paces. Keeping count was simple. Our reading for today has a different tenor, being a nervous, chaotic affair. One gets the feeling that while King David was confident, King Solomon was extremely anxious – because he knew what he was doing was a massive risk.

Think about it beloved. When Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" before the altar, God killed them immediately and right in front of their father Aaron (Leviticus 10). When Eli the high priest's sons Hophni and Phinehas treated the altar with contempt as non-believing priests, God arranged for the deaths of all three.<sup>6</sup> When King David first tried to move the Ark to Jerusalem, Uzzah died after simply *touching* the Ark. And here the entire congregation of all Israel is there in Zion to ask our Lord to consecrate a Temple that was completely orthogonal to everything God had commanded concerning the Tabernacle. Since this was the largest departure from orthodox worship ever known, I believe they were seriously afraid that the whole nation would be killed.

## God's Response to the Temple

---

1 Exodus 26-31

2 Exodus 20:25

3 Gold in fact; the details are found in 1 Kings 7

4 More details can be found here: <https://geekychristian.com/evidence-the-temple-was-not-gods-will/>

5 2 Samuel 6:1-19

6 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 4:10-18

Against all odds, God shows His approval of the Temple and moving the Ark by filling the whole place with a cloud of glory. He did not kill them. He did not lash out at the priests the way He did with Nadab, Abihu, Hophni, Phinehas, and Uzzah. He gives His permission to all Israel to conduct worship in this place despite everything they had gotten wrong. We are left dumbfounded at the implication here; why, after such a long history of destroying people for even the slightest mistake, would He approve of a Temple that went so far afield of what He had commanded?

Yet let us not mistake this for God being *squishy* about the Law. To the contrary, He is affirming the Mosaic Law in the sense of concession. Christ teaches us in Matthew 19 that divorce was permitted on account of men's hard hearts, even though divorce is something that God *abhors*.<sup>7</sup> God values men having freedom,<sup>8</sup> but He makes concessions for and regulates slavery.<sup>9</sup> Our Lord hates rape, so in the case of war He establishes regulations on “war brides”<sup>10</sup> which prevent mass rape. The design for marriage was always one man and one woman in sacred covenant for life; in the case of polygamy, God enforces strict regulations to limit it.<sup>11</sup> So much of the case-law in the Mosaic code demonstrates a fluidity of accommodation that says if men simply *must* do something God doesn't like very much, then He will put controls on the whole process and thus protect people from engaging in heinous sin. So it is with the Temple, an concession which affirms the way God does things.

David had commanded Solomon to build the Temple, for God had told David that he was not allowed.<sup>12</sup> God's answer to the king was that one day a son of his would build a *true* house of God here on earth, and that is in reference to Christ building His Church; nonetheless King David assumes it refers to his immediate son, and hurriedly makes preparations for building.<sup>13</sup> When he took the throne, Solomon was in a bind: the Law tells him he must honor his father per the Fourth Commandment, and this includes obeying his command to build – yet the Law also tells him to worship at a Tabernacle! Without hesitation, he boldly chooses to build as his father commanded, but as we see in our reading he positively bathes the land in the blood of sacrifices as a measure of propitiation; if God were displeased, at least he made sacrifices in case they were sinning.

Our Lord responds with a cloud which signifies His approval, but also His power. “And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.” The priests intended to continue their work, but God overwhelmed them. It is as if He were saying “Dear priests, and all Israel, do not think for one moment that this means *you* are the ones accomplishing something great here. I am the One who walks among you, I am the Almighty, and it is not your merits which please me but your faith.” He was not pleased with the Temple per se, but the trust that the children of Israel had, their hope in His mercy as they fearfully conducted sacrifices and followed the last wishes of David their King.

## Conclusion

This is the truth of the matter, that God cares far more about our hearts than our outward obedience. Surely we must be careful to obey His Commandments, but let us not fear that He is some deified Pharisee looking to destroy us for even the smallest infraction. Those deaths inflicted on Nadab, Abihu, Hophni, Phineas and Uzzah were all – and I mean *all* – on account of faithlessness, not a lack of compulsive attention to detail. Samuel the prophet conducted sacrifices at high places instead of the Tabernacle, yet he was not killed; David conducted sacrifices and he was not even a priest; Gideon built an ephod and Samson broke his Nazirite vow, and yet all these men were found approved by God

---

7 Matthew 19:3-9, Malachi 2:13-16

8 1 Corinthians 7:20-22, Philemon

9 Exodus 21:1-11

10 Deuteronomy 21:10-14

11 Exodus 21:10-11, Leviticus 18:18, Deuteronomy 21:15-17

12 2 Samuel 7

13 1 Chronicles 22



on account of their *faith*.<sup>14</sup> That is what we see happening in our reading for today, God approving of men's faith, affording them mercy without depending on their merits.

This is a great encouragement for us. Have you ever found yourself endlessly second guessing your actions? Are you paralyzed with fear that your actions will not please God? I'm not talking about crass sin here – let no man say “well now I can keep fornicating because I have such great faith” – I'm speaking of those times when we are tormented by confusion and self-doubt. “Is taking that job something that God wants me to do? Am I sinning by giving to this charity instead of that one? My wife felt like she had to cut off that abusive parent, are we displeasing God by breaking the Fourth Commandment?” Questions like these linger in our minds and haunt us incessantly, and today we see an explicit demonstration of God honoring men's trust in Him. He tells us today to look at the Temple, to see that He approved of it because men feared, trusted, and resolved to serve Him even if they did not do it perfectly; may we, predicated on the same fear and trust and resolve, move forward with bold confidence that He shall accept our decisions as well.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

14 Hebrews 11:32-33

Sermon for January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

Amos 9:11-15

- 11** “In that day I will raise up  
the booth of David that is fallen  
and repair its breaches,  
and raise up its ruins  
and rebuild it as in the days of old,  
**12** that they may possess the remnant of Edom  
and all the nations who are called by my name,”  
declares the LORD who does this.  
**13** “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD,  
“when the plowman shall overtake the reaper  
and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.  
**14** I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel,  
and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine,  
and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.  
**15** I will plant them on their land,  
and they shall never again be uprooted  
out of the land that I have given them,”  
says the LORD your God.

Psalms 111

**1** Praise the LORD!

- I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.  
**2** Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.  
**3** Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.  
**4** He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.  
**5** He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.  
**6** He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.  
**7** The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;  
**8** they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.  
**9** He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.  
Holy and awesome is his name!

**10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever!

Ephesians 5:22-33

**22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. **23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. **24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, **26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, **27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. **28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. **29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, **30** because we are members of his body. **31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

John 2:1-11

**1** On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. **2** Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. **3** When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." **4** And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." **5** His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

**6** Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. **7** Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. **8** And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. **9** When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom **10** and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." **11** This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Epiphany is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Introduction**

I preached on this passage two years ago, describing the ways in which the devil has attacked the estate of marriage. Of course, what I said then was nothing *new*, since we have all suffered under the yoke of the fornicationreich, the post-sexual revolution regime that traffics in divorce, loneliness, loose living and child support. One of the reasons this has been so disastrous for the Church is that the fornicationreich enforces an *internal* schism between men and women. The Body of Christ has survived many a schism in the past, but pitting men and women against each other within the congregations has done far more damage.

But as I prepared for today's sermon and read through my previous writing, I realized something. I left out one important matter in marriage, something absolutely crucial, I am *devastated* that I hardly touched on it two years ago. It not only touches on the nature of marriage and our duties within that sacred covenant, but also the nature of our obedience to the Law as Christians. And what is that important thing? Simply this, that marriage ought to be enjoyable. It is rendered enjoyable when both spouses are obedient to the commandments given in our reading, much in the same way that

obedience to God's commandments ought to render the Christian life as a whole enjoyable.

## To Women

To the women listening to this sermon or reading it, your submission to your husband is something that brings him great joy. A man should be king of his castle, after all, and he will appreciate being honored as the head of the family. But this does not mean acting out the doormat-type caricature of submission painted both by feminists and woman-haters alike. Both the bra-burners and men with maladaptive power fantasies, they have this bizarre image in their minds of submission; they picture a sad, broken woman with no personality and no drive, meekly saying “ok” to whatever orders her husband is barking at her. They see Biblical womanhood as a woman's dreams rendered dead because she should “know her place” – her place being, of course, a sad-beige kitchen or lying like a limp starfish in the bed as her animalistic husband does what he wants. People who see submission this way suffer from a reductionistic failure of imagination, catastrophizing Christian marriage because they hate Scripture. Their pathetic “Handmaid's Tale” vision of womanhood is only realized in islam – and it belongs nowhere near Christianity, because Christianity values women far more than any religion or irreligion ever will.

You see, being a good wife means *enthusiastic* and *personalized* submission. A man should be king of his castle, and it should be *good to be king*. Titus 2:4 says that women should be taught to love their husbands – not Agape love, but Philia, *friendship* love. A wife should be her husband's best friend. You must obey your husband, but that does not mean becoming some depressed, blank slate; to the contrary, obeying him is *just the beginning* of your place as his wife. If you are to be his best friend, acting like a soulless piece of meat, or having no personality at all, this would make you a terrible friend indeed. Have fun with him, dote on him, be a comforting presence for him with great conversation, be enthusiastic and communicative in the bedroom – all these make marriage a blessing for your husband, and they are avenues where your unique personality and passions *shine*.

To illustrate, allow me to brag about my wife for a moment. Of course, she submits to me when I make a choice for her or the family at large, but in addition to this she has a personality that makes my life enjoyable beyond measure. She sings. She draws. She makes things with yarn for clothing and to decorate our home. She jokes around and makes me laugh every day. She enjoys watching horror movies with me. All these were part of her life *before* we were married and had children, before we were even dating. They were her passions and hobbies, an integral part of her identity. But when we *got* married, they became an integral part of our friendship. She doesn't just sing, she sings for me. She doesn't just make things out of yarn, she makes them for our family. She is a complete human being with her own personality and pursuits, and she incorporates those things into our household to make life amazing for everyone. For her, submission is not *just* doing as I ask, but an active role in our family where her individuality comes into play, making this *her* family just as much as *mine*.

## To Men

To the men listening to or reading this sermon, your love for your wife brings *her* joy the same way her obedience brings *you* joy. It is that simple. No matter how many times a woman might protest that she doesn't need a “knight in shining armor,” she will still rejoice in having a capable, caring, authoritative husband who sees to it that all her needs are fulfilled. She *wants* to bury her anxieties resting in the strong arms of someone who, frankly, is Superman to her. Remember, the more you have life taken care of already, the less she has to worry about; the less she has to worry about, the happier she will be. But this means that we men must *flee* the stereotype of the henpecked, lazy, fragile and flighty sort of husband; we cannot be the “TV dad” who is dumber, weaker, and more undisciplined than his spouse.

In this era, young men are being told “focus on you” all the time by social media influencers. Focus on improving yourself, getting more money, and “having it all:” we are being told to have a high

level of physical fitness, financial acumen, a good job, sexual skill and high charisma in order to achieve our goals. A whole lot of those influencers then tell their pupils to *not* get married; they reason that marrying a woman opens a man up to the risk of divorce and the cessation of that focus on the self. But my question to those guys, whether it's some “Red Pill” manosphere type or moneyhawking grifter, is to ask why they think marriage should get in the way of that self-improvement. In fact, all these improvements men make to their brains and bodies and bank accounts are *crucial* for making a marriage work!

Our reading tells husbands that they must love their wives as Christ loves the Church, and that in the icon of marriage the man represents Christ. Well men, I must ask you: is Christ powerful? Does Christ own things? Does Jesus have authority resting on mere words, or because He is the genuine article, the real McCoy, the true Christ who is mighty to save? For all these things, we know the answers are resoundingly positive. So seek to emulate Him in your marriage, and wherever you are lacking you must start improving, even while you are married. Then, as you become more and more capable, your wife will enjoy the marriage she has. Dynamic married life includes much of the same sort of personal build-up as the “red pill influencers” tell single men to do, only with the addition of *holiness*. You are expected to be more well-read in Scripture than the rest of your family,<sup>1</sup> and to have answers for whatever theological questions your wife might have;<sup>2</sup> as a husband you are the high priest of the family.

I am nothing if I do not put my money where my mouth is, as the saying goes. I pray and read Scripture every day **in addition to my pastoral duties**. I exercise daily and pursue martial arts as my hobby. I am working on expanding the Very Lutheran Project and saving money for my household. My wife rests easy knowing that I have everything taken care of to the best of my abilities, and that I care for the spiritual needs of the whole family. To be honest with you though, I did not learn to do all of these things until after I was already married. Up until the third year of our marriage, my pursuits were more consumptive in nature – things to watch, listen to, etc. and I subcontracted out all of my spiritual duties to a pastor. During those first few years, I was less of a man for it, and my marriage suffered because of that; I was reliant on others for things I should have been able to take care of myself for my wife, and this bid ill for our marriage until God led me to start living more actively again.

### Caution and Promise

I can safely say that spouses being dedicated to obeying the Word for their marriage are happier with each other. But of course, I do not promise that following these things will make your marriage bulletproof or bring Heaven onto earth for you. A woman can be her husband's best friend and attentively submit to his every word, and yet there will still be times when he does not respond as she hopes. A man can be the most “Chad” alpha male super-religious He-Man in the world as leader of his family, near-perfectly representing Christ to his wife, and there will be times in which *she* does not respond the way *he* hopes she would. Truth be told, we cannot guarantee that the fellow sinner whom we married will rise up to the standards we hold ourselves to. We cannot always inspire the other to improve, and nor can we always make him or her happy.

But for the Christian, our joy is not found in results but a state of being. Obedience to these commands gives us confidence, often going so far as to add happiness to that confidence as we rejoice in how much God has made us *better*. A woman can say, “I have ceased arguing and nagging with my husband, I feel much greater peace now.” A husband can say, “I am far less selfish than I once was, and I feel more confident taking care of my wife's needs.” Most of the time, our good work as a husband or wife brings joy to our spouse, but *when it doesn't* we find a happiness in the good work itself. We feel no need to earn the approval of husband or wife, but instead we have the approval of the Holy Spirit who tells us “good job” in the depths of our hearts.

---

1 Ephesians 6:4

2 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Yes, God tells us “Good Job!” The same God who shall tell His faithful “Well done thou good and faithful servant”<sup>3</sup> also openly rewards those who do their duties with humility and love.<sup>4</sup> He does not always reward us with some external blessing, but He *does* always bear witness to our good deeds, and in so doing He brings us the joy of confidence as His servants. Do you want to be happily married? Do your best to observe the words St. Paul and other wrote about marriage, and God will grant you satisfaction with your efforts as a spouse. When you can honestly say “I am fulfilling my duties in this relationship,” then God responds with “you are, well done!”

## **Conclusion**

This is how things are with the rest of the Christian life as well, beloved. We have the joy of receiving positive feedback from our Lord because He has saved us. We cannot *earn* salvation with our good works; since we are already saved, our good works get us something else as a result, the approval, joy and rewards of the Lord our God! Let us seek these wonderful things not only in our marriages, but in all aspects of our lives.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

3 Matthew 25:21

4 Matthew 6:3-4

Sermon for January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

READINGS

2 Kings 5:1-15a

**1** Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. **2** Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. **3** She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." **4** So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." **5** And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. **6** And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." **7** And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me."

**8** But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." **9** So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. **10** And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." **11** But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. **12** Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. **13** But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" **14** So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. **15a** Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him.

Psalm 110

The LORD says to my Lord:  
"Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool."

**2** The LORD sends forth from Zion  
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

**3** Your people will offer themselves freely  
on the day of your power,  
in holy garments;  
from the womb of the morning,  
the dew of your youth will be yours.

**4** The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
"You are a priest forever  
after the order of Melchizedek."

**5** The Lord is at your right hand;  
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.  
**6** He will execute judgment among the nations,  
filling them with corpses;  
he will shatter chiefs  
over the wide earth.  
**7** He will drink from the brook by the way;  
therefore he will lift up his head.

Romans 12:14-21

**14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **17** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” **20** To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 8:1-13

**1** When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. **2** And behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.” **3** And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. **4** And Jesus said to him, “See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”  
**5** When he had entered Capernaum, a centurion came forward to him, appealing to him, **6** “Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, suffering terribly.” **7** And he said to him, “I will come and heal him.” **8** But the centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but only say the word, and my servant will be healed. **9** For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” **10** When Jesus heard this, he marveled and said to those who followed him, “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. **11** I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, **12** while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” **13** And to the centurion Jesus said, “Go; let it be done for you as you have believed.” And the servant was healed at that very moment.

Our meditation this Third Sunday after Epiphany is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Introduction**

Once upon a time, there was a happy family that lived in a tiny house. The father worked long hours, but he considered it worth the effort to see his children happy and fed when he got home every evening. The mother, a homemaker, did her best to raise the children uprightly, homeschooling them and making sure they got lots of exercise at the playgrounds every day. On the weekends, this family went on drives, went to parks, went to Church, and – on payday of course – had a nice barbecue with friends. You could say that it was the ideal family situation, and for a while at least they were happy.



But one day, mysteriously, things turned sour and their harmony was disrupted. The parents began arguing, sometimes about in-laws and other times about money. The children began to fight among one another. Bitterness began to rise. Over time, the wife stopped cleaning the house, the husband stopped trying to take the wife on dates, the children couldn't focus on their school lessons. They stopped going to Church. Visits with extended family became rare occasions, and when this family *did* visit the in-laws, such visits ended with screaming matches between the husband and wife. Meals became an after thought, and the children went hungry often; no matter how much the husband worked, it never seemed like it was enough. This lasted for five years.

Then came the mother's adultery, which it turned out had been going on for a while. Then came the father filing for divorce. Then came the bitter custody battle. The now ex-wife called the power of the State upon her former husband, hoping to squeeze every last drop of money, blood, sweat and tears out of him. She taught her children to hate their father. The father began to drink excessively while spending every night on the phone with his lawyer. The only thing the children saw of him during their "supervised visits" was an angry, overstressed man who always looked one more bad day away from snapping. Eventually, the judge made a decision towards split custody, and when the divorce was finalized the dust had a chance to settle.

But with these sorts of situations, the dust never *quite* settles, does it? The kids are now saddled with years, decades even, of pain and conflict, pulled apart by parents who want them to pick a side. Vicarious jealousy arrives as the father and mother begin to look for new romantic partners. The downward moral slide of the parents means the children will have to try to sleep as they hear their mother having carnal relations with strange men; they will see their father pathetically drunk, passed out on the living room couch. When they grow up, they will be told to "get over it" if they ever complain about their rough upbringing. If they get married, and that's a *big* "if," the wounds will be freshly opened since their parents will not be civil toward each other during planning and the ceremony. Their own children will be stained by the effort they are putting in to not be like their parents. All because, one day, harmony was disrupted and this poor family did not put it back together in time.

### **The Importance of Harmony (and how to keep it)**

Beloved, why does St. Paul tell us to live in harmony with one another? Because without it humanity – and most especially the Church – devolves into destruction. The trouble is, harmony is a fragile thing, and must be kept with vigilance. With the family I just described, we will never know what could have *disrupted* their harmonious relationship, but it does not take much to set a married couple off into that bad trajectory. A wayward comment, an uncleaned mess, even just *one bad day*. So it is with every community, and *especially* the Church. In fact, one congregation infamously found itself split apart and filing lawsuits over property because one day, years before their split, an elder received a smaller piece of ham than he felt he should have gotten at a congregational meal. Things spiraled out of control from just that one tiny slight.<sup>1</sup> Just imagine, what began with joy and celebration for this congregation, all their hopes to glorify God and learn His Word, ended in bitter hatred...over a small piece of meat.

What is harmony? If a word-for-word translation were possible, it would be akin to being "of the same mind." Families, friend groups, churches and countries are considered harmonious in St. Paul's use of the term if they are united. Not just united in belief, but also in *care* for one another. Of course we ought to be on the same page doctrinally, but Christianity is not just a set of doctrines. We weep with those who weep to show that we are thinking about or fellow believers' plights. We rejoice with those who rejoice to show that we are happy when good things happen to them. The harmonious congregation does not consist of each man thinking about his own welfare, but each man considering the welfare of his brothers too. Being "of the same mind" means having a mind towards others – or, as

---

1 [https://pluto.sitetackle.com/16065/?subpages/zzz\\_sermon\\_2010-07-11.shtml](https://pluto.sitetackle.com/16065/?subpages/zzz_sermon_2010-07-11.shtml)

the Apostle puts it, associating with the lowly instead of being haughty.

You see, harmony is not just a state of being, but a crucial virtuous attribute. The harmonious Christian is humble and, as a result, peaceable. He never feels like he is so high above someone else that he doesn't have to engage in conversation with them; he does not magnify his intelligence or wisdom, or ascribe value to himself based on that alone. "Never be wise in your own sight." If a congregation is to have harmony, then it cannot have people establishing a pecking order based on the caprices of ego. As a matter of consequence this humility will also result in more peaceful, friendly relations between Christians: if you do not think of yourself more highly than you ought,<sup>2</sup> then you shall not be easily offended when those *little things* happen, the small crimes between people that can throw the group into a trajectory of discord. So St. Paul adds "so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Do not go looking for a fight.

Conflicts will inevitably happen, of course. However they end up being resolved, and even if they are left *unresolved*, the Apostle admonishes us to never take vengeance for ourselves. God says "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," so let Him take care of matters of personal justice when you are passed up for the choir or given that smaller piece of ham. This is applied first to relations between believers; we ought not be surprised that Scripture tells us we will hurt one another. But it should go without saying that this also applies to our relations with outsiders; the Christian Church should be harmonious because it is filled with harmonious *people*, and that means believers having a firm stance against taking vengeance.

### **The Church's Record and God's Record on Harmony**

I started this sermon with an illustration of a fictional family falling apart. This is because it is the best way to describe the Church's track record on keeping St. Paul's exhortations. We have had endless tales of abuses, errors, Church officers abusing their power and taking vengeance for whatever small slights have come their way. The only way the Church has been consistently obedient to this passage is with the command to bless those who persecute us. In fact, she has blessed her persecutors *very* much by joining them in persecuting Christians! From the 30 Years War to the slaughter of the Huegenots, we have failed spectacularly to maintain harmony in the Body, let alone in individual congregations. Christians are all too eager to partner with heretics, nonbelievers, governments, and more just to *stick it* to other believers and work whatever revenge they'd like. Even without violence, there is the modern wave of unjust excommunications that have been worked by denominational bodies against right wingers, the constant schisms between groups, churches being split wide open, and so much more. The Catacomb Synod would not exist if this were not the case.

We must repent of this backbiting and selfish ambition. We must repent of our thirst for revenge, especially against other Christians. We must repent, because harmony is intrinsic to the way God would have us live; after all, Christ died to re-establish harmony between God and man. The loving relationship we had in Eden, lost at the Fall, was regained by the shedding of Christ's blood. The enmity between the Lord and all sinners was abolished as He rose from the dead. St. Paul tells us to overcome evil with good, precisely because Christ overcame *our* evil with *His* good, the Worthy One dying for the unworthy; He tells us Christians that part of becoming *like* Him is swallowing our pride, refusing vengeance, and honoring Him by loving those who have brought us pain – the same way He chose to forgive instead of damning us all forever. Don't get me wrong, the nonbelievers choose damnation, and if they choose to receive God's vengeance for all their evil then they shall receive it! But for us who have believed in His mercy, we must become merciful and humble in the same way He is.

God knew that we would fail this horribly at maintaining unity. He *knew* that the Church would go haywire with strife and division. Yet He still tells us to rejoice with the rejoicing, weep with the weeping, stay humble, stay peaceful, and never take vengeance; in a word, He tells each Christian to be

---

2 Romans 12:3

harmonious *even* if other Christians refuse to do so. This attribute, being a man of harmony, is a sign that one is a member of the sheepfold instead of one of the goats, a tell that he is wheat and not a tare. Beloved, let us then pray for harmonious hearts, that in growing this way we shall reflect the true heart of our Lord toward one another. And in this process of becoming more harmonious, let us rejoice to see that God is bringing us to bear this fruit as a sign of our salvation.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025  
PRESENTATION OF OUR LORD

READINGS

1 Samuel 1:21-28

**21** The man Elkanah and all his house went up to offer to the LORD the yearly sacrifice and to pay his vow. **22** But Hannah did not go up, for she said to her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will bring him, so that he may appear in the presence of the LORD and dwell there forever.” **23** Elkanah her husband said to her, “Do what seems best to you; wait until you have weaned him; only, may the LORD establish his word.” So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him. **24** And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and she brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. And the child was young. **25** Then they slaughtered the bull, and they brought the child to Eli. **26** And she said, “Oh, my lord! As you live, my lord, I am the woman who was standing here in your presence, praying to the LORD. **27** For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. **28** Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

Psalm 84

**1** How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!

**2** My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.

**3** Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.

**4** Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise! *Selah*

**5** Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

**6** As they go through the Valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.

**7** They go from strength to strength;  
each one appears before God in Zion.

**8** O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*

**9** Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed!

**10** For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

**11** For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does he withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.  
**12** O LORD of hosts,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Hebrews 2:14-18

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Luke 2:22-35

**22** And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” **25** Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. **26** And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. **27** And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, **28** he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

**29** “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;

**30** for my eyes have seen your salvation

**31** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

**32** a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

**33** And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. **34** And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed **35** (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Our text for meditation on this Sunday of the Presentation of our Lord is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Introduction**

We all have to face the reality that, if Christ's Return should be further delayed, we will have to shed this mortal coil. The Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, occasionally dwell on this inevitability. In Psalm 90, Moses prays to our Lord with this request: “teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.”<sup>1</sup> Later on, King Solomon advises us to go to the “house of mourning” to give ourselves some perspective.<sup>2</sup> In other words, if you know that your earthly sojourn is temporary,

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 90:12

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastes 7:2

you will be able to ask yourself what sort of life you want to live; we have a limited time for repentance, to come to faith, and to live in a manner pleasing to God.

One day you will have to say goodbye to the body that you have. And not only that, but you will have to say goodby to your friends, your family, and all other manner of people whether you liked them or not. While it is temporary, and we look forward to receiving our bodies back at the Resurrection, it is a sad consequence of sin, that we find ourselves surrounded by mortality. “What sort of life shall you live then?” the Old Testament writers ask. And so every Christian hearing that starts to feel somber, mournful, or even fearful... because we are all stupid, idolatrous fools.

### **The Insanity of the Memento Mori**

The Church has, throughout the centuries, made the psychotic decision to make death into an idol. Paintings and statues have been commissioned featuring skulls and angels snuffing out candles. Books are written which incessantly remind us of death. We have churches built next to cemeteries, with the morbid reminder given to families with young children – as though it were the greatest virtue to remind a mother on her way to the Divine Service that one day her children must perish! For crying out loud, the Paris catacombs were built as a *monument* to death, a veritable *temple* made of bones and skulls.<sup>3</sup> I know we are a part of the Catacomb Synod, but that isn't a nod to death; it is a remembrance of those saints before us who lived and worshiped in the Catacombs to continue in freedom despite persecution.

At one point you have to wonder who these people, these death respectors, really worship. Do they really worship the true God as they say? Or do they submit to the power of death *so* much that their revealed preferences show a problem with idolatry? The way these people act in their obsession with mortality, it seems to me that they have conceived of death as some dark god that holds ultimate authority over them, and it is as pathetic as it is blasphemous. When they say “memento mori,” what they really mean is “this is all you are, and this is all there is – nothing but death.”

Our reading for today blows their turgid, dour mindset up. The Christian has no right to sit there thinking about death and meditating on it as though we are still under that heavy yoke. In fact, in verse fifteen the author of Hebrews states very plainly that the fear of death is a means of subjecting us to *slavery* – a bondage which the devil uses as much as possible. Those monks telling everyone that one day they will die? Absolutely foolish, for all they are doing is proclaiming bondage to something *other than God*, and the devil rejoices whenever they do it. The believer is to fear God, but such men make themselves slaves to death by rendering that fear to the grave instead of their Maker.

### **Christ Victorious Over Death**

Humanity has been destined for death because humanity is sinful, ever since our first rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Our Heavenly Father did not *want* for us to die – death was a stop-gap measure, because sinful humans being immortal would mean they had to burn for all eternity. But then He sent His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to pay that penalty *for* us. He died for *our* sins, so that whoever trusts in Him for their salvation has all their sins *removed* at Baptism. That takes away the reason for dying.

If the reason for our dying is sin, and that sin that brings about such death is removed, then why do we still die? The truth is, beloved, *we don't*. Christians do not die, simple as. You already died when you were Baptized, so that you may have the same Resurrection as our Lord.<sup>4</sup> It is for this reason that Christ tells a poor woman at Lazarus's tomb, “Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Take a tour for yourself here: <https://360stories.com/paris/point/catacombs-of-paris>

<sup>4</sup> Romans 6:1-4

<sup>5</sup> John 11:25-26

## Conclusion

Beloved, Christ asks you today, do you believe this? Do you believe that He has won the victory over death, so that you shall not die? Even if you should lose your mortal coil, do you believe that you shall yet live? How you answer these questions is going to determine how God Himself would describe your life. A man who answers “no” to them is seen as a slave, for if he still believes he is under the power of death then he is in bondage by the fear of death to the one who has power over it – the devil. But the man who answers “yes” to all that Christ has accomplished, he is *free* from the power of the grave, knowing that the loss of his body is a comma, not a period; it is not the end for him, but the beginning of something greater.

Beloved, be the one to say “yes” to Christ's question. You and I shall not die, and even if we “die” we shall yet live, for our Lord Jesus won that eternal blessedness and communion for us all at the Cross. Since He rose from the dead, so shall you, if you believe and are Baptized;<sup>6</sup> live then not like you are going to die, but live like you shall live forever, for indeed this is what He promises. Live like there is a tomorrow, an eternal dawn which casts away the fear of the unknown in our hearts. And when that fear may return, on account of whatever sin or folly on the part of our hearts, let us go to our Lord in prayer and ask that He remove that fear by His high priestly care for our souls. For indeed, Christ's perfect love casts out our fear, that we may continue on in joy and the promise of life.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which transcends all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

6 Mark 16:16

Sermon for February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

READINGS

Exodus 3:1-14

**1** Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. **3** And Moses said, "I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." **4** When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." **5** Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." **6** And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

**7** Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, **8** and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. **9** And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. **10** Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt." **11** But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?" **12** He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

**13** Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" **14** God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

Psalms 2

**1** Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?

**2** The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,

**3** "Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us."

**4** He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.

**5** Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,

**6** "As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill."

**7** I will tell of the decree:

The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you.

**8** Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.



**9** You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

**10** Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.

**11** Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.

**12** Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

#### 2 Peter 1:16-21

**16** For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. **17** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," **18** we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. **19** And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, **20** knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. **21** For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

#### Matthew 17:1-9

**1** And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. **2** And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. **3** And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. **4** And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." **5** He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." **6** When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. **7** But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." **8** And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. **9** And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Tell no one the vision, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Our text for meditation this Transfiguration Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction: Why Moses and Elijah?**

For the Transfiguration, let us ask the question: why Moses and Elijah? Christ takes the three "inner circle" Apostles, Peter, James and John, to a mountain so they can see Him in His glorified state. Was there any need for these other two men to show up? Perhaps one could say that the two were important figures to believers in the first century, and the memory of their attendance would confirm what God the Father says from the cloud: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." There is a temptation to think that if Moses and Elijah approve, then certainly the Apostles would feel more at ease with the coming Atonement, Resurrection and New Covenant; such an argument falls flat when we remember that God's authority is perfectly fine all on its own – He needs no help from Moses and Elijah.

We might say that not only did this confirm Christ's importance to these three *Apostles*, but also to the two prophets as well; after all, Moses and Elijah needed Christ just as much as anyone else, and they both sought God out during a time when things looked grim for their ministries – and the children of Israel as a whole.<sup>1</sup> After all, St. Peter testifies that all the prophets eagerly searched out the matters of the Gospel,<sup>2</sup> and with the Transfiguration our Lord gives Moses and Elijah a refreshing *glimpse* of the Savior Whom they pronounced would one day rescue those who trust in God. This sounds good and encouraging, but then we must ask why these two men over all the *other* prophets who abided during times of trouble? Why not bring poor Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, to be encouraged by Christ's glorified state? Why not bring Hosea the heartbroken victim of adultery? Certainly Moses and Elijah, assuming this sort of “time travel” model of the Transfiguration, were not the only ones who would appreciate the sight of Christ!

So again, *why* these two men? Nothing God does is unintentional, beloved, so there must be a *reason* behind choosing *these two* to witness the glorified Christ and speak with Him. It cannot just be that they were important to the average believer in Judea. Noah was important. Abraham was important. King David was important. Yet we do not see Noah or Abraham or King David there upon the mountain, but Moses and Elijah. There was *something* about these two men that our Lord looked at and said “*these men must be here.*”

### A Firm Explanation

While I cannot give you the exact reasons for God choosing these two prophet's attendance, there *is* a direction to which the text of Scripture points. Though both Moses and Elijah were prophets, there is a key difference between the two that puts them in different categories. Neither of them were *just* prophets. Moses is the Lawgiver you see, the man tasked with giving the Old Covenant to Israel, so they could become a priestly nation. Elijah was head of the *school* of prophets first established by Samuel, and he was tasked with bringing the Northern Kingdom to repentance; subsequently, the prophetic office was concerned with being like attorneys for the Law, pronouncing the blessings and curses found in Deuteronomy depending on the peoples' obedience or rebellion.<sup>3</sup> Moses was employed to introduce the Old Covenant to Israel, Elijah was employed to bring them back to it.

Over time, each of these two was associated with a body of literature. Moses, being the Lawgiver, represented the works that he wrote: the Pentateuch.<sup>4</sup> Elijah, however, takes on a position of representing the prophets who came after him – including all the prophets who wrote Old Testament works, like Isaiah and Amos. At the same time as people started referring to Moses and Elijah as representatives of bodies of literature, people began referring to the Old Testament in a similar way: the Law and the Prophets.<sup>5</sup> All instructions given to God's people are found in this body of literature, as well as the recounting of their failures to do so. What many Jews call the *Tanakh* today, what we call the Old Testament, was called the Law and the Prophets back then.

So Moses and Elijah were brought to the Transfiguration because they represented the spiritual leadership of old Israel, whose pronouncements and writings had special authority over believers. But note that *only* Christ is shown in glory here. Moses at one point had a shining face from spending 40 days with God and receiving instructions for the Tabernacle, but this glory was fading.<sup>6</sup> Elijah was brought up to Heaven instead of dying,<sup>7</sup> and we would *expect* to hear about him having some glowing visage on account of that – but no, St. Matthew has no such words for him. Only Christ shines.

---

1 Exodus 33:12-34:10, 1 Kings 19:1-18

2 1 Peter 1:10-12

3 Deuteronomy 27-28

4 The first five books of the Bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

5 This turn of phrase, “the Law and the Prophets,” is seen in Matthew 7:12, Matthew 22:40, Luke 16:16, Acts 13:15, and Romans 3:21. “Moses” is also used as shorthand for “The Law” in 2 Corinthians 3:15-16

6 Exodus 34:29-35

7 2 Kings 2

Not only is Christ the only One shining, He is also the only one about whom our Heavenly Father says “listen to Him!” He says this after St. Peter suggests making tents for Christ, Moses and Elijah as though they were equals; God the Father is having none of that. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” Moses may be important, and the Law is certainly there for us to learn, but now you listen to *Jesus*. Elijah and all the other prophets after him, they may have served well as Covenant prosecutors for the people to hear, but now you listen to *Jesus*. God the Father declares here in no uncertain terms that Christ is the One to Whom we listen, first and foremost. He brings in the New Covenant, and He brings it to the raucous applause of the men who foretold His arrival – *including* Moses and Elijah. The New Testament, from this point onward, supersedes the Old.

## Conclusion

Scripture attests about itself that it is ultimately all about Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> This *includes* all of the Old Testament. Like Sts. Peter, James and John, we are told here to listen to our Lord Jesus above all else – even the prophets who ministered before Him. His superiority to Moses and all other prophets is demonstrated here, and by extension this means the Apostles who speak of Christ must be considered before the prophets; if I want to learn the true religion, I must learn at the feet of the men who knew Christ in the first century, and by the Holy Spirit they speak concerning Him truthfully.

Does this mean the Old Testament has no place in the life of a Christian? Of course not. The Holy Spirit inspired the writings of the prophets, and since they witness to Christ<sup>9</sup> we gain stronger faith on account of reading them. They also inspire us with the devotions of the Psalms, the wisdom of Proverbs and Job, and they encourage us with the achievements of the saints while warning us about their failures.<sup>10</sup> The Old Testament teaches us about how our Lord made the world, about true morality, and about the perils of sin – making it absolutely indispensable. But nonetheless, we confess as our Lord has commanded us, that we must listen to Christ first and join in the New Covenant which He established by His Blood. We are justified by faith in Christ Alone, united in Baptism to Christ Alone, we have our way of living established by our Lord through His Commandments, and we are told that as He died for us, we live for Him. And so, as believers we put the New Testament first, where we *find* the teachings of and about Jesus, in light of our Heavenly Father's pronouncement there upon the mountain. Our friends Moses and Elijah would have it no other way.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>8</sup> This is most explicitly stated in Revelation 19:10.

<sup>9</sup> John 5:39

<sup>10</sup> Great examples of this are found in 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 11.

Sermon for February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SEPTUAGESIMA

READINGS

Genesis 21:8-21

**8** And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. **9** But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. **10** So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.” **11** And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son. **12** But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. **13** And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.” **14** So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. **15** When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes. **16** Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. **17** And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. **18** Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” **19** Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. **20** And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow. **21** He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Psalms 95

**1** Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;  
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!  
**2** Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;  
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!  
**3** For the LORD is a great God,  
and a great King above all gods.  
**4** In his hand are the depths of the earth;  
the heights of the mountains are his also.  
**5** The sea is his, for he made it,  
and his hands formed the dry land.  
**6** Oh come, let us worship and bow down;  
let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!  
**7** For he is our God,  
and we are the people of his pasture,  
and the sheep of his hand.  
Today, if you hear his voice,  
**8 do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,**  
**as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,**  
**9 when your fathers put me to the test**  
**and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.**  
**10 For forty years I loathed that generation**

**and said, “They are a people who go astray in their heart,  
and they have not known my ways.”  
11 Therefore I swore in my wrath,  
“They shall not enter my rest.”**

1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5

**9:24** Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

**10:1** For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** and all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Matthew 20:1-16

**1** “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. **2** After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. **3** And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, **4** and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ **5** So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. **6** And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ **7** They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ **8** And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ **9** And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. **10** Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. **11** And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, **12** saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ **13** But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? **14** Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. **15** Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ **16** So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Our text for meditation this Septuagesima Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Our Gospel reading offends our sensibilities. It should. In the normal circumstance of employment, a manager is considered just if pay is distributed according to the value of the work done. Imagine if *you* saw this happen in real life! An employer pays his hardest working employee for a twelve hour shift: then he hires some new guy, lets him coast on thirty minutes of labor, and pays him the same. In *this* world, we would rightfully bristle at how unfair it is; by instinct we would say it should be made right by either paying the hard worker more or paying the new guy less.

Scripture agrees with this, by the way. When it comes to normal business, the Word of God is incredibly clear. First, bread must be earned, as St. Paul says “if anyone is not willing to work, let him

not eat.”<sup>1</sup> When it comes to commerce, King Solomon tells us that “unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord.”<sup>2</sup> When it comes to the man running payroll, we also hear “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in Heaven.”<sup>3</sup> If you balk at the situation in the parable, if you feel *indignant* at it, that is reasonable, and it is the intended reaction. Christ taught the parable this way *by design*.

## Different Rules

We are expected to feel indignation at this parable, but we must then ask *why* we feel indignation, and how things are different here. Our Savior says that this is not about earthly commerce and labor, but the Kingdom of Heaven. That means different rules, a different dynamic to how things are supposed to go in this life. Things simply don't work the same when it comes to the Kingdom; the last are first and the first are last. Out in the world where we have our jobs and earn our wages, there is an expectation of fairness that God instructs us to value; but in the Kingdom, we understand that He is the owner of all, and shall do as He pleases.

This is not a matter of salvation or rewards in Heaven. Salvation is not earned, so the denarius in this passage is decidedly *not* eternal life. And there are most certainly rewards in Heaven and some people get more rewards than others – Christ Himself says so.<sup>4</sup> So this parable cannot be talking about either of these things, lest we undo the Gospel by making it wages instead of a free gift, or lest we blaspheme by making Christ out to be a liar. The same goes if we try to say the denarius means earthly blessings, since God provides our earthly needs by His Grace as well!

So what is the point of the Parable then? If we think too much on the specifics, what the denarius means or what the different times of day mean, we shall drive ourselves mad. I do not believe that Jesus intended for us to look at each little detail as though it were a symbol for something else. He does not want us to miss the forest for the trees, so to speak. Instead, let us think about this in terms of the *owner* and His attitude of Grace toward the least among us.

## God Values Every Believer

All the people working in His vineyard, the assembly of all believers, are valued. This applies to the hard worker who does lots of things for the Church just as much as the guy who shows up to the jobsite right before closing. Do you remember Hagar, beloved? She was exactly like the eleventh-hour worker. The slave woman who belonged to Abraham and Sarah in the Book of Genesis.<sup>5</sup> The poor woman found herself caught up in the lives of her masters trying to fulfill God's promises for Him. He promised them a son, and their response was to try to force the matter by having Hagar become a concubine to Abraham so she could bear his son Ishmael. But it turned out that this was not the way God intended the promise to be fulfilled, and Hagar ended up getting cast out of the household...into the wilderness...where people starve and dehydrate to death. *Twice*.

Hagar contributes nothing to the plan of salvation. The lineage of Christ goes through Abraham's son Isaac, then to Jacob, then to Judah, all the way to the Davidic dynasty until we see our Lord born in Bethlehem. He does *not* come through the line of Ishmael, Hagar's son, or any of his descendants. Abraham and Sarah thought they could *make* the promise come about the way they wanted, and when it did not turn out that way, Hagar was cast out and left to die – again, *twice*. So she does nothing of any merit whatsoever for the Church. Yet what does our Lord say to her? As she raises her voice up to God and weeps, distraught at what looks like an inevitable death in the desert for her and her son, God comforts her saying “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the

---

1 2 Thessalonians 3:10

2 Proverbs 20:10

3 Colossians 4:1

4 Matthew 5:11-12, 19:27-30

5 Genesis 16, 21:8-21

voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”<sup>6</sup>

This perfectly illustrates what our Lord Jesus is talking about with this parable. Hagar is like one of the workers who showed up at the eleventh hour. She could not and did not do anything for the Kingdom of God in terms of her own works. She did not have money to give, she was no great teacher, her son has nothing to do with the line of Christ and her descendants after were nothing but a headache for the children of Israel. She is not like those women who end up being heroes of the faith, like the Virgin Mary or St. Martha or Deborah the prophetess, but despite contributing so little she is preserved by our Lord and given promises. Though she is “last” in terms of her actions in her life, Hagar is nonetheless put “first” by God.

### God's Gracious Care

What does Jesus mean when He says that the last will be first, and the first last? In the Kingdom of God, the dynamic is flipped from what we see in the world. In the world we expect the hardest workers and most prestigious minds to be treated better than everyone else; in the Kingdom, those who work the hardest and for the most time on behalf of the Church are doing so for the sake of others, and their position is (in this world anyway) a humble one. The pastor might do a lot for the Church, but he does not receive more love from God than the laity. The layman attending Sunday services may not do much evangelism and only has a little bit of time to read Scripture every day, but he is loved *just as much* as the pastor is. We see God protecting and providing for Abraham, a great hero of the faith who did amazing things for believers; yet we also see God protecting and providing for Hagar *just as much*, despite her doing hardly anything.

We might be tempted to think of this as unfair, just like the workers who started in the morning. Why would God do so much for those who don't work as much? Why would He place as much value on a normal Christian girl as He does one of the twelve Apostles? But as our Lord shows us in the parable, He has *every right* to do so; we are His, and we live as members of His Kingdom. If you find yourself tirelessly witnessing, studying, praying all night and day, this is wonderful – continue to do so beloved! But do not think that this life will present to you *more* blessing than the faithful who do not do as much. God loves them just as He loves you, and your works are on their behalf to help them along.

You may have notice that I'm mentioning *this* life quite a bit. That is because it is the context of this parable. Let no man tell himself “I shall do less as a Christian then, for it is all the same to God.” No! There are rewards in Heaven which some men receive and others do not. The twenty four elders, seated on thrones around our Heavenly Father in His court, all wear crowns;<sup>7</sup> not everyone in Heaven gets a crown, and not everyone gets to sit on a throne. Clearly there are honors which our Lord renders unto those who spend their lives laboring for His Kingdom, and this should motivate us all to do as much as we can.

But let not your heart be troubled if you do not feel quite as, well, *holy* as other men. Do not think of yourself as less valuable to our Lord if you cannot spend all day every day like some monk in his cell praying for a hundred hours a week. Our Lord still sees you, still *values* you, and promises that your labors shall still produce good for His Kingdom whether they be much or little. For the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 21:17-18

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 4:4

Sermon for February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
SEXAGESIMA

READINGS

Isaiah 55:10-13

- 10** “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
**11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
**12** “For you shall go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
**13** Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall make a name for the LORD,  
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

Psalms 84

[Collect reading in **bold**]

- 1** How lovely is your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!  
**2** My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.  
**3** Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.  
**4** Blessed are those who dwell in your house,  
ever singing your praise! *Selah*  
**5** Blessed are those whose strength is in you,  
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.  
**6** As they go through the Valley of Baca  
they make it a place of springs;  
the early rain also covers it with pools.  
**7** They go from strength to strength;  
each one appears before God in Zion.  
**8** O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob! *Selah*



**9** Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of your anointed!  
**10** For a day in your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.

**11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does he withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.**

**12 O LORD of hosts,  
blessed is the one who trusts in you!**

#### Hebrews 4:9-13

**9** So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, **10** for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

**11** Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience. **12** For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. **13** And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

#### Luke 8:4-15

**4** And when a great crowd was gathering and people from town after town came to him, he said in a parable, **5** “A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. **6** And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. **7** And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. **8** And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.” As he said these things, he called out, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**9** And when his disciples asked him what this parable meant, **10** he said, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’ **11** Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. **12** The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. **13** And the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word, receive it with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. **14** And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. **15** As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.

Our text for meditation this Sexagesima Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

There are endless sermons on this Parable, and I do not feel the need to go over every detail as we have heard many a time throughout our lives. But let us repeat something often missed whenever we dwell on the Parable of the Sower. Our Lord Jesus says “Now the parable is this: The seed is the

word of God. The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.” Let me repeat that important part: “*so that they may not believe and be saved.*” Beloved, this is the phrase we must dwell on today, something so often missing from sermons on this Parable – including my own in the past!

### The devil's designs

Imagine a man who wars against medicine. He burns pharmacies down, steals antibiotics from hospitals, and kicks down the racks of over-the-counter medication. Every day he wakes up angry at the thought of the healing properties that medicine affords. He pours bottles of children's Tylenol down the sink, scatters Ibuprofen all over the streets, and pours acid in antiseptic bottles. He fights medicine with a passion.

What would we say about such a man? Does he really just hate the pharmaceutical industry? Does he have some bizarre dedication to therapeutic nihilism? I doubt it. The simplest answer here is that the man doesn't hate the medicine so much as *what it does*, and what it does is help people with their illnesses and injuries. For such a man, we would reasonably conclude that he hates *people* more, and setting fire to first aid kits is his way of making sure people remain sick, in pain, and dying.

So it is with the devil, who wars against faith. He sets up entire religions to siphon people away from believing in Christ, popularizes atheistic movements, and attempts to shut down evangelism. He rages against the thought of people believing in Christ and thus being saved. He shuts down churches with covid lockdowns, raises up cults, and calls Church councils that bar the laity from reading Scripture. Anything that would proliferate the Word, the devil fights with all his might.

Of course, like the man who wars against medicine, we rightly perceive that the devil doesn't hate faith *per sé*, so much as he hates humanity. He's perfectly happy for someone to have faith in something *false*, like buddhism or hinduism. But he cannot abide by faith in Christ, because like penicillin curing a bad infection faith in Jesus cures sin and death. Because he hates us, he hates the thought of us living happily with God for all eternity – and that living requires belief. Just think, the *very first thing* we see the devil doing is sowing doubt in Eve's heart that God knew what was best for her!<sup>1</sup>

### Our Complicity and Fear

So the devil hates humanity, and this is because God loves us. No one hates God more than the devil, so he wants to destroy everything our Lord loves – especially mankind. But consider that humanity is complicit here. The flesh, the old adam, wages war against faith as well. Our sinful nature is what rises up and kills the weak man's faith when persecution afflicts him. Sin is what stifles us from bearing proper fruit as Christians, because our flesh would much rather experience all the sick pleasures the world has to offer. Our sin attacks faith because sin is the negation of the good in God's creation; like the devil, sin seeks to undo what God has created, making for a downright *suicidal* impulse in the heart of every man, woman and child. In this parable, Christ tells us of one enemy, the devil, who snatches the Word out of peoples' hearts; He *also* tells us clearly that we are the other enemy to ourselves, putting us into struggle by the traitor within our own bodies. The flesh hates faith, because faith undoes sin as faith justifies us and brings us to salvation.

We ought to recognize the devil's designs, and the cooperation that enemy within us gives him. Beloved, did you find yourselves “too busy” to pray this past week? Was it like pulling teeth to get to Church today or to start the service? Did you fear sharing the Gospel with someone that you knew should have heard it? Perhaps you had fleeting moments where you felt like all of your knowledge of the Christian faith just *vanished* as though it fell out of your brain. All of these are signs that the soil of your heart is growing thorns, becoming shallow, or that the devilish birds of the air are trying to snatch the Word right out of it. All of these things are signs that *something*, whether that be satan or our old

---

1 Genesis 3:1-5

adam, is warring against faith, “*so that they may not believe and be saved.*”

Typically, we hear this and it scares the daylights out of us. We hear the parable of the Sower and immediately begin to interrogate ourselves – “what kind of soil is my heart? Must I break up the rocky parts of my heart? Do I need to do some weeding and destroy my worldly cares? Ah, I must do great works or else I shall die spiritually!” Such is the reaction of many as they hear this Parable. But I am here to inform you that we cannot do anything to the field of our hearts. Anyone that tells you to plow that field or find some spiritual exercise to purify yourself is asking you to do the impossible – and in fact, because they want you to rely on your works to fix this problem, they are agents of the devil himself because they are trying to tear you away from faith in Christ. Again: “*so that they may not believe and be saved.*”

### **Christ is the Sower**

If your heart is the field, and the sower sows the Word, then you are not the sower – our Lord is. He brings His Word to your heart, He is the One scattering it about so that it grows into something fruitful. We belong to Him, and if we are His fields then He is our Sower, the farmer who tends to His fields. If a farmer sows seed, and in some places it is not sprouting, does that farmer never try again? And if he does sow seed once more, does he do so without changing the field?

Think of it beloved. Soil changes over time. Sometimes rocks end up there and the soil hardens and dries up so the seed is planted shallow; a farmer may see that and dig up the rocks, break up the soil and try again the next year. Sometimes weeds end up in the soil, choking out what the farmer has planted; he may see that and remove them, and try again to plant. Over time, that which does not fall by the wayside will *eventually* grow and bear fruit, because even faith as a mustard seed will become something useful to Him.

We are not to worry that we lack the works necessary to clear up the soil of our hearts. We must not worry that somehow we are destined for damnation on account of our personal failures; if we saw this Parable that way, then no one is saved at all! God forbid that the ups and downs of the human heart meant that no forgiveness or second chances would be offered. Christ did not die only for those who were predestined to have “good soil” - no, for such would mean that every story we hear of later conversion in life are false conversions. Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted the Church, certainly at one point had the Word fall upon the wayside and it was gobbled up by the devil as he helped men kill St. Stephen; but God brought a change to his heart, planted the Word once more, and Saul became St. Paul the Apostle to us Gentiles. Simon Peter was once choked out by the cares of this world as he fled the pharisees and even denied Christ three times, but Christ Himself, the great Sower, removed those weeds and made St. Peter the great Apostle that he was. So too can our Lord do this with us, so that we may believe *and be saved*.

Faith alone justifies, for it is this believing means you entrust yourself to Christ who paid for your sins with His blood. The devil knows that this is how we are saved, and so he wars against it. He fears it because it is a *living faith* that engages in real relationship with our Savior. When you notice the cares of this world weighing on your heart, go to Him and ask for Him to remove the weeds growing there. When you notice a withering in your soul from the persecutions the world inflicts on us, go to Him and ask Him to break up the rocks that have been lodged into your heart – ask Him to *deepen* and *strengthen* your faith beloved! He will be faithful to bring you to the Sacrament, to your Baptism, and to more of the Word. When you feel that “data dump” in your mind about our doctrines and what the Scriptures say, ask our Savior to come and bring you greater understanding of the Word. And when you do, entrust yourself to Him as the great Sower who shall purify and strengthen you, leading to a fruitful walk with Him.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025  
QUINQUAGESIMA

READINGS

Isaiah 35:3-7

- 3 Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
4 Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
“Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
He will come and save you.”  
5 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
6 then shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
For waters break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
7 the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

Psalm 89:18-29

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 18 For our shield belongs to the LORD,  
our king to the Holy One of Israel.  
19 Of old you spoke in a vision to your godly one, and said:  
“I have granted help to one who is mighty;  
I have exalted one chosen from the people.  
20 I have found David, my servant;  
with my holy oil I have anointed him,  
21 so that my hand shall be established with him;  
my arm also shall strengthen him.  
22 The enemy shall not outwit him;  
the wicked shall not humble him.  
23 I will crush his foes before him  
and strike down those who hate him.  
24 My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him,  
and in my name shall his horn be exalted.  
25 I will set his hand on the sea  
and his right hand on the rivers.  
26 He shall cry to me, ‘You are my Father,  
my God, and the Rock of my salvation.’  
27 And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.  
28 **My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,**

**and my covenant will stand firm for him.  
29 I will establish his offspring forever  
and his throne as the days of the heavens.**

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**1** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. **3** If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. **4** Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant **5** or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; **6** it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. **7** Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **8** Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part, **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. **11** When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. **12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. **13** So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Luke 18:31-43

**31** And taking the twelve, he said to them, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished. **32** For he will be delivered over to the Gentiles and will be mocked and shamefully treated and spit upon. **33** And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise.” **34** But they understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they did not grasp what was said. **35** As he drew near to Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. **36** And hearing a crowd going by, he inquired what this meant. **37** They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth is passing by.” **38** And he cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” **39** And those who were in front rebuked him, telling him to be silent. But he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” **40** And Jesus stopped and commanded him to be brought to him. And when he came near, he asked him, **41** “What do you want me to do for you?” He said, “Lord, let me recover my sight.” **42** And Jesus said to him, “Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.” **43** And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Our text for meditation this Quinquagesima Sunday is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Introduction**

Saint John says, quite famously, that God is Love.<sup>1</sup> This is all well and good, and it brings us great comfort to hear it, that our Lord is so loving that He sets the very standard of what Agape love truly is. Unfortunately, few people cite the *entire* verse when they say that God is Love. The Apostle writes “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” St. Paul’s words in our reading today elucidate on that line of thinking...and that means the passage should *terrify* us.

## **The Problem of Love**

What is love? There are many words used in Scripture that are translated as “love,” and they all

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 John 3:8

mean varying things, from the brotherly love of “phileo” to the familial love of “storge.” In the Old Testament, a frequent term used is “chesed,” which is translated as love but has a deeper connotation of steadfast loyalty and care.<sup>2</sup> Here, however, in our reading and with St. John, the word is *Agape*, or self-giving love. To hold to Agape as a disposition is to seek the good of the other for their own sake, without any selfish motivations or personal benefit.

This is why St. Paul speaks about personal virtues when he discusses love. You might wonder what patience has to do with love, or how humility and hope factor into it, but to the Apostle these are essential to the very definition. An Agape man, concerned with helping and benefiting others, is patient, kind, never resentful, always faithful. Christian love does not just inform our actions, but our character as well; we are called to be distinctly *unselfish*.

Here is where it gets scary. Agape love is a requirement for having any value whatsoever as a Christian. St. Paul tells us that whatever gifts you have, whether that is by speech or knowledge or charitable deeds or *even martyrdom*, if you do not have Agape to go along with them then they are altogether *worthless*. Even faith, by the way; we are justified by faith alone, but if your faith in Christ is merely some intellectual exercise, if it does not produce a sincere love for Him and for your neighbor, how can you say that your faith justifies you?

It is not enough to say “Well I love God and I love my neighbor, cased closed I’m not worthless as a Christian.” Do not forget the standard: *God* is the standard here, *His* perfect Love not your *imperfect* love. That means conforming to a *perfect* standard that shows up in your character, your deeds, everything. Have you lost patience with anyone recently? Were you irritable or resentful, even for a moment? That means you do not have perfect love, and the value that your works and your gifts may have had is lessened – or *null* – in the eyes of God.

It gets scarier the more honest we are with ourselves. The fact of the matter is, none of our actions, words, and thoughts will ever qualify as having Agape in the way that would satisfy that perfect standard. You cannot love your way into the Kingdom of God, you cannot love your way into Heaven. You can work tirelessly for the benefit of others, you can give away everything you own to charity, but nonetheless even the slightest infraction means that your love is incomplete and thus of little-to-no value to God; and if your deeds, actions and thoughts are found wanting, *you* are found wanting, meriting only judgment from our Lord. If we are honest, we examine this list of what Agape entails and our failures tell us that we are far from salvation. For the life of me, I cannot understand why my ministerial contemporaries like to read this passage during weddings – why would we scare the bride and groom like that?

### **The Matter of God's Love**

Nonetheless, having heard the stakes of it all and the strictness to which we are judged, we must not despair. God is Love, correct? So let us take comfort in another way we can read St. Paul's words:

God is patient and kind; God does not envy or boast; He is not arrogant or rude.  
He does not insist on His own way; He is not irritable or resentful; He does not  
rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. God bears all things, believes  
all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This sounds a bit silly, but when we remember that the standards of Agape love come straight from the character of our Lord, we must recognize His grace here. Because He is Love, He is Love *for you*; let us reword the passage again.

God is patient for you and kind to you;  
God does not envy or boast to you;  
He is not arrogant or rude to you.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> For more information: <https://ratiochristi.org/words-for-love-in-the-bible/>

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 11:29

He does not insist on His own way to you,<sup>4</sup>  
He is not irritable or resentful towards you;  
He does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth for you.<sup>5</sup>  
God bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things for you.<sup>6</sup>

If this is the case, beloved, you can trust that God's perfect love is more than enough to save you. Your love fails, because you are not love yourself: His love succeeds because He *is* Love Himself. Our failure to truly love one another makes us spiritually deficient in every aspect of our lives; God's power to love us perfectly means He cares for and saves us *despite* our failures. He sent His Son to us to pay for all of those imperfections, for all of our failures to be patient, kind, humble, appropriate, selfless, and forgiving. Do not look to your own love to see if you measure up to God's standard, for you know that you have failed; look instead to God's Love and see that He measures up abundantly to meet all of your needs, especially your need for salvation.

The love of Christ is entirely unselfish, to the point of *dying* for us, not sparing His own life so that we may live with Him for eternity. We are called to emulate that as best we can, seeking to be unselfish ourselves and looking out for one another on account of how Jesus first loved us. But as we try our best to follow the pattern of what love means, let us not lay in the squalor of sorrow over our failures, but move forward confidently because Christ's love preserves us and keeps us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 That is, though we are judged according to whether we believe in the Gospel, God does not *force* us to believe. Grace being resistible is an expression of God's love.

5 John 14:6

6 Numbers 14:18, 2 Peter 3:9

Sermon for March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 3:1-13

**1** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” **2** And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, **3** but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” **4** But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. **5** For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” **6** So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. **7** Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. **8** And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. **9** But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” **10** And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” **11** He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” **12** The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” **13** Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

Psalms 32

**1** Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.  
**2** Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.  
**3** For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.  
**4** For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*  
**5** I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and I did not cover my iniquity;  
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”  
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*  
**6** Therefore let everyone who is godly  
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;  
surely in the rush of great waters,  
they shall not reach him.  
**7** You are a hiding place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*  
**8** I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.  
**9** Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,



which must be curbed with bit and bridle,  
or it will not stay near you.

**10** Many are the sorrows of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

**11** Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

#### Hebrews 4:14-16

**14** Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

#### Matthew 4:1-11

**1** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. **2** And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3** And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” **4** But he answered, “It is written, “‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **5** Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple **6** and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” **7** Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **8** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” **10** Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” **11** Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Our meditation for this first Sunday in Lent is on our Old Testament and Gospel readings.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **The Fall in Eden**

Thirty seconds. If you get a stopwatch and time how long it takes to read the dialogue between Eve and the devil, even if you read slowly it only takes thirty seconds. That was how little effort it took the devil to send humanity into the state it is currently in. A short conversation. Do not think this is because they were foolish or ignorant. Adam and Eve were free from the burdens we carry today, beloved, which *should* have made it more difficult to lead them into sin. The devil did not resort to some dirty trick that played on delirious hunger, manipulating addictions, or waiting until they forgot something; Adam and Eve had perfect memories and did not get hungry, tired, confused or addicted. There was no loose thread for the devil to pull, no explicit vulnerability here for temptation. These two humans were sharply intelligent, harmonious, powerful, able to hear the voices of spirits, and unstained by memories of pain or sin. The devil could not bribe them, threaten them, or play off of potential conflict between the spouses here. But in thirty seconds, he defeated them through his temptations and man has been shackled to death and pain and labor ever since.

Beloved, if two human beings with no imperfections were undone by a short conversation, how much better do you think the rest of humanity would fare after 6000 years of sin and all the carnage it

has wreaked through all creation? We are at a far greater disadvantage than Adam and Eve were, for our natures have been stained by original sin – that concupiscence or *desire* to sin that dwells within us; all the devil has to do to get 99% of the human population to obey his every last whim is to make even the slightest offer of sinful fun, and they will go along without a second thought. Thus the world follows him into whatever he wants, from murder to theft to terrorism to child rape to persecuting the Church – and these days he doesn't even have to lift a finger to tempt anyone, for they tempt themselves through their flesh.

Perhaps you may respond, “well, Adam and Eve did not know any better, but we know better now so it would turn out much differently if you put me in that garden.” Ah, but that is only half true! Yes, Eve was deceived, but St. Paul attests that Adam was *not* deceived.<sup>1</sup> We see here that Adam, knowing exactly what was going on, still ate the forbidden fruit, and why? Because he saw that his beloved Eve had eaten it, and he decided to die with her rather than continue on without her. Whoever says they would fare any better than Adam or Eve if they were in the garden is simply lying to himself, trying to feel good about his own righteousness. It would be hopeless if you were there, beloved. For satan it is mere child's play to find out what your flesh *really* wants to worship, and he would dangle it in front of you and threaten it the same way he did with Eve, and before you know it you would be hooked right through the cheek.

We have to flee the self-righteous feeling that we all get when we read Genesis 3. Before men we might be mighty – we could be strong warriors, ingenious executives, fantastic soldiers. In our own communities we can be the very *image* of civic righteousness, a role model for our families and friends. Coram Mundo, facing the world, we can attain power and toughness and respect. But if you go alone to stand up to the devil, someone once declared to be the greatest created being,<sup>2</sup> you will be like a paraplegic laying limp before an angry elephant. None of us by our own power would stand a chance. If Adam and Eve, having no imperfections, did not resist, neither would any of us if we were all alone – they lasted thirty seconds, we wouldn't make it to ten.

### **The Stand in the Wilderness**

Things were different with our Lord Jesus. He stood straight where other men have fallen – and He stood despite experiencing great weakness. Though He is sinless, being brought up in a fallen world our Lord still experienced hunger and thirst. He got tired. He felt pain. Jesus, being Divine, permitted Himself to experience just about every hardship that us fallen humans have to experience. This is what it means when Scripture says that He was “in the likeness of sinful flesh,”<sup>3</sup> that He was sinless but still experienced the consequences of sin. It was not just His Crucifixion that was suffering for our sins, but His *whole life* included experiencing this kind of negative environment and suffering that He did not deserve. He did so willingly, though. He could have come to the earth in a body that did not experience pain or exhaustion or hunger, taking on a humanity that was more akin to Adam's – but if He did that, then we could not say that Christ *knows what it's like*.

All too often we read about the Fall in Eden, and we think to ourselves “well how were Adam and Eve to do any differently? How could they? Why would God be so upset with them when this was the first time they had ever been tempted?” If we're being honest, we start to feel a bit indignant too; “How can God judge us this harshly when He has never been tempted to sin? Has *He* ever had a deadline or been stressed or pressed about by poverty? Has *He* ever been through what we have to go through?” Again, we ask whether He knows what it's like for us.

But He does know. He knows what it is like to be tired after work. He knows what it is like to be hungry but not have food on hand. Scripture attests that He sympathizes with all of our weaknesses,<sup>4</sup>

---

1 1 Timothy 2:13

2 Ezekiel 28:12, in which the prophet is comparing the king of Tyre to satan.

3 Romans 8:3

4 Hebrews 4:15

He knows what it is like to be tempted, and He is more well-acquainted with suffering than any of us will ever be. He proves it to us here with His experience in the wilderness, where He stood strong. And He stood strong despite His circumstances being far, far more difficult than the temptation of Adam and Eve.

The devil knew about the Divinity of Jesus. A being of such extreme intelligence is not so foolish as to think that Christ was *just some guy*. Oh no: he was aware of the Virgin Birth, he knew the true meaning of all those prophecies in the Old Testament, and he had personally overseen Herod's attempts to kill the Christ child just thirty years prior. Until this point, he had been trying to get others to destroy Jesus to no avail – and he was not stupid enough to try and kill Jesus himself, lest the angels waiting nearby tear him apart. So the only way the devil could *possibly* mess up God's plan of salvation for mankind was to tempt Christ to sin. And since he knew that Jesus was the Messiah, made of much sterner stuff than an Adam or an Eve, he would have to strike when the opportunity was right.

That opportunity came when our Lord fasted in the desert. Forty days of no food, wasting away until He was deliriously hungry and in constant pain. “Surely,” the devil must have thought, “now this 'Messiah' will fall.” He tempts Christ with food, he tempts Him with the ego boost of invincibility, and he tempts Him with ruling the world, all to no avail. The devil tries to confuse Jesus by playing Bible teacher and trying to goad Him into conceding Scriptural verses taken out of context. But no matter what temptations and trickery the devil pulled out of his bag of tricks, Jesus Christ stood firm in His faithfulness to complete His mission. He succeeded where Adam failed. This is the power of our Lord Jesus! It took thirty seconds for the devil to successfully get Adam and Eve to sin, but after *forty days* he could not get Jesus to make even a single error.

### **Christ Preserves, Protects and Strengthens**

Oh beloved Christian, hear now that our Savior stood strong *for you*. He did not yield to the temptation to sin, because on account of His perfect obedience – even obedience to death on a Cross – He is the only Worthy One who could pay for the sins of the world. And now that He rules the cosmos from the Right Hand of our Heavenly Father, He does three wonderful things for us, that we may be made to stand strong when we undergo spiritual attack.

#### *Preservation*

He preserves our faith. By Word and Sacrament, with His Body and Blood given unto us and the Gospel proclaimed, He ensures that our faith shall endure in those wildernesses of life where it would normally wither.

#### *Protection*

He protects us from the slings and arrows of the devil and his angels, the demons. If satan had his way he would destroy all of mankind, but our Lord Jesus made sure that everyone who belongs to our Lord shall have safety for his very soul.

#### *Strengthening*

Christ also strengthens us for those times when we find ourselves confronted by the forces of darkness. Just as we are told we must put on the full armor of God, we are *also* blessed to know that we have put on Christ at our Baptism.<sup>5</sup> There are many times in which faithful Christians have succeeded where Adam and Eve failed, because our Lord gave them the power to rebuke the devil and stand firm against temptation – or, at the very least, be smart enough to flee before things got too dicey.

And we need that strength, that protection and that preservation. The devil uses two different strategies between Eden and the wilderness. In Eden he simply told a few half truths while disguised as a snake; in the wilderness he waited until Christ was physically weak from fasting. But he employs a different strategy now, hitting believers with two vectors of attacks. On the first place there is the

---

5 Galatians 3:27

constant fog of temptation from the godless culture around us – “free” online pornography, greed permeating the airwaves, warmongering, ego-stroking from psychologically addictive social media apps, and so much more. But on the other direction he threatens us with “canceling,” to destroy mens' careers and livelihood should they so much as whimper against the godless culture. We must be made strong by our Lord, devoted to following Him and staying true to His ways; as we trust Him to empower us, we rest confident in the assurance that Christ, the One who bested the devil, shall one day lay him to utter destruction.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 32:22-32

**22** The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. **23** He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. **24** And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. **25** When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. **26** Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." **27** And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." **28** Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." **29** Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. **30** So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." **31** The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. **32** Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh.

Psalms 121

**1** I lift up my eyes to the hills.  
From where does my help come?  
**2** My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.  
**3** He will not let your foot be moved;  
he who keeps you will not slumber.  
**4** Behold, he who keeps Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.  
**5** The LORD is your keeper;  
the LORD is your shade on your right hand.  
**6** The sun shall not strike you by day,  
nor the moon by night.  
**7** The LORD will keep you from all evil;  
he will keep your life.  
**8** The LORD will keep  
your going out and your coming in  
from this time forth and forevermore.

Romans 5:1-5

**1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. **2** Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. **3** Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, **4** and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, **5** 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.

Matthew 15:21-28

**21** And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. **22** And behold, a

Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” **23** But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” **24** He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” **25** But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” **26** And he answered, “It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.” **27** She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table.” **28** Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

Our meditation this Second Sunday in Lent is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction

In the Smalcald Articles, Luther says this regarding justification by faith alone:

Of this article nothing can be yielded or surrendered [nor can anything be granted or permitted contrary to the same], even though heaven and earth, and whatever will not abide, should sink to ruin.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, this doctrine that we call *Sola Fide*, is the doctrine “upon which the Church stands or falls.” It is so important that departure from it ruins entire denominations, leading to confusion, fear, idolatry, and potentially even conversations with demonic entities. If you don't believe me, allow me to go over a historical example which shows *just how bad* it gets when we deny *Sola Fide*.

Fatima, Portugal, 1917: three children claimed to have had a series of visions featuring an individual appearing as the virgin Mary. Lucia dos Santos, and Francisco and Jacinta Marto, began with visions of the mother of Christ telling them to pray the rosary – and that if enough people did so, the First World War would end earlier. This sounds at first like nothing special; children have flights of fancy all the time, believing themselves to be receiving grand revelations. But if we actually listen to what these children claimed the virgin said...well, that paints a *very* different picture.

As I read some of these messages, I'd like you to ask yourself: does this sound Christian?

May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1917:

“Would you like to offer yourselves to God to accept all the sufferings which He may send to you in reparation for the countless sins by which He is offended and in supplication for the conversion of sinners?”

June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1917:

“Jesus wishes to use you to make me better known and loved. He wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart.”

“Do not be disheartened. My Immaculate Heart will never abandon you, but will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.”

July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1917:

"Sacrifice yourselves for sinners and say often, especially when you make some sacrifice, 'O my Jesus, this is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the offenses committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.' "

"You saw Hell where the souls of poor sinners go. In order to save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If people do what I ask, many souls will be saved and there will be peace.”

August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1917:

"Pray, pray a great deal and make many sacrifices for many souls go to Hell because they have no one to make

---

1 SA II.1

sacrifices and to pray for them." <sup>2</sup>

Close to a century later, pope John Paul II carried out a “consecration” of, well, everyone, to this “immaculate heart” of Mary. It includes such prayers as this to the virgin:

“From famine and war, *deliver us*.

From nuclear war, from incalculable self-destruction, from every kind of war, *deliver us*.

From sins against the life of man from its very beginning, *deliver us*.

From hatred and from the demeaning of the dignity of the children of God, *deliver us*.

From every kind of injustice in the life of society, both national and international, *deliver us*.

From readiness to trample on the commandments of God, *deliver us*.

From attempts to stifle in human hearts the very truth of God, *deliver us*.

From the loss of awareness of good and evil, *deliver us*.

From sins against the Holy Spirit, *deliver us, deliver us*.

Accept, O Mother of Christ, this cry *laden with the sufferings* of all individual human beings, *laden with the sufferings* of whole societies.”<sup>3</sup>

So. Does this sound Christian to you? It sounds about as Christian to me as an islamic call to prayer sounds – that is, all this Fatima business is incredibly *un-Christian* isn't it? Not just for the cultic devotion to Mary, not just for the bizarre proclamations and prophecies of doom, oh no. All of that is superficial, like the leaves of a plant. Our Epistle reading today shows us the *root* of why it is wrong, in that this Fatima thing is entirely predicated on a lack of Christian faith. That is to say, trusting in Christ alone to save you and *believing* that you are justified having that very faith.

## The Problem

What's the problem here? Why would I say they lack faith? So far as they proclaim that the Fatima event is true and so long as they believe Mary was really there, they certainly have *some* sort of faith, but it is not Christian. Unfortunately they refuse to believe what God has promised, shown in our Epistle reading today.

Rome begs Mary to deliver them – not Christ. Now, typically a papist will tell you that they don't pray **to** Mary, but **through** her. Oh, they'll tell you that these aren't worshiping prayers, but just asking her to ask Jesus to do something for us all, like playing a divine game of telephone. Looking at these prayers from John Paul II, we can see that those excuses are horseshockey. Rome isn't praying to Mary in such an innocuous way (it is *never* innocuous, but they always make it sound that way); no, they are *desperately* begging her to intervene herself to save humanity and deliver them, as though Mary were a goddess.

Such prayers are clearly idolatrous,<sup>4</sup> and inexcusable in their way of trusting the spirit of a human woman for deliverance instead of our Lord, but they do not come from nowhere. The Roman church *ate up* the messages from these children because the messages portray Christ as angry with all the world, angry with Christians, disgusted by what He sees, and if it were not for Mary then He would destroy everyone in an instant. The Papacy confirmed and rejoiced to hear from the children that it is not the blood that Christ shed on the Cross which offered salvation, but the “immaculate heart” of the Theotokos. This is the exact *opposite* of trusting Christ for deliverance and salvation; it is trusting Him to be an angry, vindictive destroyer, held back only by the kisses bestowed on Mary by churchmen.

That from which you expect all your good, that is what you truly worship. By praying desperate

<sup>2</sup> These quotations and more can be found at:

[https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian\\_appearitions/messages/fatima\\_messages.html](https://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_appearitions/messages/fatima_messages.html)

<sup>3</sup> Full text found here:

[https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000626\\_message-fatima\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000626_message-fatima_en.html)

<sup>4</sup> <https://thebookofconcord.org/large-catechism/part-i/commandment-i/>

litanies to Mary and believing the children's story that salvation and refuge come from her "immaculate heart," the papacy proclaimed its idolatry from the rooftops. And why wouldn't they? They did not and do not believe that Christ is their Savior – or else they would believe we are justified by Faith Alone. Remember that the messages given to the children included having masses of believers make *sacrifices* to pay off sins so that souls could be saved; this is a denial that Christ paid off those sins by His Blood, a great forgetting that He said "it is finished" while upon the Cross! But no wonder; if you dogmatically assert that faith in Christ is not enough to justify you before Almighty God, then you will flee to whatever refuge you can find – whether that is to your works, to the saints, to Mary, whoever.

### **The Solution**

Let us turn to our text. St. Paul says we have been justified by faith in Jesus. What does that entail? It means that "we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The one who believes in Christ, trusting in Him alone for salvation is *not* under the terrors that the children at Fatima were given. To the contrary, God sees you and I with a great *peace*, because Jesus established that peace with His very blood. Instead of the angry Jesus who insists that you bow down to His mother, the Bible presents us with a Jesus who loves you so much that He *perished on a Cross* to make things right between you and God. For Christians, there is no way that Christ would look upon you and decide you are under wrath for not being devoted enough to Mary – such a notion is entirely alien to His character.

Beloved, do you feel like those Catholics who flee away from Christ and try to find shelter in something else? There is no need. Our Savior says to you that it is through Him that you have *grace*, the unmerited favor of Divine deliverance and salvation. Shall we run in terror from Him who has done so much to establish peace and communion? Shall we run to the arms of some other spirit when He has promised us safety? Perish the thought! He invites us to trust in Him with such compassion and gentleness, that we must not doubt His gracious offer.

### **Awareness**

St. Paul also writes that on account of this grace from Christ who made peace for us, our suffering is no longer to be considered a sign of wrath in all situations. The "Mary" figure that spoke to the children in Fatima, and Rome after them, claimed that the plague of global communism was a punishment for people not praying their rosaries enough; in their minds, it confirms their belief that God is a scary tyrant who only ever wants to destroy, and only Mary can hold His anger back. But the Apostle replies that our sufferings are something we find joy in, because our Lord uses them to sanctify us further: suffering produces character which produces hope – and if we hope in our Lord's promise of deliverance from suffering, then we have all cause to hope in Him rather than someone else...even Mary.

Truly there is merit to the warnings that Scripture gives us. God indeed disciplines His children, and He indeed calls unbelievers to repentance through catastrophes, that they may turn to Him for deliverance. But for those who truly put their trust in Christ Alone for deliverance and salvation from sin, death and the devil, who rest with complete assurance that He spoke truly when He said "It is finished," those who are *justified* by faith alone, there is only comfort and strength for when such are caught in the crossfire of the strifes of this world. Let us move forward, in full confidence of what our Lord has done for us, that we may be the Church which stands, and by our witness help those who have fallen.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Exodus 8:16-24

**16** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” **17** And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. **18** The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. **19** Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

**20** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. **21** Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants and your people, and into your houses. And the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. **22** But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. **23** Thus I will put a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this sign shall happen.’”” **24** And the LORD did so. There came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and into his servants' houses. Throughout all the land of Egypt the land was ruined by the swarms of flies.

Psalms 4

- 1** Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness!  
You have given me relief when I was in distress.  
Be gracious to me and hear my prayer!
- 2** O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?  
How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? *Selah*
- 3** But know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself;  
the LORD hears when I call to him.
- 4** Be angry, and do not sin;  
ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent. *Selah*
- 5** Offer right sacrifices,  
and put your trust in the LORD.
- 6** There are many who say, “Who will show us some good?  
Lift up the light of your face upon us, O LORD!”
- 7** You have put more joy in my heart  
than they have when their grain and wine abound.
- 8** In peace I will both lie down and sleep;  
for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Ephesians 5:1-14

**1** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**3** But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. **4** Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. **5** For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. **6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **7** Therefore do not become partners with them; **8** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light **9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **11** Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. **12** For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. **13** But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, **14** for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,  
and arise from the dead,  
and Christ will shine on you.”

Luke 11:14-28

**14** Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. **15** But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” **16** while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. **17** But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. **18** And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. **19** And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. **20** But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. **21** When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; **22** but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. **23** Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

**24** “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ **25** And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. **26** Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

**27** As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!” **28** But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday in Lent is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Introduction**

Why gnats and flies? The passage we read from Exodus tells us about the third and fourth plagues that God sent to punish the Egyptians, and call them to repentance for keeping Israel in

bondage....and He sends gnats and flies in our reading. We hear about God turning the Nile to blood, and we can understand why He would do so; the Nile was the beating heart of Egypt, their source of food and water. God turning the Nile to blood is a wake-up call that convicts Pharaoh of the blood of Israelite children that he shed as he tried to kill every male born to the Hebrews. We can understand why God would later plague Egypt with darkness, as Egyptian paganism places a high priority on solar worship. By shrouding the land in darkness, God demonstrates His power over every so-called deity in the world and tells Pharaoh that the false gods Ra and Horus can't save him. And of course, we understand the great Passover teaching us that if we wish to be saved from destruction we must appeal to the Blood of the Firstborn. But...gnats? Flies? What is the point of *these* plagues?

I suppose one could simply shrug and chalk it up to God ramping up the scope and level of discomfort upon the Egyptians. Gnats are annoying. Flies are more annoying than gnats. The first two plagues were turning the waters of the Nile into blood and making frogs appear out of the same river. The plagues of gnats and flies were upon the entirety of the land though, so God is showing that His power extends far beyond the reach of the Nile and now all of Egypt stood warned. It would be easy to say this, that these two plagues were nothing more than an escalation. But I think there is more to it than that.

### **The Creator's Mastery**

Aaron struck the dust of the earth with his rod, and “all the dust of the earth became gnats.” There is no need for me to tell you that this means a *lot* of gnats in the land. Imagine noticing that there are suddenly gnats in your house, and being irritated at this you begin to clean. In the 15<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., this means sweeping the dust outside of your home. You go outside with whatever garbage you collected, ready to cast it out, and then you see the *swarm*, the veritable *cloud* of gnats all over the land. Dust is everywhere. And now gnats have taken dust's place. No wonder Pharaoh's magicians said that this was the “finger of God” that did these things. They could not replicate this miracle, and even if they had been able to produce a few insects on their own, the sheer, vast quantity of gnats – trillions and trillions of them – shows that the God of Israel has authority over all the soil, dirt, dust, the *very ground on which they stood*.

It is important to recognize that the magicians *believed in God* on account of this plague. They confess that only God could do these things – no sorcerer could do it. And if the magicians could not do it, that means the false gods they appealed to for their magic could not do it either! After this plague of gnats, the magicians are never again portrayed as trying to repeat what the God of Moses does or countersign Him in any way. Later on, they are covered in boils and cannot even stand up, perhaps as a warning against lapsing back into their old ways. While I certainly hope that they were brought to saving faith in our Lord, their confession is in stark contrast to Pharaoh who refuses to believe. Thus our Lord decides to intensify things.

### **The Lord Shows the Difference**

The next plague is flies. A gnat is relatively harmless, and as such the gnats were just a slightly scary annoyance to the average Egyptian. But while the gnats show God's mastery over the earth, the flies are a warning of *wrath*. With gnats, God tells them He is Lord of all creation; with flies, He shows them ever so gently why that should make them afraid. A fly can't kill you with its bite, but it can make your food go bad, make your fields lie fallow, distract everyone from doing any work, and drive the animals of the land – and the people – mad with irritation. With the flies, our Lord afflicts the land of Egypt with a mild but catastrophic plague.

All the land except for Goshen, where the Hebrews live. Our Lord tells Pharaoh the purpose here. “But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people dwell, so that no swarms of

flies shall be there, that you may know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth. Thus I will put a division between my people and your people.” Not only is this the God that made heaven and earth, but He also declares here that He has an assembly of people He calls His own – that is, a Church.

Make no mistake, this is about the Church, or all who believe in God, not some petty racial selection. We cannot forget that God shows no partiality. He does not play favorites between races, and He is no respecter of persons.<sup>1</sup> After all, this is the same Lord who spoke through St. John the Baptist, saying that our Lord could make children for Abraham from mere stones if He wished.<sup>2</sup> When He protects the children of Israel from the plague of flies, He is protecting people *who believe in Him* – whether they be descended from Jacob or not. During this time, as a matter of fact, many non-Israelite peoples were beginning to side with their Hebrew neighbors, and many would step out in faith to follow them in the Exodus.<sup>3</sup> The heart of the matter, the entire time, was faith.

### **Faith is the Dividing Factor**

Faith is what God takes into consideration when dividing up the children of humanity in His Judgment. Just as the Israelites were spared from the plague of flies in our reading today, and just as they were spared the increasingly harsher judgments to come – cattle destruction, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and the death of the firstborn – so too are Christians spared the fate of nonbelievers. It has always been this way, far before the plagues on Egypt and repeating throughout history. Noah and his family were the only ones with faith when the Great Flood drowned the rest of humanity: they alone were spared. When the Israelites took Jericho, the only inhabitant of the city to survive was Rahab – a single woman who believed in the true God, only her and her family were spared. Time does not permit me to go over every example, but Lord knows there are plenty of them found in both the Old and New Testaments, our Lord only sparing the faithful as He punishes the teeming masses of nonbelievers, ultimately with eternal fire.

Yes, this pattern will happen again and again until Judgment Day, when it then happen continuously, *forever*. When Christ separates the sheep and the goats, the faithful from the unbelieving, He will show the difference between the spiritual Israelite (the Christian) and the spiritual Egyptian (the nonbeliever) in a way that shall ring out eternally. Each time something terrible happens, from an economic downturn to a deadly disease outbreak to severe weather, part of it is God calling all men to seek the safety of their eternal souls by believing the Gospel. He is seeking men who will be like the magicians, who cast aside their former idols as they confess “This is the finger of God.”

As for me and my house, we hold on to trust that our Lord will keep us safe from the fires of His Judgment. All Christians do. But for any nonbeliever reading this or listening to it online, will *you* be like the magicians? Will you confess the Hand of the Lord upon His creation, calling all to trust in His deliverance? Or will you be like Pharaoh, harden your heart, and stubbornly stay the course to judgment? I pray for your sake that you follow the former's confession!

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

1 Acts 10:34, Romans 2:11

2 Matthew 3:9

3 Exodus 12:37-39

Sermon for March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Isaiah 49:8-13

**8** This is what the LORD says:

“In the time of my favor I will answer you,  
and in the day of salvation I will help you;  
I will keep you and will make you  
to be a covenant for the people,  
to restore the land  
and to reassign its desolate inheritances,  
**9** to say to the captives, ‘Come out,’  
and to those in darkness, ‘Be free!’

“They will feed beside the roads  
and find pasture on every barren hill.

**10** They will neither hunger nor thirst,  
nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them.  
He who has compassion on them will guide them  
and lead them beside springs of water.

**11** I will turn all my mountains into roads,  
and my highways will be raised up.

**12** See, they will come from afar—  
some from the north, some from the west,  
some from the region of Aswan.”

**13** Shout for joy, you heavens;  
rejoice, you earth;  
burst into song, you mountains!  
For the LORD comforts his people  
and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

Psalm 132:8-18

[Collect verses in **bold**]

**8** Arise, O LORD, and go to your resting place,  
you and the ark of your might.

**9** Let your priests be clothed with righteousness,  
and let your saints shout for joy.

**10** For the sake of your servant David,  
do not turn away the face of your anointed one.

**11** The LORD swore to David a sure oath  
from which he will not turn back:

“One of the sons of your body  
I will set on your throne.

**12** If your sons keep my covenant

and my testimonies that I shall teach them,  
their sons also forever  
shall sit on your throne.”

**13** For the LORD has chosen Zion;  
he has desired it for his dwelling place:

**14** “This is my resting place forever;  
here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

**15 I will abundantly bless her provisions;  
I will satisfy her poor with bread.**

**16 Her priests I will clothe with salvation,  
and her saints will shout for joy.**

**17** There I will make a horn to sprout for David;  
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

**18** His enemies I will clothe with shame,  
but on him his crown will shine.”

#### Acts 2:41-47

**41** So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in common. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

#### John 6:1-15

**1** After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. **2** And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. **3** Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. **4** Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. **5** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” **6** He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. **7** Philip answered him, “Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little.” **8** One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, **9** “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?” **10** Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. **11** Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. **12** And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, “Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost.” **13** So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. **14** When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, “This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!”

**15** Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

Our meditation this Fourth Sunday in Lent is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

There is a tension in the Christian faith that leaves many of us uneasy. I speak of the tension between God's *Love* and God's *Justice*. On the one hand, we believers are comforted to know that our Lord sent His Son to die for us and for His sake forgives us all of our sins; this is the Mercy of God. We are promised an eternal life that we do not deserve, for we are poor and miserable transgressors; this is the Grace of God. But on the other hand, Scripture portrays God as unspeakably violent on account of His Wrath; after all, the Psalmist writes “God is a righteous Judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.”<sup>1</sup> He promises that those who do not belong to Him will burn in the lake of fire for all eternity.

So the same God who says He is Love,<sup>2</sup> this very same Lord will burn people for trillions of years without end. His Wrath frightens us, terrifies us, and lay us low. Even in moments where we rejoice in the vindication offered to the saints by seeing the Great Judgment, when we meditate on what's coming to those who persecute the Church, we still find ourselves uncomfortable by the tension. This is the God who forgave me and promised me a blessed eternal future; why then did He not show the same mercy to Judas or to Nero or any other number of the damned? Am I simply fortunate to be unlike them?

Do not try to justify yourself by saying “Well I do not do as Judas or Nero did.” Judas betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver; we do it for free every day with our sins. Yet the Baptized believer is saved, while men for whom Christ died remain under a sentence of damnation. These men and women that God loves, He also says that He shall burn and destroy them. How does this work? How do we resolve this tension?

## The Alien Work

Scripture attests that the infliction of wrath is an *alien* work of God – that is, it is not native to His character, but He employs it in *response* to wickedness. God *prefers* to show mercy and blessing and prosperity to all, but it would be unjust to give this in perpetuity to those who hate Him. Ezekiel records our Lord saying “As I live, declared the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”<sup>3</sup> It is not that God is some sadistic tyrant yearning to squish people, but He is *just*, and He knows that it would be *unjust* to give eternal blessedness to those who hated Him and sinned with a high hand all their lives.

That men refuse the free offer of salvation is the reason they are damned. Upon their demise or at the Last Judgment, our Lord freely gives them what they – in their unending hatred of the Divine – would prefer anyway. Luther puts it this way:

“The Lord does not say that hell-fire was prepared for human beings. For although all are sinners and guilty of eternal death, God nevertheless wanted to prevent this misery by giving His Son into death for us. And thereafter He revealed His good Word to us, so that we know what we are to do if we want to serve God and live to please Him. So our Heavenly Father would very much like for us to be saved and, therefore, has ordained for us, not eternal fire, but heaven and eternal life.”

Regarding those who reject the Gospel, Luther says

“But we go on despising the forgiveness of sins through Christ as a trifling treasure. If only we had enough money and possessions! These mean more to us. Moreover, we also take no delight in doing what God tells us to do in order to serve Him. Since, then, we degenerate to the very level of the devil and observe his will more than

---

1 Psalm 7:11

2 1 John 4:8

3 Ezekiel 33:11

the Word of our Lord God, it must follow that we are obliged to share this judgment. We prepare this doom for ourselves. We could, to be sure, have a better lot; but we do not want the better lot.”<sup>4</sup>

Whoever ends up damned would prefer to be damned in the first place. Whoever would be brought into the fold of the saved, God brings them salvation by bringing them to faith in the Gospel. It is that easy to understand. You might reply to me “why then are so many more damned than saved?” To this I reply, it is a double edged tragedy. The majority of humanity will end up damned because they prefer their sin over receiving forgiveness and renewal; to repent and believe in the Gospel would result in our Lord changing their ways and purifying them, and they simply do not want that. This is the first tragedy, for they do not want the one thing that could bring them true joy.

The second tragedy of this is that they refuse mercy while God *wants* to be merciful to them! Our Lord *loves* forgiving and being merciful, far more than doling out His justice on the deserving. Scripture teaches us this about the Lord's wrath, saying “His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah writes in Lamentations, “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness.”<sup>6</sup> People resist this gracious offer, even when they know that Christianity is true – almost as if they *know* that God wants to show them His blessings, and this is their opportunity to try to spit in His face. They do so to their downfall.

## God Loves Showing Mercy

In our Old Testament reading, our Lord proclaims to the Israelites that He will restore them. These people who had abandoned God to go worship idols and sacrifice their children and engage in cultic orgies had certainly merited great discipline. This discipline came in the form of the Exiles, both of Northern Israel and of Judah. Many people were slaughtered, many were carried away into slavery, still others fled into the wilderness where they likely starved. God poured out His anger on the harlot Israel for so thoroughly breaking the Covenant He established with them at Horeb.

But while God certainly disciplined His people, nonetheless He spends a great deal of time promising a great restoration. “In the time of My favor I will answer you” - that is, when they repent of their sins and return to Him. God promises to these former rebels that He will keep them once more, bring them back to the land, and liberate those captives who had been carried away. Not *only* will God restore them, He says, but He will make desolate hills green with pasture, He will protect them from heat stroke, He will make the terrain easier to traverse, and He will show the people where all the good water is to drink and be refreshed. And when God has brought the exiles back, He will tell the heavens and the earth to *party*, to burst forth in exultation and joy as He comforts His afflicted people. Of course, this is a picture mostly of the eternal state after the Resurrection, but God intended the message to comfort those Israelites who were coming to realize that they had made a grave mistake with their spiritual straying.

One gets the sense from this text that when all this restoring happens, our Lord will let out a great big “Finally!” as He gets to show the kind of mercy He has always wanted to show to those who formerly rebelled, the ones who have finally come back to their senses and repented. It shows the same spirit as the rejoicing of the father in the Prodigal Son parable, wherein our Savior relates to us how joyous God is when a sinner turns back. It reminds us that Jesus says Heaven rejoices whenever someone receives God's forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

---

4 From *What Luther Says*, vol.II, comp. Ewald M. Plass (Concordia, 1959), pg.625

5 Psalm 30:5

6 Lamentations 3:22-23

7 Luke 15, especially vs.1-10



## **So should we!**

We must not forget that as God rejoices to show mercy, so should we rejoice to see Him show mercy. He loves forgiving and comforting and restoring people, and we must as well. When someone turns their life around and becomes a Christian, we should be supportive; they ought not be elevated to be leaders in the Church, but we have no right to throw their past sins in their face. God was pleased to see them repent and be restored, why would we ever resent that?

We must also rejoice to *be* merciful as well. Yes, there is a time and a place for judgment, for warfare, for conflict.<sup>8</sup> But then we need to get right back to mercy. There is a time for being at odds with others, but we must yearn to build people up, to support, to comfort the afflicted and to forgive whenever we can. The same way God bids all of creation to say “Finally!” at the restoration of His people, because He has been *waiting* for their repentance and to forgive them, so must we be excited to have the opportunity to do so. After all, before we we believers, that is how our Lord felt about us; He sings the same song from our Old Testament reading over each one of us when we are Baptized, and shall sing it again as we enter into Paradise. Let us likewise focus more on mercy and compassion than wrath, and earnestly seek to be merciful to those around us, for this is how Christ first loved us.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

8 Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Sermon for April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

READINGS

Genesis 22:1-14

**1** After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **2** He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." **3** So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. **4** On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. **5** Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you." **6** And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. **7** And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" **8** Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together. **9** When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. **10** Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. **11** But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." **12** He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." **13** And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. **14** So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Psalm 43

**1 Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause  
against an ungodly people,  
from the deceitful and unjust man  
deliver me!**

**2 For you are the God in whom I take refuge;  
why have you rejected me?  
Why do I go about mourning  
because of the oppression of the enemy?**

**3 Send out your light and your truth;  
let them lead me;  
let them bring me to your holy hill  
and to your dwelling!**

**4 Then I will go to the altar of God,  
to God my exceeding joy,  
and I will praise you with the lyre,  
O God, my God.**

**5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you in turmoil within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my salvation and my God.**

### Hebrews 9:11-15

**11** But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) **12** he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. **13** For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, **14** how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

**15** Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

### John 8:37-59

**48** The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” **49** Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. **50** Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. **51** Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.” **52** The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ **53** Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?” **54** Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ **55** But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word. **56** Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” **57** So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” **58** Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” **59** So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Our meditation for this Fifth Sunday in Lent is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **The Old System**

Have you ever read Leviticus? Third book of the Bible, it contains the “priestly code.” In Leviticus, there are commands for how priests and Levites were to live, teach, and work; it also has a liturgical calendar and various ethical laws as well. But the most striking part is the sacrificial system. Almost everyone in ancient Israel was required to bring forth a sacrifice at some point in their lives, and most people had to do it hundreds of times, if not thousands. Blood sacrifices were made for firstborns, for the mothers of newborns, for the consecration of priests, for the consecration of the people, for sin offerings, for peace offerings, for daily offerings, for declaring someone ceremonially clean, for addressing unsolved crimes, for...well, I could go on, but the point is, God instituted an extremely *bloody* religion.

Day in and day out, one could expect two things from ancient Israelites: a smell... and a mess. The blood of these sacrifices was spilled everywhere outside of the altar, the offal of the animals was thrown on the floor and the smoke of burning animal flesh wafted through the air like fog on a seaside harbor. I cannot put it lightly beloved, if you were taken back in time to Israel's wilderness wanderings or to the Tabernacle at Shiloh, the most intense memory you would take back to the present day would be just these two things, the smell and the mess. This is to say nothing of the howls and screeches of turtledoves and rams and bulls and goats being slaughtered every day at all hours ringing into your ears, etching the sound into your memory *permanently*. No wonder St. Peter says that the Law was

something that no one could bear.<sup>1</sup>

### The Reason for the Old System

This is uncomfortable to think about, certainly. But have you considered *why* God instituted such a bloody, extreme sort of system? Allow me to explain it with a story. One of my professors in Bible college attempted witnessing to a Jewish man. He had met the man through a work associate, and when this Jew heard that he was a Christian professor, he decided to ask about Christianity and the Gospel almost purely out of curiosity. For the average Jew, it isn't exactly an every day occurrence that you hear about someone willing to chat about Jesus to a Jew – and my professor was energized at the thought of having the conversation.

The conversation seemed to start out well enough. The professor spoke about the Apostles being reliable eyewitnesses to Jesus' Resurrection, to the forgiveness offered to everyone, and to the power of the Word to regenerate people. Their discussion proved somewhat fruitful, as the Jew was unable to come up with any reason to deny the historicity of the Gospels, and he was even willing to go so far as to say that Jesus makes for a fine Savior...to the Gentiles. But the witnessing went to something of a standstill when the professor said “not just the Gentiles, but you Jews as well. There is salvation in no one else my friend.”

This notion irked the Jew. He responded by appealing to the Law of Moses, saying that as it had been handed down to the children of Israel then surely the blood descendants of Israel received it as well. And what does the Law say? “If a person does them, he shall live by them.”<sup>2</sup> But that is when my professor cited our reading for this Sunday. The conversation sounded a little like this after that point: “So Moses saves you, huh?”

“Well, not Moses, but the Law passed from him to us.” the Jewish man replied.

“What does the Law say you need to do when you sin?”

“Well it tells us to make sacrifices...”

“So you're hosed then. There is no altar, no Temple, the Romans destroyed it. You can't make any sacrifices according to the Law of Moses, can you?”

And from there, he began stuttering, and the conversation did not go very far after that. You see, if the sacrifices truly paid for sins, then being unable to perform them meant there was no means of salvation. But if they did not pay for sins in the sense of truly absolving someone of guilt, then, as my professor asked, “*don't you think God is trying to tell you something?*” The Jew did not want to answer that question, because he knew the answer: all this bloodshed would point straight to Jesus Christ.

### Christ was the true reason

The Mosaic system demanded sin offerings for two reasons. First, by being covered in the blood of animals, the sins of the people were not forgiven so much as *covered*, as with clothing. One could not approach God, be a part of His congregation, or receive His blessings unless animals had paid that price for them; in other words, to even be able to *ask* Him for forgiveness for your sins, sacrifices had to happen to permit you to be in His presence. Even then, some sins were not met with sacrifices, but immediate execution of the perpetrator.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason for these sacrifices was to point the children of Israel to trusting in the Messiah who was to come. Every time an Israelite brought a sin offering to the priest, he recognized that his sin was being covered, and one day the Messiah would come who would undo all of his sin entirely. Every time he made an offering after the priest declared him or his wife ceremonially clean, he was remembering that one day the Messiah would come and make *everyone* ceremonially clean by His

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 15:10

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 18:5

<sup>3</sup> Namely idolatry, murder, and adultery.

salvific work. The tragedy is, the ancient Israelites began seeing the sacrificial system as their means of forgiveness and salvation, effectively turning it into an idol that gave them permission to live as riotously and unjustly as they wanted; eventually God simply told them that He hated their Mosaic observances because of this, and he counted them as *worthless*.<sup>4</sup> The tragedy turned to insult when the Temple was taken away from them, leaving no other option but faith in Christ, and they responded by turning their faith toward their collective identity.

## Conclusion

Beloved, though they rejected Christ in favor of idolatry (and still do, as my professor learned), this only makes the Gospel shine more brightly. God made His point with all of those sacrifices, that no matter how much one is covered in the blood and ashes of animals there is only true forgiveness and salvation by being covered in the blood of Christ. We receive Communion, partaking of His Body and Blood, to remember this – that instead of *us* having to bring a sacrifice to God, God brings His Sacrifice to us! To strengthen and preserve us in this life-giving Sacrament! Not only does He set us free from a code that demands so much of us, He adds to this freedom by freely giving to us great blessings, eternal life, our daily bread, and the power of new life from our Baptism onward.

Those who stubbornly hold onto their idolatrous judaism (or any other non-Christian religion, though frankly the jews have far less an excuse than the pagans do), do so to their great loss, and if they persist then it will be their damnation. But for you and I, shall we hear that God has set us free and choose slavery instead? Shall we hear that He offers such great gifts through His Son Jesus, and choose loss? Shall we hear that we can keep our animals and grain and children and the ways we dress, the music we love, our folkways, that God loves these and wants us to steward them as our own, and turn around to go after a dead Mosaic covenant? Perish the thought! Let us rejoice in His liberation and in His grace! Let us breathe in this new life and belong to Him for whom all is given unto His *true* Israel, the Church.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 Isaiah 1:13-17

Sermon for April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
PALM SUNDAY

READINGS

Zechariah 9:9-12

- 9** Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!  
Behold, your king is coming to you;  
righteous and having salvation is he,  
humble and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- 10** I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall speak peace to the nations;  
his rule shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.
- 11** As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.
- 12** Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;  
today I declare that I will restore to you double.
- 13** For I have bent Judah as my bow;  
I have made Ephraim its arrow.  
I will stir up your sons, O Zion,  
against your sons, O Greece,  
and wield you like a warrior's sword.

Psalms 31:9-18

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 9** Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eye is wasted from grief;  
my soul and my body also.
- 10** For my life is spent with sorrow,  
and my years with sighing;  
my strength fails because of my iniquity,  
and my bones waste away.
- 11** Because of all my adversaries I have become a reproach,  
especially to my neighbors,  
and an object of dread to my acquaintances;  
those who see me in the street flee from me.
- 12** I have been forgotten like one who is dead;  
I have become like a broken vessel.
- 13** For I hear the whispering of many—  
terror on every side!—  
as they scheme together against me,  
as they plot to take my life.
- 14** But I trust in you, O LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.”

**15** My times are in your hand;  
rescue me from the hand of my enemies and from my persecutors!

**16** Make your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your steadfast love!

**17 O LORD, let me not be put to shame,  
for I call upon you;**

**let the wicked be put to shame;  
let them go silently to Sheol.**

**18 Let the lying lips be mute,  
which speak insolently against the righteous  
in pride and contempt.**

Philippians 2:5-11

**5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Matthew 21:1-11

Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

**5** “Say to the daughter of Zion,  
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” **11** And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Our text for meditation this Palm Sunday is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Behold your King!**

“Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey.” What does this mean?

It means Jesus is unlike any other king in history. The vast majority of human kings of this earth have been greedy, wrathful, arrogant swine. The mass of kings throughout history is replete with utter scoundrels. Men like King Ahab, who conspired with his pagan wife Jezebel to have a man wrongfully executed just so he could have another vineyard.<sup>1</sup> Men like King Ahaz, who burned his own son alive as a sacrifice to pagan gods.<sup>2</sup> Even among kings widely considered *good*, you have despicable acts like King David's adultery with Bathsheba and his scheme to get Bathsheba's husband killed in battle.<sup>3</sup>

We find examples of royal misbehavior all over history even after the completion of Scripture's Canon. Ferdinand I of Naples sired twenty children from the various women he called home – except for “allegedly” his affair with his sister; he also had a hall of mummies he made from his opponents that he had executed. Other kings showed their wickedness in mundane ways, like their slavish obedience to the papacy shown whenever it was time to burn a Protestant at the stake. This often involved mass killings of Christians by Christians – and I don't mean *just* the petty and stupid wars that the kings of Christendom loved declaring. In France, some 30,000 French Protestants (the Huegenots) were murdered in the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre because Charles IX and his mother Catherine de Medici saw them as a “threat” to their power. In the East, Emperor Andronikos Komnenos encouraged the Eastern Orthodox Christians in Constantinople to massacre 60,000 Catholics and sell the survivors to muslims as slaves. While there have been ostensibly good kings who waged good wars and treated their people a bit more fairly, even these had their sins; they do not undo the general calamity of rule by sinners.

The Triumphal Entry, fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy, told the people that things were about to change. When Christ entered into Jerusalem on that colt, there was certainly a tremendous celebration; one has to wonder if the people celebrating had a feeling that *finally* this was going to be a *truly* good King, this Messiah who would come to deliver them. No more corrupt leadership, no more corrupt priests, this Messiah was – in their eyes – supposed to come in and *fix* things once and for all. Of course, because Jesus does not do that during His earthly ministry, the tone quickly changes. This same crowd cries “Crucify Him, Crucify Him” just a few days later. His first Advent and His earthly ministry was not for instituting an earthly paradise, but to *save* their souls! But the crowd does not know that yet. We can imagine their frustration dawning on them when Pilate shows Christ bound at the hands, and the realization that they were still going to be bound to Roman oppression, still have to pay unfair taxes, and still slave away to the Pharisaic system; since they saw that nothing earthly would change (and it fundamentally hasn't even to this day), their cry for the crucifixion of Jesus was likely borne out of severe disappointment.

### **The Humility of our King**

How did they miss it? Our Old Testament reading says that the King arriving in Jerusalem would be humble, and that He would speak peace to all the races of man. How did they forget that He came to establish peace between God and man by shedding His blood? Clearly they were not thinking about *that* part of His mission, or else they would not have turned around and hated Him. If anything, they focused solely on the word “righteous.” They must have read about speaking peace to nations and assumed it was victory stipulations, that when the prophet says He would deliver people from the bottomless pit he meant that the Messiah would free *political* prisoners and slaves. They wanted one thing, and they were willing to ignore or twist whatever Zechariah prophesied until the Scriptures matched the Messiah they invented for themselves in their minds. But as Christ is *humble*, He was never going to be that way.

That Christ is humble means that humility is inherent to His character forever. You will never see our Lord Jesus being arrogant, demanding accolades, or parading His greatness for nothing but an

---

1 1 Kings 21

2 2 Kings 16:1-4

3 2 Samuel 11



ego boost.<sup>4</sup> This is one of the things that makes Him so perfect. Proverbs 3:34 says “Toward the scornful He is scornful, but to the humble He gives favor.” This is to say, God blesses those with humility; Christ, being perfectly humble, is perfectly and infinitely blessed. When every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,<sup>5</sup> they won't be doing so out of some obligation to stroke the Divine Ego or something – they will recognize His greatness *for who He is*. Our eternal praise unto Him is made all the more precious to Christ because He receives it with humility.

### Until the King's Return

Now, does all this talk about Christ's humility mean that He will not judge the wicked and destroy evil? Of course not. In fact, it is that very humility which assures us that Jesus will not say “saving you is beneath me.” It is that very humility which meant He was willing to be borne in a smelly little manger for the sake of His salvific mission. And in humility, Christ will judge the living and the dead upon His return – doing so because it is right, rather than to elevate His own self-esteem. He will and does most certainly rule “from the River to the ends of the earth,” that is the entirety of creation, but He will and does rule with the absolute purest of motives and actions.

The very thing which the children of Judah rejected is the very thing which brings us to worship our Lord Jesus, and it is the very thing that He calls us to foster as well. In humility He went into Jerusalem not on a warhorse but a colt; He was willing to descend from the Heavenly Throne to save us poor sinners; He is willing to rescue us when He returns, and indeed He has promised it. In the meantime, we are called to be humble as well – recognizing that we do not *deserve* what we are receiving.

The children of Judah, fresh out of Exile in Babylon, receive this message from Zechariah as the Temple is being built. The latter half of the prophecy tells them that one day they would be raised up to fight the Greeks; three hundred and fifty years after Zechariah, Antiochus Epiphanes would sacrifice a pig to zeus on the altar in Jerusalem, and God restored true worship by raising up the Maccabees to expel him and his army. The Triumphal Entry was almost two hundred years after that. Five hundred years total – that's a long time! Zechariah gives this prophecy to the returned Exiles *not* because it would be fulfilled in their lifetime, but because they needed to hear the encouragement. They needed to hear that no matter how long it took, they were to *wait* and *hope* for the fulfillment of God's promise, and that He would be faithful to bring salvation by a humble and righteous King. In the meantime, they were called to continue doing as God had directed.

Today He asks us to do the same, waiting for Christ our King to return while in the meantime committing to humble service. We still labor for what is right. We still go to the Altar for the preservation of our faith. We still repent of our sins, and we still look *upwards* as we await the fulfillment of the promise Christ gave us – that when He returns, He shall return to deliver us into an eternal paradise with no death, no sorrow, and none of the wickedness inflicted by the kings who came before.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 For a word study on humility, this is the idiom Zechariah uses: <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6041.htm>

5 Philippians 2:9-11

Sermon for April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025

GOOD FRIDAY

READINGS

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

**13** Behold, my servant shall act wisely;  
he shall be high and lifted up,  
and shall be exalted.

**14** As many were astonished at you—  
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—

**15** so shall he sprinkle many nations.  
Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,  
for that which has not been told them they see,  
and that which they have not heard they understand.

**53:1** Who has believed what he has heard from us?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**2** For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.

**3** He was despised and rejected by men,  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

**4** Surely he has borne our griefs  
and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
smitten by God, and afflicted.

**5** But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
and with his wounds we are healed.

**6** All we like sheep have gone astray;  
we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.

**7** He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.

**8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?

**9** And they made his grave with the wicked

and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

- 10** Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,  
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
- 11** Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.
- 12** Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and makes intercession for the transgressors.

### Psalm 22

- 1** My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2** O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,  
and by night, but I find no rest.
- 3** Yet you are holy,  
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4** In you our fathers trusted;  
they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5** To you they cried and were rescued;  
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.
- 6** But I am a worm and not a man,  
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.
- 7** All who see me mock me;  
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;
- 8** "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;  
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"
- 9** Yet you are he who took me from the womb;  
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.
- 10** On you was I cast from my birth,  
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.
- 11** Be not far from me,  
for trouble is near,  
and there is none to help.
- 12** Many bulls encompass me;  
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13** they open wide their mouths at me,  
like a ravening and roaring lion.

**14** I am poured out like water,  
 and all my bones are out of joint;  
 my heart is like wax;  
 it is melted within my breast;  
**15** my strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
 and my tongue sticks to my jaws;  
 you lay me in the dust of death.  
**16** For dogs encompass me;  
 a company of evildoers encircles me;  
 they have pierced my hands and feet—  
**17** I can count all my bones—  
 they stare and gloat over me;  
**18** they divide my garments among them,  
 and for my clothing they cast lots.  
**19** But you, O LORD, do not be far off!  
 O you my help, come quickly to my aid!  
**20** Deliver my soul from the sword,  
 my precious life from the power of the dog!  
**21** Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
 You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!  
**22** I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
 in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:  
**23** You who fear the LORD, praise him!  
 All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,  
 and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!  
**24** For he has not despised or abhorred  
 the affliction of the afflicted,  
 and he has not hidden his face from him,  
 but has heard, when he cried to him.  
**25** From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
 my vows I will perform before those who fear him.  
**26** The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;  
 those who seek him shall praise the LORD!  
 May your hearts live forever!  
**27** All the ends of the earth shall remember  
 and turn to the LORD,  
 and all the families of the nations  
 shall worship before you.  
**28** For kingship belongs to the LORD,  
 and he rules over the nations.  
**29** All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;  
 before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
 even the one who could not keep himself alive.  
**30** Posterity shall serve him;  
 it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;  
**31** they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn,  
 that he has done it.

## 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

**14** For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; **15** and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

**16** From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. **17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

## John 19

**1** Then Pilate took Jesus and flogged him. **2** And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. **3** They came up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and struck him with their hands. **4** Pilate went out again and said to them, "See, I am bringing him out to you that you may know that I find no guilt in him." **5** So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" **6** When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him." **7** The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." **8** When Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid. **9** He entered his headquarters again and said to Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. **10** So Pilate said to him, "You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?" **11** Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."

**12** From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." **13** So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. **14** Now it was the day of Preparation of the Passover. It was about the sixth hour. He said to the Jews, "Behold your King!" **15** They cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar." **16** So he delivered him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus, **17** and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. **18** There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. **19** Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." **20** Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. **21** So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" **22** Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

**23** When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom, **24** so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the Scripture which says,

"They divided my garments among them,  
and for my clothing they cast lots."

So the soldiers did these things, **25** but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. **26** When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" **27** Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

**28** After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), "I thirst." **29** A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. **30** When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

**31** Since it was the day of Preparation, and so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken and that they might be taken away. **32** So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him. **33** But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. **34** But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. **35** He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. **36** For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken." **37** And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."

**38** After these things Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took away his body. **39** Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus by night, came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds in weight. **40** So they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. **41** Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. **42** So because of the Jewish day of Preparation, since the tomb was close at hand, they laid Jesus there.

Our text for meditation this Good Friday is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

*"Behold, my servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted."*

Jesus Christ is the most famous man in all of history. Our dating system consists of B.C. (Before Christ), and A.D. (Anno Domini). He split the calendar, such that every time we say the *year* we are living in, we make reference to Him – and that is only the beginning. Most architecture in the West is built according to techniques men discovered by building churches. Our governments descend from the system established by Christendom, we have massive public holidays like Christmas that even nonbelievers celebrate. The influence of Jesus, the grip He has on the entire world through His fame, is undeniable. But why? What makes Jesus so famous?

It is not that He is both God and man, though He is. Jesus is Divine, but there are plenty of religions that make some similar claim about their fake deities, whether it is from the tales of hercules or some crazy person claiming he's the newest "buddha." The fame of Christ is not staked on making a similar ontological claim as other men. He leaves us no such room to put Him in some "demigod" category. The fact that His Name is more recognizable than hercules or "the buddha" - yea, more than every other man who claimed divinity - tells us that there is *something else* going on.

It is not that Jesus was a great moral teacher that places Him at the center of all fame, infamy, and even time itself; if we made that claim then we would be very confused, because there are many, many teachers in this world. Yes, Christ's teachings are absolutely *sublime*, perfect beyond comparison. But for the same reason that He is not counted among pagan demigods, He shall not be placed in the same category as a mere Plato or Confucius, His fame surpasses them easily. *Something else* elevates Him above all teachers.

Christ's fame is not explained by the fact that the prophets told everyone about the Messiah beforehand; there are many prophecies, and many claims to men fulfilling them. There is no shortage of men giving their hot takes as they pontificate on whatever political or cultural thing is to happen, and every time one of them is correct (most often by accident), they go about seeking to make themselves famous – claiming “I predicted this! I predicted this!” If Christ were famous by virtue of the prophets bearing witness to Him, He would be seen as nothing more than a very improbable statistical anomaly guessed correctly by the ancients. Predictions come and go, and people's astonishment at whatever modern predictions come true is fleeting; Christ's fame remains towering over them. *Something else* tells us that His fulfillment of all these predictions is far more important.

Of course, one can always point to the fact that Jesus Christ is *true*. Of all the men who claimed to be divine, only Jesus Christ is truly God. Of all the men who have been lifted up as great teachers, Jesus Christ is the *greatest* Teacher there ever was. And of course, the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah are all perfectly fulfilled *only* by Him. No other person in history can lay claim to having fulfilled over three hundred oracles about him – only Jesus fulfills this. But despite all these things being correct and Christ being true, this does not account for Him being so exalted, lifted up higher than any man. Right now, *billions* of people believe in Him, and the rest of humanity believes in something predicated on rejecting Him. This does not happen for mere matters of truth, beloved; the color of the sky has not caused such a rift in humanity, and nor have statements like “water is wet.” Truth, by itself, does not produce this sort of fame, let alone two thousand years of debates. *Something else* is at work here.

## Why Christ is Exalted

The only explanation for Christ's exaltation above all other historical figures is that He died and rose again. Today we are discussing His death. Now, a death does not sound so special when you consider that all but two human beings have perished.<sup>1</sup> Death is everywhere, and a constant part of this world. What makes Jesus's death so special?

It is for this very simple reason: He did not just die, He died *for* us all. Now, that does not sound quite so special at first either. Many men have died for you. Men have died to keep their children safe. Men have died on the battlefield for their countries. Men have died keeping others safe from certain calamities or in trying to put out disastrous fires. Yet while history is awash with men who have died for their countries or their families or their friends or even strangers, *something* makes Christ dying for you and for me different. As the prophet says, His death on that Cross makes kings shut their mouths, and brings Him the portion that would be reserved for the strong. The quality and purpose of His death grants Him the right to encircle the entirety of the cosmos in His arms: because of His death, now *all* of it belongs to Him.

It is that He died for *you*, but with such a death that He accomplished infinitely more than any other man's death could accomplish. Isaiah prophesies that He would be “pierced for our transgressions” - our sins. Sins against whom? Against God. *That* is the difference between Christ and every other man. When you or I look back on every sin that we have committed, the proclamation is made that Christ died for it. When we think upon the ways in which we *will* sin, we hear the

---

<sup>1</sup> Enoch and Elijah are the only exceptions to the rule of death.

proclamation that Jesus *already* died for it. Everyone, believer or nonbeliever, is confronted with the fact that Jesus Christ paid for it with His Blood.

The punishment for sin is *death*. If someone sins in any fashion whatsoever, the Lord declares that such an individual must die – and we all sin, so we are all under a death sentence. Because God loves justice, this is the inescapable fact which accounts for all the tragedy of the world. But God doesn't just love justice: He also loves humanity, which He created in His own image. We were meant to be the pinnacle of material creation, but through our sins we have marred and corrupted everything we were supposed to be. So because our Lord loves us, He does not *want* to destroy us even though justice demands it. The outpouring of His wrath is thus an *alien* work to Him, and He seeks to show mercy.

In order to reconcile God and man, and to undo the curse of death which arises from our many sins, there must be a sacrifice. That sentence of death must be placed on *someone else*, someone who is not under the sentence of death Himself. Jesus Christ is the only man who ever fit that rubric, one who never sinned and always perfectly obeyed God's Commandments. Isaiah points out that He did no violence – that is, He was no murderer or abuser – and “there was no deceit in His mouth,” meaning He did not so much as *lie* to anyone! If anyone sins, then that man dies on account of his own sins; because Christ never sinned, this meant that He could die for *other* peoples' sins. And that means dying for you and for me.

He did not *have* to do this. He did not have to suffer the most painful and mournful death in history. The prophet says He looked like any other man, even though He is Divine as well. He could have gone and lived some comfortable life – or even used His miracle working to command the loyalty of all nations. He could have been fantastically rich, had all the wives and children one could ever imagine, or even just lived some quiet life out in the countryside. But then, if He had not gone to that Cross, we would all be damned, forever. The wrath of God would never have been satisfied, and we would all remain under that death sentence. Because He loves us, even individually, He *willingly* chose to submit to death, death on a Cross, for our sakes.

## Conclusion

This is why Christ is exalted. His fame spreads beyond any other historical figure because two thousand years ago He died for us. Unlike the death of a soldier or a father or a firefighter, His sacrifice on the Cross applies to you and I immediately, constantly, an ever present reminder. No one who has heard the Gospel can escape the lifelong impact that this makes, and everyone hearing it must make a decision: since He has revealed Himself in this way to me, do I resist the mercy that He is showing me? Or do I accept it, turn and worship Him? Let us do the latter, for no other figure has, can or will show us such great love as He has.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025

EASTER SUNDAY

READINGS

Job 19:23-27

- 23** “Oh that my words were written!  
Oh that they were inscribed in a book!  
**24** Oh that with an iron pen and lead  
they were engraved in the rock forever!  
**25** For I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and at the last he will stand upon the earth.  
**26** And after my skin has been thus destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I shall see God,  
**27** whom I shall see for myself,  
and my eyes shall behold, and not another.  
My heart faints within me!

Psalm 118:15-29

- 15** Glad songs of salvation  
are in the tents of the righteous:  
“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly,  
**16** the right hand of the LORD exalts,  
the right hand of the LORD does valiantly!”  
**17** I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the LORD.  
**18** The LORD has disciplined me severely,  
but he has not given me over to death.  
**19** Open to me the gates of righteousness,  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.  
**20** This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.  
**21** I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.  
**22** The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.  
**23** This is the LORD's doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.  
**24** This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.  
**25** Save us, we pray, O LORD!  
O LORD, we pray, give us success!

**26** Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.  
**27** The LORD is God,  
and he has made his light to shine upon us.  
Bind the festal sacrifice with cords,  
up to the horns of the altar!  
**28** You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God; I will extol you.  
**29** Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever!

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

**6** Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? **7** Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. **8** Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Mark 16:9-20

**9** Now when he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. **10** She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept. **11** But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.  
**12** After these things he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. **13** And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them.  
**14** Afterward he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. **15** And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. **16** Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. **17** And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; **18** they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.”  
**19** So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. **20** And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

Our text for meditation this Easter Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

[Note for Deacons and lay leaders: traditionally, the Very Lutheran Project has included very short sermons and encouraged our house churches to have very short services. The logic behind this is that Easter, like Christmas, is supposed to be a *celebration* – and Christians celebrate best when enjoying the day with their families. We encourage the same brevity today with a shorter homily. However, if your home congregation desires to have a *longer* service, we encourage the addition of an extra hymn after the homily, and chanting the Psalm instead of praying the collect.]

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## The Abolition of Dying

I have talked about death quite often in the past six months. Perhaps you have noticed it. The reason for this is not some macabre obsession, but rather an affirmation that *Christians do not die*, leading up to this very day. Christ tells Martha “Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live.” This all sounds like talking about the Resurrection, right? But our Savior goes a step further, saying “everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.”<sup>1</sup> This is to say, not only are you *justified* by faith in Christ, but by faith in Christ you do not experience the terrors and sorrows of death when it is time to leave this mortal coil. Believing in Jesus, *trusting* in Him to deliver you from the death sentence upon all sinners, means that He will do exactly as He promises and rescue you before death happens to you.

Today, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate the day that this promise became a reality, when Jesus Christ abolished dying for whoever believes in Him. Because *He* rose from the dead, *you* will rise from the dead – and more than that, if you have been Baptized, then you have already gone through death;<sup>2</sup> since that's over with, you will not experience it another time. This day, Easter, is when that blessed, precious promise became reality for us. There may well come a time when you have to leave the flesh for a while, but that is not death. Death is a period. A Christian departing the body is merely a comma, placed there before the rest of eternity begins for him.

This is one of the reasons we celebrate Easter in particular. It is not just a remembrance of Christ's Resurrection, but a *recognition* that He has won *infinity* years of blessedness and happiness for us. 800 trillions years from now, we will *still* celebrate Easter, and there will not be a hint of boredom or ho-hum doldrums surrounding the celebration. By rising from the grave, He guaranteed us the greatest possible future, so long as we believe.

## The Establishment of True Living

But that is not *all* that our Savior did. As if it were not enough to abolish dying, He also brings life to us in a powerful, amazing way from the moment we believe onwards. You see beloved, the quality and tenor of our lives *change* when our Lord saves us. Everything that Jesus told the Apostles would happen, happened exactly as He said it would; in the book of Acts, we see the Apostles casting out demons, speaking in tongues, picking up serpents, healing people, and more. Their lives were filled with achieving great things for God's Kingdom, being empowered by the Holy Spirit to do things beyond the capabilities of normal men.

Jesus is not promising miraculous powers to us, but something even better. The descriptions He gives of what believers will do is relegated to that first generation in the Church, pointing to the *type* of life that we live. It is true living, the kind where we are led by the Spirit to do the good works which change lives, bring others to faith, and please our Lord<sup>3</sup> – all of which are much more miraculous than handling snakes or speaking in tongues! And not only that, but we live in this new way with an unspeakable joy in our hearts, growing day by day.

This means that no Christian can say “my life was meaningless” when he or she is old and decrepit. For all the saints, God is building up hagiographies<sup>4</sup> which will ring out into eternity. St. Peter and the other Apostles may enjoy the distinction of being *first*, but all of us will look back on what our Lord has done, and rejoice to see the power of God displayed in our transformed lives.

---

1 John 11:25-26

2 Romans 6:1-4

3 Ephesians 2:8-10

4 That is, biographies of the saints.

**Let us Believe!**

Today Jesus Christ offers us a revitalized life based on the forgiveness of all our sins, a life which goes on for eternity in newness, joy, power, and peace. And what is it that He asks of us? That we believe and be Baptized. Therefore, let us spend the day in the joy of belief, remembering and holding close that our Lord Jesus has risen from the grave to give us eternal blessings, just as the Apostles rejoiced to see Him as they were in that upper room. Let us believe!

The Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 37:11-14

**11** Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. **13** And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. **14** And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the LORD; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.”

Psalm 33

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1** Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!  
Praise befits the upright.
- 2** Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;  
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!
- 3** Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.
- 4** For the word of the LORD is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.
- 5** He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.
- 6** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.
- 7** He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;  
he puts the deeps in storehouses.
- 8** Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!
- 9** For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.
- 10** The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
- 11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
the plans of his heart to all generations.
- 12** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!
- 13** The LORD looks down from heaven;  
he sees all the children of man;
- 14** from where he sits enthroned he looks out  
on all the inhabitants of the earth,
- 15** he who fashions the hearts of them all  
and observes all their deeds.

**16 The king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
17 The war horse is a false hope for salvation,  
and by its great might it cannot rescue.  
18 Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
19 that he may deliver their soul from death  
and keep them alive in famine.  
20 Our soul waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
21 For our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.  
22 Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.**

1 John 5:1-5

**1** Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. **2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. **3** For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. **4** For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. **5** Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

John 20:19-31

**19** On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” **20** When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. **21** Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” **22** And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

**24** Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. **25** So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.”

**26** Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” **27** Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” **28** Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” **29** Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

**30** Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; **31** but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday in Easter is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Israelite Despair**

When Ezekiel receives the vision of this valley, full of dry bones, it is during the beginning of the Babylonian Exile. God permitted the children of Judah to be carried off into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, because they had stubbornly refused to repent for *centuries* of idolatry, greed, oppressing their neighbors and allying themselves with pagan nations. We must note, however, that God calls the mass of skeletons “the whole house of Israel.” This is to say, God includes here the Northern tribes carried off into Exile by the Assyrians one hundred and forty years before Judah was taken out. Dry indeed, these bones, for they had been there for close to fourteen decades – that is, five or six generations.

The Northern tribes of Israel were taken to Exile, even permanent dispersion, for being worse than the children of Judah. Most of Judah's kings were bad, and they led their population to idolatry, child sacrifice, and other manifold heresies. But *occasionally* they would get a good king like Hezekiah or Josiah who would lead them to a temporary repentance – kind of the same way the book of Judges shows us with God raising up individual judges to deliver the people after they strayed from Him. But the Northern tribes? Forget it. From their first king Jeroboam I to their last king Hoshea, they refused to stop worshiping golden calves and foreign gods and doing their absolute best to become a complete *stench* to our Lord. Judah became a country again after their Exile: Northern Israel did not.

Let us imagine being among the ranks of that tiny, miniscule little remnant of Northern Israelites who still remained with their identity intact. They did not go *completely* extinct, but the survivors were shockingly few; in Ezekiel's day, one could potentially meet the last surviving men of Naphtali or Manasseh. Can you imagine going day by day, remembering every morning that God had abominated the tribe you came from? Could you get up out of bed, time and time again, with the knowledge that your people had so thoroughly broken the Mosaic Covenant that all the curses of Deuteronomy 28 came upon you and God *always* set His Face against you? Such was the reality of belonging to a dead country; no home to speak of, no promises from our Lord, and no inheritance for a better future.

Some of us do not have to imagine that feeling, for that is a present reality. Right now there are countless Ukrainians who have lost their homes and had to flee their country. There are Palestinians who have fled their country after seeing everything they knew blown up. In Syria, after the fall of Bashar al Assad's rule, that nation has become a violent, turbulent no-man's land. And sadly it appears that India and Pakistan are gearing up for war, and time will only tell if this means another generation of lost people with no home to call their own. Certainly there are and shall be countless children who will be able to relate to those dry bones, suffering under the consequences of their parent's mistakes – as well as their own.

It is for this reason that the bones proclaim with their forlorn voice, “Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.” Both the living and the dead among the remnants of the twelve tribes were facing the reality that they sinned, got all that they deserved, and had no right to even ask God for forgiveness. There was no Temple to make atoning sacrifices. There was no home to return to. There was nothing but the whips upon their backs, cracked endlessly by their new masters. God made it so that this people who loved their idolatry were forced to be ruled over by idolaters, and those rulers were far more cruel than the Egyptians who ruled over their ancestors before the Exodus. It was a crushing, horrible existence that left the remaining Israelites feeling devoid of hope.

### **The God of Hope**

In truth, without the Lord our God these Israelites would indeed be without hope; but God does

not let them come to that conclusion. He is the God of hope after all, and this applies to the faithful and forlorn alike. He promises to the children of Israel, to all the dry bones, that He will open their graves and raise them from the dead. He calls them “My people,” telling them that He had not cut them off as completely as they thought He had. Not only does He promise them life and declare their belonging to Him, but our Lord also promises a *home* to them once more; He says “I will bring you into the land of Israel.”

Now why would our Lord do such a thing? They had rebelled against Him so horribly, what was the point of even pretending that they had a future? Ah, but that future is the very thing our God had in view when He made these promises. He speaks of the Resurrection, that day in which all these Israelites will have life and their home once more. This does not happen unless someone comes to forgive their sins, to *make* them children of God again. This prophecy from Ezekiel is predicated on Christ going to the Cross to pay for all the sins of mankind – including the sins of Israel and Judah, the chief subject of the vision here. Without His atoning death, there would be no such vision and no such proclamation of mercy and love from our Heavenly Father. And without our Savior's Resurrection, neither would we hear of a future Resurrection for these Israelites and a return to their old home country.

The Atonement paid for the sins of all generations, past and present and future. Ezekiel writes in such a way that his vision points *forward* for those Israelites to take comfort in living once more. In view here is the Gospel, pure and simple; our Lord is not positing some political return to the land (indeed, the modern nation-state called “Israel” is *not* the topic of this chapter), for He is promising something much, much better. The ancient Israelites, those who repented of their idolatry and trusted in the true God, are hearing the good news that our Lord still loves them and includes them in the plan of salvation along with everyone else who believes.

### **The God of Hope *for you***

This is not just comfort for the Israelites and children of Judah, though. This is also a message of comfort for *you*, beloved. If God reserved mercy for a nation which ceaselessly and tirelessly rebelled against Him, from the moment He took them out of Egypt even to the present day, then He most certainly offers that same mercy to you and I. No matter how bad we think we have sinned, no matter how much the mud of iniquity has been smeared upon us, our Heavenly Father continues to beckon us to faith, offering forgiveness, renewal, and a place among the saints who inherit eternal life. All He asks is that we believe, trust, and seek Him out to deliver us from sin, death and the devil.

Someone might ask about the unforgiveable sin. What about that? If you are worried about whether you have committed it, then you have not done so, beloved.<sup>1</sup> Jesus Christ is stronger than your transgressions. If He was willing to die for the sins of the ten tribes, who had done unspeakable wickedness before the Assyrian captivity, then so much more are we assured that Christ died for *our* sins, and offers us the same mercy. He even makes the same offer to all the current crop of people displaced from their homes, offering them Paradise as their true home. Let us believe, and rejoice in the promise of eternal life in an eternal home with an eternal, blessed relationship with our Lord who loves us.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> The unforgiveable sin is nothing more than lifelong refusal to believe in Christ.



Sermon for May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY IN EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 34:7-16

**7** “Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: **8** As I live, declares the Lord GOD, surely because my sheep have become a prey, and my sheep have become food for all the wild beasts, since there was no shepherd, and because my shepherds have not searched for my sheep, but the shepherds have fed themselves, and have not fed my sheep, **9** therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: **10** Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them.

**11** “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. **12** As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. **13** And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. **14** I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. **15** I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. **16** I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Psalms 23

**1** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

**2** He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.

**3** He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.

**4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

**5** You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

**6** Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.

1 Peter 2:18-25

**18** Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. **19** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering

unjustly. **20** For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. **21** For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. **22** He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. **23** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. **24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. **25** For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

#### John 10:7-16

**7** So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. **8** All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **9** I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. **11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. **13** He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Our meditation for this Third Sunday in Easter is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

I think the default instinct in most of humanity, and even most Christians, is to hate pastors. Oh sure, perhaps someone might like his or her own pastor – and I truly hope that you like me! But I am certain that you can think of at least *one* minister out there that puts you in a bad mood, even at the mention of his name. To this day, even *mentioning* the pope will put many of us Protestants in a bad mood. Many people get angry whenever someone starts talking about Kenneth Copeland, Mark Driscoll, Andy Stanley, Rick Warren or any other megachurch evangelical figure. Perhaps in our Lutheran circles, anger can be evoked if I mention Steven Paulson or Nadia Bolz-Weber (she's not a pastor, but the fact that she pretends is enough to make people upset). Whatever my feelings are on them, the animosity felt against them by laity is understandable. Whoever it is that upsets us, whether it is by their actions or their doctrines, the standard feeling is to dislike that minister and *all ministers like him*.

On the one hand, it is reasonable. If I see a pastor saying something I disagree with doctrinally, it bugs me. I know that what he's saying is false, I know that he's teaching that falsehood to laity, and I know that this is going to cause problems down the road for most (if not all) of them. If I see a pastor who had some moral failing in his past, happily preaching behind an altar, it bothers me; in some cases like adulterers they shouldn't be preaching at all, while in others it just bugs me that they had that misstep in the first place even if they were restored to the office in good faith. This sort of thing *should* bother us, whether it is by doctrine or practice. Nowhere in Scripture are you and I told that we have to *like* everyone, and we are *especially* never told in Scripture that we have to like every pastor out there. God has told us to love, but not necessarily to hold some particular affection for them. If they're in the wrong, it is OK to feel that way.

But on the other hand, like anything else, this can go too far. There is a point where the hatred is the point. I have seen men on social media embracing the idea of wiping out clergy entirely, burning

everything down and starting from scratch. You know the type, they're typically found pronouncing anathema on everything they see, and telling everyone that x, y, or z minister is secretly worshipping demons. In their eyes, every last pastor is guilty of some doctrinal or moral transgression – and of course only *they* have noticed it, and only *they* are talking about it. They cook up a moral framework, impose it on everyone, and they are extremely angry that the ministerium doesn't immediately turn around and bow to their every whim. No pastor will ever be “good” enough for this kind of man, and so they have a common sentiment with the likes of the French revolutionaries who slaughtered priests en masse or the Bolsheviks who put clergy in gulags. It is not just some particular pastor they disagree with or dislike, but pastors as a *category* that they wish to do away with. We are all guilty in their personal moral system, and thus we must all be punished. It is shameful that such men call themselves Christian when the only thing they worship is killing.

### **Why the hate/dislike for pastors?**

So why is this a thing? On the one hand a whole lot of people (myself included) have a reflexive dislike of *some* pastors. Sometimes it is merited, while at other times it is just our particular sensitivities, being irritated by someone else; this instinct can be unfair at times, something we ought to always contend with honestly within ourselves. But on the other hand there are some who – if they were being honest – just want to murder us all. There is sinful murder in their hearts and bloodshed on their minds. So what gives? How does something like this arise from within our hearts?

Let me be clear: I am not talking about non-Christians. Nonbelievers hate God, and so they hate Christians. Pastors are the most recognizable Christians out there because we are supposed to be vocational ministers who proclaim the Gospel. If someone hates the Gospel, they will hate the men speaking about it from a pulpit. This is to be expected from those under the power of the devil.

When it comes to believers, I might mention is how one apple can spoil the whole bunch. One bad pastor – whether by heresy or by grievous sin – gives us all a bad name. But if I attributed this all to the rotten clergy out there, I would be doing you a disservice – because the primary reason for the suspicion against pastors among believers is that *pastors are not Jesus*.

### **The Peculiarity of the Pastorate**

You see beloved, before our Lord Jesus went to the Cross for us, He spoke about different groups that were easily understood by everyone around Him. Our Gospel reading takes place in Jerusalem right after He heals a man born blind; surrounded by pharisees investigating the healing and by all the people the blind man brought over, it was the perfect moment for our Savior to discuss the spiritual landscape in the first century.

-Those rabbis who came before Jesus, men who were teaching frivolous nonsense for money? The ones developing the talmud? Jesus calls them thieves and robbers, men who only cared about stealing, killing, and destroying people God loves so they could line their pockets and serve the devil.

-The ones God called to serve, who are derelict in their duties, are the pharisees<sup>1</sup> and the priests. God gave them spiritual authority over the people, but they turned around and abandoned the people to go seek fame, fortune, and whatever other worldly nonsense they wanted. Jesus calls this type of spiritual leader a hired hand. Most of the pharisees were *both* thieves and hired hands!

-Meanwhile there was an ultimate thief, the wolf, the devil, who loved nothing more than to destroy peoples' lives and their faith – something the

---

1 Matthew 23:1-12

devil continues to do to this day.<sup>2</sup>

Before Christ went to the Cross, the land was full of spiritual perils, the devil was hard at work trying to peel people away from faith in God, and everyone that was *supposed* to be protecting them was derelict in their duties – if not actively malicious. *But then Jesus happens.* He tells the crowd that He is the Good Shepherd, and believers are His sheep. He tells them He guards His sheep like a door and whoever believes is saved. He says He is willing to die for them rather than see a single one lost. And Jesus tells us a very precious truth when He says “I know My own and My own know me” and “they will listen to My voice.”

Every believer is one of the sheep in Jesus's flock. Deep down, we know that Jesus is trustworthy, Jesus will never lead us astray, we want *Jesus*. We yearn for the day when there will be the One Shepherd with the One Flock, just as He promises at the end of our reading. But in the meantime, as we wait for that blessed day, Christ does not give out any more “hired hands.” Instead He sends out the Apostles and has them plant...*churches*.<sup>3</sup> With pastors. Eventually St. Paul will talk about the office of pastor as one of the spiritual vocations given by God to protect from those same ravenous wolves – demons and false teachers – that were tearing through Judea during Christ's earthly ministry.<sup>4</sup>

But while God has commissioned us to do this work, we are still fallible men – sinners, even, just like the rest of humanity. And there are many thieves and wolves worming their way into the pastoral office and doing their best to subvert the lives of the laity. I say this to my contemporaries in this vocation: are you *surprised* when the laity hold you in suspicion? Are you *really* so befuddled that so many Christians instinctively react with hostility? The laity want Christ, but in the meantime the task is left to them to discern whether their pastor, the overseer of their spiritual well-being, is either a wolf in sheep's clothing or a normal sinner like they are. And if you are a well-meaning pastor, doing your best to be faithful, you will *still* be questioned all the time because deep down everyone is comparing you to Jesus – and you will be found wanting.

St. James says that teachers (those tasked with *spiritual* teaching, ie., ministers) are judged with greater strictness.<sup>5</sup> This stricter judgment is something that pastors have accept as a present reality. The stricter judgment comes from the sheep who know we are not the true Shepherd; on account of this we are held to a much higher standard. If we are suspected of acting like one of the former hired hands, or if (God forbid) we begin to act like one of the thieves and robbers, the sheep are right to reject us! Yes, Scripture tells the laity to support, obey and honor their spiritual leaders,<sup>6</sup> but the pastor is forbidden from demanding these things from them. To the contrary, St. Peter requires that we lead chiefly by example when he says “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly as God would have you; not for shameful gain but eagerly, not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”<sup>7</sup> The peculiarity of the ministerial office is found in the way that the man in it is given authority but cannot force it on people; the office itself demands honor, but the man must earn the trust of the people honoring him; he must lead, but by laboring harder than anyone else. In other words, he must sign up for some serious pain.

## Conclusion

Someone listening to this might be confused. Perhaps everything is going great, they love their pastor. Good! I hope such a man has done the work of earning his congregation's trust. But when it comes to other congregations, maybe they are not so fortunate. To such churches – and house churches, lest our Deacons forget that this dynamic happens to them too – I can only offer one exhortation. Please

---

2 1 Peter 5:8

3 Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15, 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

4 Acts 20:28-30, Ephesians 4:11-15

5 James 3:1

6 1 Timothy 5:7, Hebrews 13:17

7 1 Peter 5:2-3

be gracious to one another.

We are justified by faith alone. This goes for pastors and Deacons just as much as anyone else. If someone proclaims the faith, they ought to be treated as a believer, and Agape love is owed between believers. We must apply this between the minister and the laity. Love is patient, humble, hopeful and faithful.<sup>8</sup> Ministers must be tested to make sure they are not wolves or thieves,<sup>9</sup> but this should be done with a generous spirit, with the *assumption* that the minister means well. And in the minister's case, I exhort patience as well; the laity are *doing their job* to make sure they are not being deceived. In the spirit of Christian love, let us be gracious to one another, relying on the leadership of the true Good Shepherd who will never leave us nor forsake us.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

8 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

9 1 Timothy 3:10

Sermon for May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FOURTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

READINGS

Isaiah 40:21-31

- 21** Do you not know? Do you not hear?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
- 22** It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
- 23** who brings princes to nothing,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.
- 24** Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
when he blows on them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
- 25** To whom then will you compare me,  
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
- 26** Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
who created these?  
He who brings out their host by number,  
calling them all by name;  
by the greatness of his might  
and because he is strong in power,  
not one is missing.
- 27** Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hidden from the LORD,  
and my right is disregarded by my God”?
- 28** Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary;  
his understanding is unsearchable.
- 29** He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
- 30** Even youths shall faint and be weary,  
and young men shall fall exhausted;
- 31** but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;  
they shall run and not be weary;  
they shall walk and not faint.

Psalm 147:1-11

[Collect verses in **bold**]

**1** Praise the LORD!  
For it is good to sing praises to our God;  
for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.  
**2** The LORD builds up Jerusalem;  
he gathers the outcasts of Israel.  
**3 He heals the brokenhearted  
and binds up their wounds.**  
**4 He determines the number of the stars;  
he gives to all of them their names.**  
**5 Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;  
his understanding is beyond measure.**  
**6 The LORD lifts up the humble;  
he casts the wicked to the ground.**  
**7** Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;  
make melody to our God on the lyre!  
**8** He covers the heavens with clouds;  
he prepares rain for the earth;  
he makes grass grow on the hills.  
**9** He gives to the beasts their food,  
and to the young ravens that cry.  
**10** His delight is not in the strength of the horse,  
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,  
**11** but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,  
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

1 Peter 2:11-20

**11** Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. **13** Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. **18** Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. **19** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

John 16:16-22

**16** "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." **17** So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" **18** So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." **19** Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?" **20** Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. **21** When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the

anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. **22** So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. **23** In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. **24** Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Our text for meditation this Fourth Sunday in Easter is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

I love to exercise. Every morning I try to do some jogging, and when I get home I swing kettlebells and do pushups and pullups. In the evenings, if I'm not at Karate practice I'm swinging exercise clubs and stretching. I don't have any particular goal in mind for working out though; it isn't about getting large muscles or competing in tournaments for me. I simply love to move, to breathe, and to feel the blessing of good health that God has given me. For me, exercise is an act of gratitude unto the Lord for the body He gave me.

I recognize that this fitness habit will not last forever though. When I get older, I will have to spend more time in recovery, and my natural strength will be less than what it was. My joints will ache more, injuries will take longer to heal, and there will be a sense of decline. Strangely though, I cannot say that the inevitability of aging scares me, or that I dread it. Aging must be managed in this life, and exercise can help us stay feeling good, operating normally... but eventually we just get too tired and too old to live with the vitality we once had. Thankfully, God gives us a wonderful promise regarding all this.

## Decay through sin

Why do we get old? Why do we find ourselves weaker over time? One might answer that death is a consequence of sin, so as we get older we find ourselves feeling the impending departure from our flesh. That is only half of the problem. Sin is not just the *reason* for shedding the mortal coil; it is also the cause of the body's decay. Sin is not *just* rebellion against God in thought, word or deed. It is crime against what and who we were created to be. Sin is a wicked negation of creation, which seeks to undo what our Lord has done. Athanasius, one of the Church Fathers, explains the relationship between sin and decay this way:

For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time. 5. For if, out of a former normal state of non-existence, they were called into being by the Presence and loving-kindness of the Word, it followed naturally that when men were bereft of the knowledge of God and were turned back to what was not (for what is evil is not, but what is good is), they should, since they derive their being from God who IS, be everlastingly bereft even of being; in other words, that they should be disintegrated and abide in death and corruption.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, sin not only merits death by going against God: sin *is* a kind of death all on its own. The more sin one has, the more it undoes him. Have you ever met a man who repented after years of “hard living?” Perhaps someone listening to this sermon or reading it is one of these types. If you are, God bless you for being a faithful believer now! But I can assure you, and they can tell you, the

---

1 Found here at *New Advent*: <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2802.htm>



man who lives in sin ends up aging more quickly. Years of hard drugs, years of dealing with sexually transmitted diseases, years of staying up late partying, or any other number of things the “hard living” man gets up to, they take a toll on the body. I have met many a man that fried his brains with drugs or destroyed his organs with alcoholism; those who repented can tell you easily enough that their sins of choice aged them beyond their years.

The body gets older through a life full of sin; some people sin less than others, but nonetheless *still* sin, and so they age as well. Though we can do clean living and try to avoid transgression, this is no guarantee that we will remain young. Others find themselves weakened and decaying after a life full of struggling with the consequences of sin – like the labors men must undertake to provide food for their families, or the damage that childbirth does to a woman's body.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the mix of sin and labor and pain, and even the arrows of misfortune striking us from afar, build up and wear us down. Such is life, when the world and the flesh and the devil are seeking to undo us.

### **Vitality from God**

But life does not *have* to be seen as nothing more than pain and decay, beloved. Instead, we worship a primal, vital, *living* God – He is the *living* God, the God of *life*. In our reading today, God directs His readers to look up at the night sky with all the stars, saying “who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of His might and because He is strong in power, not one is missing.” Man is compared to the short-lived grasshopper, and all of humanity like grass that is here today and gone tomorrow. But God shows us that He made the long-lasting, near-indestructible stars, and He ensures that they will be there in perpetuity.

He promises to do the same for those who trust in Him. The children of Israel cry out “we are withering! We are hidden from God and we perish with His disregard!” But He invites them to ask themselves, would the living God who created the entirety of the universe be truly so limited? The God who named the stars and kept track of them, the God who knows everything there is to know about everything, is He *really* unable to see them? Such would be impossible.

And so our Lord promises to them a great strengthening. Over and against all of their enemies and afflictions, if they should believe in Him then they will be rejuvenated. In verse 28, Isaiah writes “He does not faint or grow weary.” In verse 31 he writes that they who wait on the Lord “shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint.” To the men of Israel who were disabled, malnourished, or injured, this promise extends to them should they place their trust in the Lord. To the men of Israel who were old and feeble, they are promised a day when they would not be faint, if only they believe in God. Because the Living God is strong and does not tire, He extends that very vitality to those who are found in Him.

### **The Promise of Everlasting youth**

He makes the same promise to you, beloved – and to the Church at large, which inherits all of God's promises by being in Christ.<sup>3</sup> This promise is not just for Israelites, but “they who wait for the Lord,” anyone who trusts in Him. This is part of being justified by faith, not just being free from the sentence of death, but a positive promise of eternal *youth* and *strength*. Instead of being frozen in whatever state we were in before our burial, we will be granted a powerful new nature which remains capable of doing great things forever. After the Resurrection no one will have dementia, nor will anyone be crippled or blind. God will trade those aches and pains of aging and exchange them for feeling good every day.

---

<sup>2</sup> These particular hardships are laid on our shoulders in Genesis 3.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20

In this life, our Lord gives us a taste of that blessed reality. The new life in Christ that we are given when we are Baptized reminds us that we are a new creation already,<sup>4</sup> awaiting the redemption of our bodies to catch up with our souls. In the meantime, we can expect that there will be moments when God calls us to do something, just as He called upon the faithful among Israel to serve and told them He would give them the strength to do it. When such moments happen to us, by the power of the Holy Spirit we can rest assured that He will enable us to do the works which He prepared for us before the foundation of the world;<sup>5</sup> such moments of renewed vitality are but a foretaste of that eternal blessedness. Should you find yourself healed of an illness like a particularly bad flu, or your prayers for a better night's sleep are answered, these are things which aim us at the immediate future (good works for us to do for our neighbors), and the future to come – not just eternal life, but eternal *living*.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 2 Corinthians 5:17

5 Ephesians 2:10

Sermon for May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIFTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

READINGS

Isaiah 12:1-6

- 1** You will say in that day:  
“I will give thanks to you, O LORD,  
for though you were angry with me,  
your anger turned away,  
that you might comfort me.  
**2** “Behold, God is my salvation;  
I will trust, and will not be afraid;  
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my salvation.”  
**3** With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. **4** And you will say in that day:  
“Give thanks to the LORD,  
call upon his name,  
make known his deeds among the peoples,  
proclaim that his name is exalted.  
**5** “Sing praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously;  
let this be made known in all the earth.  
**6** Shout, and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion,  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.”

Psalms 66:1-9

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1 Shout for joy to God, all the earth;**  
**2 sing the glory of his name;**  
**give to him glorious praise!**  
**3 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!**  
**So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you.**  
**4** All the earth worships you  
and sings praises to you;  
they sing praises to your name.” *Selah*  
**5** Come and see what God has done:  
he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man.  
**6** He turned the sea into dry land;  
they passed through the river on foot.  
There did we rejoice in him,  
**7** who rules by his might forever,  
whose eyes keep watch on the nations—  
let not the rebellious exalt themselves. *Selah*  
**8** Bless our God, O peoples;  
let the sound of his praise be heard,  
**9** who has kept our soul among the living  
and has not let our feet slip.

### James 1:19-21

**19** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; **20** for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. **21** Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

### John 16:5-15

**5** But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ **6** But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. **7** Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. **8** And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: **9** concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; **10** concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; **11** concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

**12** “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. **14** He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. **15** All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Our text for meditation this Fifth Sunday after Easter is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Let's talk about the Holy Spirit... or, more accurately, why we should talk about Him a lot more. We all understand from Scripture and recite in our Creeds that God is one Being who is eternally three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We speak of our Heavenly Father all the time. We are certainly “Jesus people” with how much we talk about Christ and everything He has done for us. The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, does not get much fanfare among us Lutherans. We don't talk about Him very much, except for the occasional “teaching sermon” where we remind people about “official doctrine,” but then we go right back to looking like we're binitarian weirdos.

Oh yes, functionally, most Lutherans are Binitarian – they act as though they only *really* believe in two of the three Persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit only exists on paper to them, and is never truly regarded outside of the box-checking we do when we recite the Creed. Perhaps you do not feel like *you* do this, but it is an easily observed phenomenon among the majority of our denomination. Even the pastors. Looking at the standard “Law and Gospel” sermon in the West, what do we hear from most homilies? God the Father is mad at you, Jesus makes it better, rinse and repeat every Sunday until you get your last rites. Why is this the case? Most likely the reason is that most of Lutheranism is terrified of the Holy Spirit. Tragically, we find Him threatening.

### **The Comfort Zone**

In our Gospel reading, our Lord Jesus tells us that the Holy Spirit will *convict the world*. Every liberalizing, leftward leaning Lutheran starts to shudder at that. “He will do *what*???” they ask nervously. “Convict? Oh no, that's not what God is all about. God is all about overlooking our sins, not convicting us of them....right?” Perhaps these types comfort themselves when they remember that Christ refers to the “world” that is the enemy of the Church, the roiling mass of nonbelievers who hate God and seek to persecute Christians. There is some relief at first when we remember that the conviction of the Holy Spirit is for *those* people, not for us.

Ah, but that is no good! Convicting the nonbelievers? Making them feel bad? Talk about that too much and you'll hear them pray, "Dear Holy Spirit, have You not heard 'judge not lest ye be judged?'" Every Lutheran body<sup>1</sup> has been preaching some doctrine of "radical acceptance" now for *decades* in the hopes of making nonbelievers comfortable when they walk through the doors of the nave. We have spent so long avoiding the conviction of the Holy Spirit because it sounds sad when someone says they felt "judged" at Church for their past mistakes. Lutheran bodies are terrified of speaking of the Holy Spirit, because that feeling the nonbelievers get, the feeling of being judged doesn't come from *us*, but *Him*. No matter how nice we are to a newcomer, someone who was dragged to the Divine Service by their parents or someone just checking Christianity out for the first time, the Holy Spirit will convict them as He calls them to repentance. And that judgment is one of the reasons the world never treats us fairly; we have a bad reputation among nonbelievers because the Holy Spirit won't let them feel comfortable around us.

I am saying right now that there is no fruit and no point in attempting to make the non-Christian feel more secure in his or her sin. If you bend over backwards, trying to make them feel more comfortable, they will never repay the favor. If you start condemning what they condemn, using words like "privilege" and "gentrification:" if you start attacking the things they call "racist" or "sexist;"<sup>2</sup> if you start ignoring or downplaying their sexual sins, character flaws and greed; all that will happen is you end up looking like the world while the world does not look any more Christian. You cannot appease the nonbeliever's sensibilities enough to get them to consider joining the faith, because it is the very guilt which they avoid that the Holy Spirit uses to convert them! In this case, *guilt is good*. But if you permit the Holy Spirit to do as He will, and tell the *truth* in love to the pagan – that his guilt is from the Holy Spirit witnessing against non pagan's sins, and Christ is the only cure – then there will be plenty of fruit in time.

## **Tired Condemnations**

I have seen that most Lutherans do not want to hear this. They do not want to make people uncomfortable, and so they avoid talking about the Spirit's ministry, instead preferring to watch video after video of "discernment" guys attacking Pentecostals. "Oh sure, maybe we aren't perfect, but at least we aren't like those crazy Charismatics!" they'll say. "Maybe we could do better, but if we go too far then we risk becoming like those loonie Enthusiasts who think they can speak in tongues!" Not only are people *scared* of talking about the Holy Spirit's ministry, they are also proud of how much they ignore Him! It is a diversion of guilt, and I'm tired of it.

I say no more of that. We should not be proud of ourselves just for being more orderly or civilized than Pentecostals. They are treating the Holy Spirit as though He really exists, while the vast majority of Lutherans treat the Holy Spirit as nothing more than a few lines we read out of our liturgy. "Oh, but He operates through the Word, and He brought us to the faith through Baptism," someone might reply, sheepishly hoping that we don't notice his meager, *low* view of the Third Person of the Trinity.

After we have finished up our arrogant, turgid, tired condemnations of silly Charismatics, there is a troubling tendency among us to try to put the Holy Spirit in the Word and Sacrament box. We are tempted to stuff Him into the Bible so we can claim we only ever interact with Him when we read it or hear a minister preach it or when we remember our Baptisms. We dislike the idea of the Holy Spirit being the Living God who dwells with us, pushes us toward good works, speaks as our conscience and often leads our very prayers. "Oh don't make me do things, Holy Spirit," our sinful nature begs, "oh don't require things of me, I'll- I'll meet You on Sunday, ok?"

## **The Real View**

---

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, we here at the Catacomb Synod seek to be the exception.

<sup>2</sup> This is to say,

But Lutherans should be *passionate* in the way we worship the Holy Spirit. He is the One who dwelt above the waters when our Heavenly Father created the heavens and the earth.<sup>3</sup> He has been the Great Observer in whom we live and move and have our being.<sup>4</sup> Every breath you take is a gift from Him, every time you take a step – or watch your infant child take their first steps – He watches and rejoices that the highest created being, humans, are doing things they were created to do. He is the Lord and Giver of Life, the reason your heart pumps blood through your veins.

He convicts the world, as our Lord Jesus says. We should rejoice in that. The Holy Spirit loves us so much that He refuses to allow us to continue in our sins. He will witness to us and exhort us to turn back, so that we do not find ourselves judged with the same judgment that is coming to the devil. He tirelessly brings forth Law and Gospel so that we repent, accept the conversion He wishes to work in our hearts, and look forward in faith to an eternal life in fellowship with Him. Such is the love of God shown to us daily, that He operates through His Word and Sacrament in this way.

But that is not all that the Holy Spirit does. We know that He is the Giver of Life, we know that He works in Word and Sacrament to convert us and keep us strong in the faith, but He also *guides* us. Christ promises to the Apostles “He will guide you into all the truth.” What truth? Christ is the truth – the way, the truth and the life.<sup>5</sup> To be sanctified is to be brought closer to the image of Christ in our words, thoughts, and deeds, that we may continue in the works prepared before the foundation of the world.<sup>6</sup> The Holy Spirit is the Giver of Life, and for us believers He is the Giver of *new* Life, leading us in a relationship where He helps us get *better* after living in a sin-sick world from birth onwards. We should talk more about the Holy Spirit, all of His works and ways. Otherwise, we are missing out on the joy that comes from these treasures, and a more full loyalty to God.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

3 Genesis 1:2

4 Acts 17:28

5 John 14:6

6 Ephesians 2:10

Sermon for May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SIXTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

READINGS

Numbers 21:4-9

**4** From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. **5** And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." **6** Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. **7** And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. **8** And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." **9** So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Psalms 107:1-9

[Collect verses in **bold**]

- 1** Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever!  
**2** Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
whom he has redeemed from trouble  
**3** and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.  
**4** Some wandered in desert wastes,  
finding no way to a city to dwell in;  
**5** hungry and thirsty,  
their soul fainted within them.  
**6** Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he delivered them from their distress.  
**7** He led them by a straight way  
till they reached a city to dwell in.  
**8 Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wondrous works to the children of man!**  
**9 For he satisfies the longing soul,  
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.**

James 1:22-27

**22** But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **23** For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. **24** For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. **25** But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

**26** If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. **27** Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

John 16:23-30

**23** In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. **24** Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

**25** “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. **26** In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; **27** for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. **28** I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

**29** His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! **30** Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.”

Our meditation for this Sixth Sunday in Easter is on our Psalm reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

For the past two thousand years, there has been a kind of person that is *skittish*, to say the least, about receiving material blessings. They are eager to hear our Lord Jesus say “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.”<sup>1</sup> They are happy to hear St. James condemn the rich.<sup>2</sup> They gobble up St. Paul's words when he says the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking.<sup>3</sup> They especially treasure Christ's stark warning, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”<sup>4</sup> They are downright passionate about collecting verses like these in order to make Christianity an *anti-life* religion. They see fasting and giving and doing missions work not as helpful parts of our sanctification, but *the* way to live consistently as Christians.

At the root of things, these anti-life individuals simply hate creation. They genuinely feel bad when good things happen to them in the here and now, and they feel good about themselves when something bad happens. They collect verses and passages from Scripture in the hopes to build some cumulative case against everything that goes into ordinary living. This is the sort of person who wants you to feel bad for not doing more for foreign missions, the type of man who thinks being a monk is ideal. For them, this life is a *test* where you have to spend all of your days in misery, hunger, poverty and loneliness or else you will find yourself condemned forever. This is the thinking behind the monastic movement, behind “Christian socialism,” and so many other misguided attempts at making our religion some sort of death cult.

But when they come across part of the Bible like our Psalm for today, they don't know how to react. The Scriptures are full of passages like this, praising God for delivering men from certain death, thanking Him for food and shelter and spouse, and all other matters where He provides good to people *in this world*. The entire Psalm recounts the good that our Lord does in helping the lost find shelter, releasing prisoners, healing men who had destroyed themselves through sin, delivering sailors from treacherous storms, giving water to the thirsty and food to the hungry, and uplifting the poor. And it ends in this way: “whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love

---

1 Matthew 6:19-20

2 James 5:1-6

3 Romans 14:17

4 Luke 14:26



of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Steadfast Love and This Life**

The God who created us and promised Heaven to all Baptized believers, also blesses us in this life. We are called to consider this as an outworking of Divine benevolence, His steadfast love. If we have eternal life in Christ, why then should anyone care about earthly blessings? Why not just join the anti-lifer and ignore the needs of the body, even the needs of our neighbors, as we anticipate eternity? In four hundred quadrillion years of rejoicing in the new Heavens and new Earth, one wonders why God would even bother with blessing us in this life at all. Yet here, we see the example of wanderers brought to a safe city as an example of His love for the redeemed, and the Psalmist invites us to meditate on that.

The first verse is the key here. His steadfast love *endures forever*. Beloved, God does not wait until you are in Heaven to do good things for you. Nor did He see creating the universe as the sole expression of love for us. With this Psalm, our Lord wants us to see that He loves us *now*. All these examples, from feeding the hungry to giving shelter to wanderers, are things that remind us of the concrete nature of God's love. His compassion and goodwill toward us is not a mere abstraction; it is not something from far in the past or something you have to wait for; His love is a tangible reality that we can observe showered over all creation even in this very moment.

As I type this homily, I am reminded that I am wearing a warm sweater. I may not be rich, but I have coffee at the ready. I have food in my refrigerator, and my loving wife is tending to our children and filling the house with joy. I have friends that I can spend time with after my labors are finished for the week, and I am looking forward to exercising at Karate class tonight. Even when life is hard, I have so many of these little blessings that I have no lack of happiness in my life. All of these things, the Psalmist would say, are because of the love God has for me, and he calls us all to meditate on this wonderful truth so that we are *always* aware of Providence.

### **Steadfast Love and Eternal Life**

Back to the original question, what do we think of all this in light of eternity? Why does our Lord bother blessing us in this way, calling us to notice all these things, if we are just going to shed the mortal coil and end up in Heaven? Beloved, it is because all these earthly blessings are a sample. God shows you blessing today so as to give you a *taste* of eternal life to come. It is as though He were saying to us, “I know that things can get hard in life, but worry not, let me give you a hint for the good that you will receive if you continue in the faith until the end.”

A fascinating aspect of this is that blessings may not always be equal in this life, but our Lord more than makes up for it. In this world, we see some men being richer than others. We see some men lonely and others with lots of friends. Some men have land and houses while others are homeless (or close to it). But the Christian who receives little here is promised great comfort when all things are restored, to the point of being honored alongside rich believers like Abraham.<sup>6</sup> The Lord does not want us to see earthly blessing as a measuring stick of how much He loves one person or another, for He even blesses the damned in this life.<sup>7</sup> Whatever material blessings one person might have, whether much or little, the *point* is to focus on the heavenly future that these blessings hint at. A Resurrected body with plenty of food to eat, being eternally healthy, the perfect communion of saints, things like that.

---

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 107:43

<sup>6</sup> Luke 16:25, Matthew 19:27-30

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 5:44-45

## Conclusion

So what do we do with the verses I cited at the beginning? You know, those verses which tell us to “hate” our families and despise riches, those verses that encourage fasting and being aloof from worldly things? Beloved, they are matters of priority. Christ and the Apostles used hyperbole to make sure that we put God *above* earthly riches, family and food rather than *in place* of them. A pagan sees something like a good meal or a bit of extra money or good entertainment, and takes these things to be his gods instead of thanking the true God who gives them to him. As St. James says in our Epistle reading, we are to be unstained from the world; when we enjoy the blessings God gives us, we cannot enjoy them in the idolatrous ways that the world enjoys them. We must remember that God gave them to us as a sign of His steadfast love that endures forever.

We hear that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification, wiping away the stain of sin so that we could be with Him forever. Christ *solved* the problem of death and all the afflictions of this world. When we remember that He did so, we may rejoice all the further that He blesses us to reassure our hearts that He means it: His love for us endures yesterday, today, and forever.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025  
SEVENTH SUNDAY IN EASTER

READINGS

Ezekiel 36:22-29

**22** “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. **23** And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. **24** I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. **29** And I will deliver you from all your uncleannesses. And I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you.

Psalm 51:1-12

- 1** Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.
- 2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!
- 3** For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.
- 4** Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.
- 5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
- 6** Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
- 7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- 8** Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
- 9** Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.
- 10** Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.
- 11** Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
- 12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

### 1 Peter 4:7-11

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

### John 15:26-16:4

15:26 “But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. 27 And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

16:1 “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. 2 They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. 3 And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. 4 But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

Our meditation for this Seventh Sunday in Easter is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

St. Peter tells us that the end of all things is at hand. By this the Apostle means that Judgment Day could happen at any moment – *not* because he thought that it was a nearby fixed date. Too many commentaries suggest that the early Church had this idea that Christ would return in their lifetimes. Overlooking *why* the Apostles used the language they did is a silly mistake, and no matter how many times modern exegetes try to paint St. Peter as some overexcited fool, they only make themselves look foolish in the process. This is because what St. Peter is doing here is building a lasting, functional and God-glorifying way to run a church.

The Apostle writes to us that there is a *therefore*, a *so-what* or practical application that we must adhere to when considering Christ's Return. He will return in the clouds to take us from the earth just before Judgment Day; *therefore*, since we do not know when this shall happen, the Church must be found with her house in order, that our Lord may be glorified when He comes back. Instead of building a bunker or interpreting every unusual weather pattern as a sign of the End Times, the Apostle invites us to prepare for our Lord's Return by asking ourselves what sort of Christian we are and how we can be better than we are.

### **Self-Control and Sobriety**

We are told first to be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of our prayers. Make no mistake beloved, this means being sober and in one's right mind. When Christ returns, shall He return seeing you drunk? Shall He return seeing you engaging in pet addictions? Heaven forbid! As it stands, St. Peter says that this is *for the sake of our prayers*, meaning that not only at Christ's Return but even now, if we are drunk or losing control over anything else, He is ashamed of us.

I mean that, by the way. If you get drunk, your prayers shall likely be as silence before our Lord; after all, a drunken man does not say sensible things, and He shall not entertain alcoholic nonsense. If you intentionally devolve yourself into the frivolity of pet sins, not taking your own conscience seriously, why should He take your thoughts seriously when you express them in prayer? Beloved, your relationship with Christ *now* will characterize your relationship with Christ when He returns.

Think of it this way. If any one of us was on a long journey and corresponding with one of our loved ones, would we want to stay on the phone with them if every phone call was during a drunken binge? Would we want to come home to that at the end of our journey? Never. So again, *now* is the time to exercise self-control. Do not let your flesh's favorite sins have authority over you.

### **Loving one another**

Love covers a multitude of sins, the Apostle says. In what way is that true? Certainly not when it comes to *God* covering our sins. When it comes to our Lord, our sins are covered by the Blood of our Lord Jesus; nothing else wins our redemption for us. But *between believers*, the multitude of insults, acts of neglect, moments of backbiting, and any other sins we commit against one another cry out for us Christians to solve. Because we all sin in one way or another, it is inevitable that we shall harm each other, even if by accident. But if we have the core attitude of love for other believers, then that love covers those sins, as we are marked by forgiving every believer who hurts us and taking care of every Christian's needs.

Christ shall return expecting to see the Church operating as a family with true unity. He wants Christians to love one another sincerely. Let us go back to the analogy of a man going on a journey; if you were to go away for a while, imagine the tragedy of coming back and seeing your family in shambles. The wife is not greeting you upon your return, for she is too busy screaming at your children. One of your children is missing and nobody cares. Your siblings want nothing to do with your wife. Your parents aren't speaking. Imagine, *just imagine* the sorrow that would befall you if you came home to all that! And so St. Peter speaks of our Agape love for one another as the means by which the Church prepares for our Lord's Return.

### **Hospitality**

We are also instructed to show hospitality. Our hospitality will be the litmus test for how we demonstrated our love for one another. Oh it might be good if we *say* we love one another, but that love must be *shown* more than it is spoken. Is someone in your congregation falling on hard times? Has he lost his job? Does he know where his next meal is coming from? If you answer all these questions with a mere shrug, or even worse – an active affirmation that you are willingly neglecting that brother in Christ – then my advice to you is to be very afraid. Such sin by omission *angers* our Lord, and I am sure you well know that it is a fearful thought for Him to be *angry* with us when He returns!

This hospitality must be free of grumbling as well. Show me a Christian congregation full of petty resentment, and I will find it difficult to agree with you that it is a Christian congregation in the first place. Every favor done with grumbling is hardly a favor at all, for by your resentment and anger to the Christian you are helping, you let them know that they are not *truly* loved, but instead they are nothing more than a burden to you. May such never be, for our obedience to the Apostolic command must be done with a willing heart, *full* of compassion on others. This compassion is the mark of the regenerate believer, and when our Lord separates the sheep from the goats, the sheep will be shown to be our Lord's flock by how they took care of one another.

### **How shall all this be done?**

It seems that St. Peter has given us a tall order, doesn't it? Tell an entire congregation – an entire *synod* – that we are to do all these things in light of Judgment Day seems impossible. How we wish it were as easy as building doomsday bunkers or stockpiling food or searching for signs in the news websites! All of that is far more achievable than to tell every Christian that they must be sober, diligent against sin, loving, forgiving, giving, and to do it all with joy in their hearts. In an age marked by endless bickering and backbiting, with everyone jumping on every rumor mill and charity being attacked as some sort of subversion, making this our means of preparation feels nearly impossible. If we are told to do this on our own, then we are doomed.

In the latter verses, St. Peter admits that we cannot do this on our own. God knows that we are powerless to achieve self control on the individual level, let alone to show internicene love as a church body. This is why the Holy Spirit enables us with various gifts.<sup>1</sup> If you are blessed with teaching and exhorting, the Holy Spirit gave that ability to you; if you are able to serve with strength or resources or even just with time and friendliness towards your fellow Christians, He is the One empowering you to do so. In other words, God knows it's hard to do all this, so *He makes us able to do it*.

## Conclusion

St. Peter says that this great strengthening, the way in which the Holy Spirit hold the invisible Church together and helps her bear great fruit, is so “that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” When our Lord comes back to judge the living and the dead, He will be given all glory, laud and honor for the success of His Church. The pronouncements spoken through the mouths of pastors, theologians and apologists were *God's* oracles given for the sake of strengthening His people. The acts of love and charity which were done through the hands of strong and generous men, these were accomplished by the powerful arm of the Holy Spirit keeping the least among us held up.

We shall meet Him on that fateful Day, gathered together with the mass triumphant shout of millions and millions of believers and angels and living creatures. We shall be as those who made it out of a vicious, long campaign of war, finally receiving the news that we *won*. But being justified by faith in Christ, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, and living in the Father's new creation, we shall not demand nor congratulate ourselves for the medals and crowns bestowed upon us for our service. Rather, we shall rejoice in Christ and thank Him, for the credit and honor belongs to Him for making this not only possible, but actual. Let us therefore render heartfelt thanks to Him now as we shall when we see Him face to face; let us appeal to the Holy Spirit to help us obey His Commandments; and let us rejoice that our Heavenly Father, overseeing all of this, has guaranteed our ultimate victory – when the Church Militant becomes the Church Triumphant.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> For Deacons, Chaplains and Lay Leaders: now may be a time to enumerate and describe some of the special talents and gifts you see in your congregation's members.

Sermon for June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
PENTECOST

READINGS

Genesis 11:1-9

**1** Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. **2** And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. **3** And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. **4** Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.” **5** And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. **6** And the LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. **7** Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech.” **8** So the LORD dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. **9** Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth. And from there the LORD dispersed them over the face of all the earth.

Psalms 143

**1** Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
give ear to my pleas for mercy!  
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!  
**2** Enter not into judgment with your servant,  
for no one living is righteous before you.  
**3** For the enemy has pursued my soul;  
he has crushed my life to the ground;  
he has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.  
**4** Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
my heart within me is appalled.  
**5** I remember the days of old;  
I meditate on all that you have done;  
I ponder the work of your hands.  
**6** I stretch out my hands to you;  
my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. *Selah*  
**7** Answer me quickly, O LORD!  
My spirit fails!  
Hide not your face from me,  
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.  
**8** Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love,  
for in you I trust.  
Make me know the way I should go,  
for to you I lift up my soul.  
**9** Deliver me from my enemies, O LORD!  
I have fled to you for refuge.  
**10** Teach me to do your will,

for you are my God!  
Let your good Spirit lead me  
on level ground!

**11** For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life!  
In your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble!  
**12** And in your steadfast love you will cut off my enemies,  
and you will destroy all the adversaries of my soul,  
for I am your servant.

### Acts 2:1-13

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. **2** And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. **4** And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. **5** Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. **6** And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. **7** And they were amazed and astonished, saying, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? **9** Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.” **12** And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” **13** But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

### John 14:21-27

**21** “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. **22** Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” **23** Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. **24** Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. **25** “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. **26** But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. **27** Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Our text for meditation this Pentecost Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

There is an old term in the Lutheran Confessions called “Enthusiasm.” It means, quite literally, “god-within-ism.” Before there was a Pentecostal movement, before we called them Charismatics, Enthusiast was the preferred label for someone who believes that God effectively “manifests” through them and to them. They believe that prophets are still around in the Old Testament fashion, hearing God speak to them directly without reliance on the Word; they emphasize speaking in tongues,



miraculous healings, etc. In recent years, the word Enthusiasm has made a comeback, because it turns out that this phenomenon is not limited to the Pentecostal and Charismatic *denominations*. There are all sorts of Christians everywhere who go about looking for God under every green tree, trying to listen to Him directly. We see this in the old mystics and the monks, who thought they learned crucial doctrines from their visions: they might attack the Pentecostals for their denominational differences, but at root they have the same ideas.

The problem with “Enthusiasm” as an outlook is that it seeks something God doesn't promise. God never told you or me that we would all be speaking in tongues, nor does He promise miraculous healings to every Christian, and nor does He promise to talk to us outside of His Word being read and proclaimed. Certainly, our Lord *can* do all these things, but He does not tell us to seek them out in the way that these enthusiasts do. Instead, He calls us to be gathered as believers for Word and Sacrament, where He has promised with an infallible promise to be whenever we are together. Instead of going off into the woods or a monk's cell in a desert looking for enlightenment or great visions, we must do our best to be humble, constant servants in the here and now.

Nonetheless, the Enthusiasts, especially those who emphasize God's *presence*, have a point. There *is* something to the idea that God dwells within us, because that is incredibly Biblical and thus true. Just because some denominations *overemphasize* something from Scripture, and misinterpret what that truth means for us, does not mean that it is false. The calvinists misunderstand Divine sovereignty, but that does not mean God is no longer in charge of the universe; the orthodox overuse concepts like Divine mysteries, but that does not mean the Christian faith has no mysteries; the papists are in gross error with their transubstantiation doctrine, but we still affirm that Christ's Body and Blood are present in, with, and under the bread and the wine. So too do we see these “enthusiasts” mistaking a great, fundamental truth from Scripture: that from the moment of your Baptism onward, all three Persons of the Trinity have dwelled with you in a distinct, special way.

### **Christ's Manifestation to believers**

In our Gospel reading, Christ tells the Apostles that if someone keeps His Commandments, then He will manifest Himself to that individual. This sounds confusing at first, and so St. Jude asks Him what He means by “manifest,” how it shall happen, and in what form. He had previously said that the world would see Him no more:<sup>1</sup> how can He manifest to someone without the entirety of the world taking notice? Christ responds that whoever loves Him keeps His Word – this is to say, whoever *believes* in Him shall love Him and eagerly wish to do as He says. Whoever loves Him in this way receives both Christ and our Heavenly Father *Who both dwell with the believer*.

The same Christ who tells the Apostles “I am with you always, to the end of the age”<sup>2</sup> tells us here that He is with *you*, beloved. His presence and care are not reserved for the “big-wigs” of Christianity, but for every single Christian who loves Him. And not only that, the same Heavenly Father who declared the universe into existence, the One who told Israel that He would not leave them nor forsake them,<sup>3</sup> Christ promises the very same Father shall be with *you*. Just think of that blessing! Christ who walked with the Apostles, who walked on water, who walked to Golgotha carrying a cross to die *for you*, promises that He shall walk with you. Our Heavenly Father, who spoke from the heavens, who led Israel in the wilderness, He shall speak to and lead you. This is a promise; not that we hear funny voices or utter prophetic oracles on our own, but that our Lord is with us and shall be actively involved in each of our lives.

---

1 John 14:19

2 Matthew 28:20

3 Deuteronomy 31:8, Hebrews 13:5

## How the Promise Works

How does this happen? At what point does God say “Ah, this man loves Jesus, so now I shall dwell with him?” Christ points to the Holy Spirit and calls Him the Helper, who dwells with and comforts us. We may not always *feel* the presence of our Heavenly Father or our Lord Jesus, but even when we do not feel that warmth and assurance, the Holy Spirit works to strengthen, guide, and protect us in our walk with Him. After all, He was the One who facilitated this special relationship between us and the Father and Christ.

St. Peter says that when we are Baptized, we receive the Holy Spirit, and in this blessed Sacrament is salvation.<sup>4</sup> Baptism is the means by which the forgiveness of our sins, won for us by Christ on the Cross, is *applied* to the individual Christian. The Holy Spirit, who inspired the words of these promises, comes to us in our Baptism to be the seal of our salvation, working faith and justification.<sup>5</sup> Because of this wonderful miracle, the Scriptures say that all who have been Baptized are *united* to Christ, thus dwelling with Him.<sup>6</sup> Our Heavenly Father thus dwells with us as well, counting us as having Christ's righteousness and justifying us by our faith in our Savior.

And so, for all believers, all three Persons of the Godhead dwell with us and make a home with us as we walk the Christian life. You are never *alone*, you are never *abandoned*, and you shall never be *forsaken* by the Lord who promises to be with you. He reminds us of this as the Holy Spirit gathers us together for the Divine Service, as Christ comes to us with His Body and Blood at Communion, and as the Father feeds and provides for us. No believer who receives these blessings with joy shall ever be left behind.

## Conclusion

Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit's work of reminding the Apostles all that He has said. This also applies to us, albeit in a slightly different way than for the Apostles. For them, this is a promise of inspiration, which guarantees the truth of the New Testament that they wrote. But for *us*, remember that the Holy Spirit also reminds the Christian of His Word, working with us to recall the Scriptures, to help us in our weakness, to strengthen us for the times ahead.

The point of this is *peace*, beloved. Christ says that this is His means of giving us peace. It is not the peace of the world. The world can only give us a temporary *satisfaction* with material goods or the absence of conflict, and it is short lived. But the peace that comes with knowing God is on your side as you walk in faith, that peace that comes with knowing He is always with you, *that* peace lasts forever. And it is a peace which we shall observe in its fullest expression into eternity with Him.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21

<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:38, Ephesians 1:13-14

<sup>6</sup> Romans 6:1-4, Galatians 3:27

Sermon for June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025

TRINITY SUNDAY

READINGS

Isaiah 6:1-7

**1** In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. **2** Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. **3** And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

**4** And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. **5** And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

**6** Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. **7** And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

**8** And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.”

Psalm 29

**1** Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

**2** Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

**3** The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD, over many waters.

**4** The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

**5** The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

**6** He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.

**7** The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.

**8** The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

**9** The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, “Glory!”

**10** The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.

**11** May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!

Romans 11:33-36

**33** Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

**34** “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”

**35** “Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

**36** For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

John 3:1-17

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. **2** This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” **3** Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” **4** Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ **8** The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

**9** Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” **10** Jesus answered him, “Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? **11** Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. **12** If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? **13** No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. **14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**16** “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Our text for meditation this Trinity Sunday is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Introduction**

In our Epistle reading, St. Paul proclaims the mystery of God's ways and knowledge. This is after he spends a few chapters discussing the matter of Israel. Israel, God's chosen people, is no longer understood as an earthly nation bound to the Law of Moses; instead, because of the Cross of our Lord Jesus we now see that the *true* Israel is the Church, all Baptized believers in Christ, joined to the New Covenant by faith. Upon the Cross and Resurrection of our Lord, the true Israel was revealed, blooming at Pentecost to eventually overshadow the earthly “old Israel.”

The Apostle ends this section of his Epistle by proclaiming God's mystery. St. Paul considers what had to happen in order for this to be the case; old Israel had to fall in order that the true Israel may be revealed. The people who persecuted Christ and had Him crucified had no idea that God was going to make good things come out of their sin. In the same way Joseph tells his brothers “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,”<sup>1</sup> so our Lord permitted for Jesus to be crucified by His countrymen so that the sins of the whole world may be forgiven.

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 50:20

So that is what St. Paul is thinking about when he praises God's infinite wisdom and judgments. But his statement on God's mysteries does not end there. He cries out that no one can get to the bottom of what our Lord is up to, because finite man can never fully understand the depths of an infinite God. Beloved, may we never forget that God is *above* us. He will always be vastly superior to us in His immeasurable transcendence.

### **Our Lord's Omniscience**

We may compare the matter to an ant and a man. An ant's mind is only concerned with the immediate execution of its purpose within the ant colony, and even then this consists of moving almost automatically through its works. Humans, on the other hand, are almost all capable of understanding abstract thoughts, solving complicated mathematical problems, and recognizing patterns in nature. An ant cannot tell a story or sing a song. An ant could not tell you about *itself*, even if it were able to speak, because it has no concept of self to begin with. Men have written epic poems covering broad swaths of history, created and operated complex machines, and traversed oceans. To put a finer point on it, a newly born human baby knows more than all the ants that ever lived *combined*.

When it comes to God, the gap between His infinite knowledge and wisdom and our limited capacities is even larger than the gap between ants and men. Just one example, one I could spend years writing about: St. Paul writes in Romans that God “calls into existence the things that do not exist.”<sup>2</sup> God created the entire universe without any pre-existing materials, choosing instead to tell nonexistent things to start existing; this means He knows everything that does not exist! He knows what would happen if the things which do not exist *were* to exist, and whether or not He shall bring them out of their nonexistent state.

“Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!” Our Lord knows what a four-sided triangle would look like. He interacts with things that do not exist. He speaks to numbers and hears what silence sounds like. He knows exactly what all potential versions of the universe would be like if even one event in history were changed. This is the Omniscience of God, which so surpasses even the most advanced intelligences in humanity so as to make them seem even *more* ignorant than even half of an ant's mind.

Naturally, our sinful flesh is bothered by this. What the Apostle praises, our flesh despises. We want to know *more* than God, we want to proclaim *ourselves* to be the experts in all things. It is for this reason that the scholastic theologians came into prominence, men who thought they could force God's Hand by telling Him what He could and could not do, what He can and cannot think, what He knows and what “logically impossible” things they think don't belong in the Divine Mind. This same spirit gave the world “open theism,” where confused men *insist* that our Lord simply couldn't know *that* much, or else He would know things sinful men don't want Him to know! And of course, sinful human reason does not stop at the scholastic or open theistic positions, does it? Men who think they are smarter than God end up denying the Trinity, denying the Atonement, denying our Lord's Creation of the universe, and so much more – all because they proclaim themselves to be wise, but end up being fools.<sup>3</sup> For they refuse to recognize the mystery involved with our Lord's infinite capacities, and thus become parodies of the Christian faith.

### **Staying with What is Revealed**

God knows more than we do, this much is plain to us. This means that He arranges all that He does and all actions of His servants to accomplish great things. He does not have to make sense to us, no matter how logical we think we are. This means that there is an ocean of secrets within the Mind of God, one with depths that cannot be reached. Theology might be “thinking God's thoughts after Him,” but there are so many mysteries and secrets that to try prying into them runs the risk of shipwrecking

---

<sup>2</sup> Romans 4:17

<sup>3</sup> Romans 1:22

the faith of many.

But let us not despair when we ponder this inestimable gulf between God's knowledge and our paltry understanding. God has not left us adrift in the seas of ignorance, choosing instead to reveal Himself by His Word. This very Word, the sacred Scriptures which we know and cherish, reassure us that no matter how many mysteries there are, He *loves* us. St. Paul paraphrases Isaiah, asking “who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?”<sup>4</sup> But later, as he writes 1 Corinthians, he will proclaim that “we have the mind of Christ,”<sup>5</sup> meaning that the Word is opened up to believers to show us the Gospel. God *reveals* certain mysteries to us, like how He operated within history to produce the Messiah who died for our sins and rose for our justification.

He reveals to us the things that matter the most, which were once kept hidden but now are gloriously shown in great glory. Our Heavenly Father send His only Son to die for us, and rose Him from the grave that we may live eternally. The Holy Spirit dwells with us, and shows us that He has inspired the Word to always be inerrant, constant and true. And with this strong Word, we rejoice to belong to the true Israel of our Lord. Thus we have a firm foundation, knowing that despite all the mysteries of the faith, we can always *trust* that “from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.” He shall not permit that any who trust in Him should be put to shame.

## Conclusion

Now, does this mean we Christians should stick our heads in the sand? Should we refuse to investigate the mysteries of the faith, or just rely on feelings? Absolutely not. God promises to reward those who earnestly seek Him,<sup>6</sup> encouraging us to seek the answers. But He has given us the Bible, the sole source of our doctrines, so that we may not be found adrift in the waters of mystery. Let us then rejoice to seek the truth in the assurance of Divine revelation, that we may be assured of the good that He promises.

Now the Peace of god, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 From Isaiah 40:13

5 1 Corinthians 2:16

6 Hebrews 11:6

Sermon for June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 15:1-6

**1** After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” **2** But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” **3** And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” **4** And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” **5** And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” **6** And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Psalm 33:12-22

**12** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!  
**13** The LORD looks down from heaven;  
he sees all the children of man;  
**14** from where he sits enthroned he looks out  
on all the inhabitants of the earth,  
**15** he who fashions the hearts of them all  
and observes all their deeds.  
**16** The king is not saved by his great army;  
a warrior is not delivered by his great strength.  
**17** The war horse is a false hope for salvation,  
and by its great might it cannot rescue.  
**18** Behold, the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,  
on those who hope in his steadfast love,  
**19** that he may deliver their soul from death  
and keep them alive in famine.  
**20** Our soul waits for the LORD;  
he is our help and our shield.  
**21** For our heart is glad in him,  
because we trust in his holy name.  
**22** Let your steadfast love, O LORD, be upon us,  
even as we hope in you.

1 John 4:13-21

**13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** So we have come to know

and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. **17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. **18** There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. **19** We love because he first loved us. **20** If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. **21** And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

#### Luke 16:19-31

**19** “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. **20** And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, **21** who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. **22** The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, **23** and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. **24** And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ **25** But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. **26** And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ **27** And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— **28** for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ **29** But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ **30** And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ **31** He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

How deeply have you thought about damnation? Beloved, really, how deeply have you truly asked about it, thought about it, *dwelled* on it? The burning, the anguish, the dejection of knowing that forevermore one would be rejected by God? Perhaps you haven't thought about it much because it is uncomfortable. No one *likes* the way hell is depicted in Scripture. A proper Christian never *wishes* for someone to be damned, because it is the single most unpleasant thing we can surmise would ever happen to anyone. But if we never meditate on the topic, we shall never understand why we are so warned.

This passage is not symbolic. Christ tells us of something that actually happens. Theologians and scholars can call it a “parable” all they want, but Christ describes the realities of hell and paradise in the course of giving His message. We are not given any room to deny that there is a real abode of the damned and a real abode of the blessed foretold here. Jesus never says the afterlife is *like* this or that, and nor does He use any indicative language that tells us it is just a story. He is not presenting some mere morality play to get pharisees away from their greed. Hell is a real place, and it behooves us to honor the Word of our Lord by asking what is said about it here.



## The Residents of Hell and its Appearance

The rich man is in hell – let us call him by his traditional name, Dives.<sup>1</sup> Properly speaking this is a picture of the final judgment. He's burning, just as the prophecies concerning the lake of fire promise. It is not *Sheol*, the afterlife often given before the Gospel poured forth. Sheol was a foggy, drab, and dark place where both the good<sup>2</sup> and the bad<sup>3</sup> used to go after death. In the Old Testament era, before Christ went to the Cross, the hope of the saints was being taken *out* of Sheol to go to our Lord.<sup>4</sup> This is not what the Dives goes through – he is one of the residents of *hell*, after the Final Judgment. Yes, Dives mentions his brothers, but he knows not what time it is and does not know how long he has been in hell. He is suffering the fate of all nonbelievers here. Again, the Bible promises that the damned will burn forever....and here the rich man is...burning.

The state of Dives tells us much about the residents of hell. They are in their right mind, conscious of all that is happening to them; no one in hell is insane. They retain sensation, especially pain, as we see Dives being conscious of the flames which burn him. They are not disembodied ghosts, but people with *bodies* that can experience the suffering. They are able to see, able to speak, and apparently able to move as well, since Abraham points not to any chains on Dives but to a *chasm* that separates him from the blessed. In other words, when we think of the final damnation of the wicked, we are not to think that their eternal conscious torment is such that their minds break down or they are annihilated into nothing. That Dives is *recognizeable* in the first place means that the appearance of the damned is much the same as they had in their earthly lives.

Christ does not describe much of hell to us. We can surmise though that it is a fiery place, if a dark and quiet one, with its general silence interrupted by the moans of the damned. The light of paradise ensures that Dives can see Lazarus and Abraham from afar, and the relative quiet means he can hear them respond to his cries. Since no one else is mentioned besides Dives, and no one attempts to silence him, it would appear that hell is big enough for each damned soul to be left alone (relatively).

## How they are Damned

Dives also shows us that it is not just the worst examples of humanity who are damned. In fact, just about anyone from any walk of life could end up there. You see beloved, Dives was a normal observant jew from the first century – in fact, he was quite *religious*. Why did he not help Lazarus? Because with his sores, touching Lazarus would have rendered Dives ceremonially unclean.<sup>5</sup> We might balk at him not helping Lazarus with some donation of money, but do not forget that this was *normal*! A significant thought among observant jews in the first century was that those afflicted like Lazarus deserved it on account of some sin, whether by the afflicted person or their ancestors.<sup>6</sup> So religious was Dives that he saw Abraham and recognized him, calling him father. He even had traditional family values, as we see him caring deeply – with *true* familial love – about his five brothers. Believe me, Dives was a respected member of his community, well known for being religious: it is likely that his family believed he was in Heaven after his death. We can reasonably assume that he was a pharisee.

We would be foolish to think that Dives was damned because of some neglect on his part to care for the poor, or even some particular sin. Do not forget that Christ shows us this rich man speaking to Abraham! Abraham was *extremely* rich in his day, with much cattle and a whole cadre of slaves that at his command could be called to fight and die for him.<sup>7</sup> This same Abraham did neglect some of the

---

1 “Dives” is simply a Latin phrase meaning “rich man,” but nonetheless it is a helpful moniker.

2 1 Samuel 28:6-11

3 Psalm 9:17

4 Psalm 49:10-15

5 Leviticus 13

6 John 9:1-3

7 In Genesis 14, we hear of Abraham possessing 318 trained warriors born in his household.

poor in his area, as he was called to be a stranger in a foreign land, where he knew not the language of the natives;<sup>8</sup> there is simply no way he could care for all those who were in need around him. Worse yet, *speaking* of neglect, do not forget that this is the man who neglected the safety of his wife as he lied about who she was to pharaoh and Abimelech, allowing her to be abducted so he could feel more secure.<sup>9</sup> Abraham collected concubines...and then summarily sent them away, refusing to care for the children they bore him lest they compete with his favored son Isaac.<sup>10</sup> Ah, from his infernal abode Dives must have seen Abraham and felt great confidence that his request for water would be heeded, thinking to himself “Abraham! A man not so different from myself.”

Just because someone is rich does not mean they shall be damned. Just because someone has *sins* in their past, even sins of neglect, does not mean that they shall be damned either. Again, Abraham was rich, and at times had neglected the well-being of others. But Abraham is *saved* while Dives is damned. Why? Beloved, it is because there is something Abraham has which Dives does not: faith. Dives, a man who was seen to be very religious, lacked faith in God entirely. Note that as he burns, he calls not to God but to Abraham. Why does he not pray? Why does he not beg for mercy or forgiveness? What, does he not think of God at all? No beloved, for Dives does not ask for deliverance from hell; like the rest of the damned, it seems he prefers to be there.

The rich man asks for relief from suffering, not release from his location. He has no intention of having fellowship with God, feels no need to call out to Him, and has no desire to be saved. All that matters to Dives in this moment is relief from the flames. Oh certainly, he does not want his *brothers* to suffer in the flames, but he does not care for their faith in God one way or another. Like the book of Esther, the absence of any mention of God in this passage speaks *very* loudly.

Dives is damned, not because he was religious because his heart didn't belong to God, and he preferred it that way. In fact, *no one* is in hell that wouldn't prefer to be there, *especially* the extremely religious. If hell did not burn them, they would be content living there eternally. Just think of it, Christ speaks about Lazarus and Dives to the *pharisees*, the wealthy and *extremely* religious men who with *precious* few exceptions all hated Jesus! These men, trusting in their dry ritualism and their theological knowledge, absolutely *loathed* our Savior and wanted nothing to do with Him; what makes us think that this would change once they enter hell?

## The Character of Hell's Inhabitants

Hell is a hateful place full of hateful, bitter people. Dives asks Abraham (not God) to send Lazarus to provide him relief. This is to say, he still thinks *Lazarus* should be serving *him*! He does not ask Lazarus directly, oh no – he still thinks Lazarus is *beneath* him. Where is Lazarus's seminary degree? Where is his philosophical acumen? Why wasn't Lazarus at the Temple giving offerings? We told him he was anathema, why is he in Paradise? In the mind of Dives, Lazarus is no more than a servant, for in his earthly life he was nothing but a sore-afflicted beggar. I suspect that Dives asks Abraham to send Lazarus over to hell because, if he were being honest, he thinks that Lazarus belongs there and not him.

Hell is full of people like that, men and women who trusted in their works or their status or their knowledge or their heritage to purchase paradise from God. Heaven is full of men and women like Lazarus, who had only their heart to give to our Lord – and it just so happens that this is all God wanted from them. But for such a one as Dives, he resisted any attempt of the Holy Spirit to show him the light of God's grace and mercy; in his mind, God should work for *him* the same way Lazarus should.

---

8 Genesis 12:1-9

9 Genesis 12:10-20, 20:1-7

10 Genesis 25:1-6

Hell is full of people who resent God, and they will resent Him eternally. Of course, the fault is theirs – they were the ones to reject Him, to reject His Word, to reject the free offer of salvation given in Christ Jesus by His blood shed for our sins. But they shall never see it that way. In the eyes of the damned, they *deserve* Paradise and *do not* deserve punishment for how they attempted to get there. Every drug dealer, every pimp, every hedonist, every pagan, and all the pharisaical religious shall be personally offended when Christ tells them “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” And thus they shall burn, with a chip on their shoulder forever. They shall continue to reject God, believing that if only the flames were cooler then they could stay in hell comfortably.

### **Conclusion: Lazarus**

Beloved, are you damned? Ask yourself, shall you burn? As you meditate on this question, if you think to yourself “Ah, of course not – for I go to church, I treat my parents well, I am careful to avoid sin, and I make sure to always read up on my theology to get to know things better” then I have little hope for you. To answer the question, “are you damned” by listing out things that you think make you a *good person* puts you in the category of Dives, who with the pharisees that Christ addresses had the same exact misplaced confidence.

Beloved, be like *Lazarus*. Even if you are not afflicted by sores or poverty as he was, now is the time to recognize that Lazarus had only one thing he could give to our Lord, and that was his trust. With no money, no health, nothing to be proud of and no education, Lazarus had to live by faith that our Lord would one day save him. As the dogs licked his wounds, he looked upward to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, wishing nothing more than the deliverance which would one day come to him. In a word, Lazarus had the faith of Abraham, his confidence in Christ, believing what Moses and the prophets wrote.

We may not be afflicted like Lazarus, and for your sake I hope you are not! But nonetheless, may we take the same *attitude* that Lazarus and Abraham both had, trusting in our Lord to save us just as His Word promises. Not giving heed to any of our own merit, may we avoid hell simply by believing that our Lord shall bring us to Paradise, belonging to Christ forever. Being with Him into eternity, we shall be forever joyful instead of those poor souls who shall forever be bitter.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Acts 15:1-12

**1** But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” **2** And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. **3** So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. **4** When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. **5** But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

**6** The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. **7** And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. **8** And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, **9** and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. **10** Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? **11** But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

**12** And all the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.

Psalms 46

- 1** God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
**2** Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
**3** though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*  
**4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.  
**5** God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.  
**6** The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.  
**7** The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*  
**8** Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.  
**9** He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;

he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.  
**10** “Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!”  
**11** The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

#### Galatians 2:1-16

**1** Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. **2** I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. **3** But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. **4** Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— **5** to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. **6** And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. **7** On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised **8** (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), **9** and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. **10** Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

**11** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. **12** For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. **13** And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. **14** But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

**15** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; **16** yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

#### Matthew 16:13-19

**13** Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. **18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

Every now and then the word “judaizer” comes up in theological conversation. Accusations fly in one direction or another over the course of arguments, with one person inevitably calling the other a “judaizer.” But what exactly *is* a judaizer? What is the judaizing heresy? One would think this would be common knowledge, because it was such a massive problem that the entire book of Galatians and many other parts of the New Testament were written against it. Unfortunately, over my years of ministry and observing these discussions, it seems that few people have a settled definition for it. Let's fix that today.

A naive man would see our readings for today and think that the judaizing heresy was nothing more than a bunch of misguided Hebrew Christians. They are shown trying to get Gentile Christians to observe the Jewish lifestyle and get circumcised, perhaps from some discomfort over worshiping with people from a different culture. Under such a definition, the judaizers expected Gentiles to live like Jews: only eating kosher foods, not working on Saturdays, and having their clothing cut from one cloth. Of course we balk at the circumcision part, but in that day was far less barbarous than today's circumcisions. Again, this is the *naive* understanding of it.

If this were truly all there was to judaizing, merely asking that Gentiles adopt Jewish customs, then we should be *shocked* to find St. Paul criticizing them so strongly! If all they were doing was mistakenly pushing for a cultural lifestyle adjustment, why would he scream at Sts. Peter and Barnabas in Antioch for joining up with the “men from James?” Perish the thought. If anything, for people who were adjusting to the faith, the Apostle wrote about them as the “weaker brother” who had not yet understood their freedom in Christ;<sup>1</sup> our instructions (and theirs) are that we must not pass judgment on each other.<sup>2</sup> Those Jews who had converted to the true faith were understandably going to have a hard time embracing freedom from the Mosaic code after decades and decades of observing it carefully.

But those are not the judaizers. The judaizers were a far more sinister group of people, one which infected the Church very early on. For them, it was never about *adjusting* to Christian freedom, it was about *abolishing* it. It was never about individual Hebrew Christians maintaining their cultural heritage, but stripping the heritage from others. And the reason for this is simple: the demands of the judaizers flowed not from their Jewish identity, but from their belief that we are justified by works.<sup>3</sup> Justification by works is the true root of the judaizing heresy, making it the single most successful heresy in the history of the Church.

## Works Based Salvation

St. Paul says that there were “false brothers” who “who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery.” This slavery, what does it mean? For St. Paul, it was a matter of slavery after falling for a false gospel. He contends against them “so that the truth of the Gospel might be preserved for you.” Salvation itself is at stake here, as the judaizers are shown trying to drag people away from the Gospel and bring them into servitude to something that *will not save*. And what is it that will not save? The works of the Law.

St. Paul writes that “a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus

---

1 1 Corinthians 8

2 Romans 14:1-12, circumcision being an exception to this rule of toleration, as circumcision is a sign of a dead covenant.

3 Or “faith plus works” as it is known today.

Christ.” The judaizers believed that the work of Jesus Christ, dying for our sins on the Cross and rising from the dead, is simply not enough to save someone's soul. There must be – simply *must* be – something that the individual believer has to *do* to be saved in addition to his faith. The idea that someone could just believe in Christ, be Baptized, and rejoice in their salvation disturbed the judaizers, who believed that there was something missing from the equation. Since they were jewish, they supposed that the thing which men must *do* is get circumcised and start obeying the Law of Moses in addition to observing the Ten Commandments (which do not justify either).

This is no different from the slavery inflicted on so many Christians today. Even if they could not get the Church to accept circumcision and Mosaic sacrifices, the judaizers were *quite* successful in teaching people that Jesus wasn't enough. Now over a billion people who have been Baptized are told that they must pray to the saints, do penance, and follow bizarre rules for every day life. Only fish on Fridays during Lent. No eating before Easter. No Communion if a woman is on her period. Spouses have no control over their own marriage bed. Kiss the icon and believe what bishops make up, or else burn in hell.<sup>45</sup> Fast twice a week at least, Pharisee-style.<sup>6</sup>

The judaizer cries out, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”<sup>7</sup> The Church responded with the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), declaring the general freedom of Christians everywhere, especially freedom from the laws concerning circumcision. The judaizers did not accept that defeat. After the Council, St. Paul writes that they snuck around, inserting themselves in churches, trying *secretly* to bring their doctrines into prominence wherever they could. They sowed discord against St. Paul in speaking to the Corinthians.<sup>8</sup> They formed the “synagogue of satan” that afflicted the churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> Even after the closing of the Canon of Scripture, the judaizing faction wrote tracts like the Didache which *still* encourage people to be “perfect” through circumcision and Torah-observance. They were the ones who convinced the early Church that people go to heaven by their deeds. We have them to thank for the heretics of old, from Novatian to Pelagius to Celestius to Donatus and so so many more. If it wasn't going to be the Law of Moses, the judaizers settled on making up *new* rules and regulations for people to live by; thus we have Rome and Orthodoxy which exist today as monuments to the abominable doctrine. Justification by works – *that* is judaizing at its core.

## Stand in Faith, Rejoice in Freedom

With the recent war between Israel and Iran, social media has become drenched with condemnations of dispensationalism, zionism, and “judaizing” - that is, they see Christians listening to rabbis instead of listening to the Scriptures and to proper theologians. People are rightly upset about this bizarre exophilic affinity for a foreign group. There is this massive population that believes God loves all people but loves jews more; they are patriotic for their own countries, but far more patriotic for the zionist state; they might love their culture, but they love jewish culture more. This is a terrible state of affairs, beloved. God gave you *your* people, *your* country, *your* culture, and He does not require you to embrace a foreign peoples' folkways to be properly devoted.

But I do not call it “judazing” when wayward Christians have such a weird obsession with the jewish state and people. There ought to be another term for it. Properly understood, judaizing is the introduction of what Martin Luther calls a false, “conditional Gospel.” In fact, let us hear what the good

---

4 The seventh ecumenical council, Nicea II, pronounces anathema upon anyone who does not genuflect before icons and anyone who “rejects any written or unwritten tradition of the church.”

5 <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum07.htm>

6 Luke 18:9-14

7 Acts 15:1

8 2 Corinthians is written to respond to these “Super Apostles.”

9 Revelation 2:8-11, 3:7-13

Doctor has to say about this passage:

When Paul speaks of the truth of the Gospel he implies by contrast a false gospel. The false apostles also had a gospel, but it was an untrue gospel. "In holding out against them," says Paul, "I conserved the truth of the pure Gospel."

Now the true Gospel has it that we are justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the Law. The false gospel has it that we are justified by faith, but not without the deeds of the Law. The false apostles preached a conditional gospel.

So do the papists. They admit that faith is the foundation of salvation. But they add the conditional clause that faith can save only when it is furnished with good works. This is wrong. The true Gospel declares that good works are the embellishment of faith, but that faith itself is the gift and work of God in our hearts. Faith is able to justify, because it apprehends Christ, the Redeemer.

In another place, he writes:

To live as a Jew is nothing bad. To eat or not to eat pork, what difference does it make? But to play the Jew, and for conscience' sake to abstain from certain meats, is a denial of Christ. When Paul saw that Peter's attitude tended to this, he withstood Peter and said to him: "You know that the observance of the Law is not needed unto righteousness. You know that we are justified by faith in Christ. You know that we may eat all kinds of meats. Yet by your example you obligate the Gentiles to forsake Christ, and to return to the Law. You give them reason to think that faith is not sufficient unto salvation."<sup>1011</sup>

Beloved, you are *right* to be bothered if you see a Christian eating kosher or flying the israeli flag above your own country's flag. You should be *just* as bothered if not more when your Roman Catholic friend is worried that he will be damned if he doesn't do enough good works. The former endangers a man's freedom in Christ *even if* he thinks that his love for everything jewish is just voluntary. It tempts him to make an idol in his heart out of a different race and culture. But the latter, the papist anxiety, endangers his salvation by trusting in works and rules that shall not save. It is a tragic denial that Jesus is a sufficient Savior!

But the good thing is, the true Gospel alleviates both of these problems. Tell the dispensationalist, zionist Christian that those Mosaic laws were there to *prophecy* about Jesus, to serve as type and shadow of who He is!<sup>12</sup> Tell him, "for freedom Christ set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit to a yoke of slavery."<sup>13</sup> Tell him that to abstain from circumcision and to live free from the Mosaic regulations *honors Christ Himself*. Tell the papist or the orthodox that Christ is *truly* our Savior, and they do not need to worry about not being good enough – Christ came to save us precisely because we could never be good enough to purchase Heaven from Him! Tell him that his obedience to the Ten Commandments comes from gratitude for *being* saved, not in order to be saved!

This is the point beloved, that we stand in faith and rejoice in freedom. The judaizers hate that we place our trust in the true Savior. Those who want us to be someone else than we were born as hate the freedom we have to make our own decisions in adiaphora. But we trust in our Lord and are justified by faith in Him Alone, and we rejoice at the liberation He brings us.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

10 Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*.

11 Found here: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1549/1549-h/1549-h.htm#link2HCH0002>

12 Hebrews 8:1-7

13 Galatians 5:1



Sermon for July 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 7:18-20

- 18** Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity  
and passing over transgression  
for the remnant of his inheritance?  
He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in steadfast love.
- 19** He will again have compassion on us;  
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.  
You will cast all our sins  
into the depths of the sea.
- 20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and steadfast love to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our fathers  
from the days of old.

Psalm 103:1-13

- 1** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!
- 2** Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,
- 3** who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,
- 4** who redeems your life from the pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5** who satisfies you with good  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6** The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7** He made known his ways to Moses,  
his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8** The LORD is merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9** He will not always chide,  
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10** He does not deal with us according to our sins,  
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12** as far as the east is from the west,  
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

**13** As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

**12** I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

**1** Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”  
**3** So he told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.  
**8** “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Today's reading sounds very pleasant until you recognize when (and to whom) it was written. The prophet Micah wrote to the children of Israel and Judah around the same time as Isaiah. Much of his writing is full of wrath and condemnation for the wicked social practices that he saw: oppression of the poor,<sup>1</sup> crass idolatry, and refusal to hear the Word of the Lord. There were false prophets in his day too, who gave false oracles for money,<sup>2</sup> and the political rulers cared little what God had to say to them. Thus Micah pronounces a terrible judgment against both countries, culminating in only a small remnant of the descendants of Jacob being permitted to live as a coherent people group.<sup>3</sup>

Since the Word of the Lord accomplishes what God says, this judgment came for both Israel and Judah with a harsh fulfillment. Israel was wiped out, taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and only a tiny remnant remained in Samaria. A hundred and fifty years after that, Judah itself was taken into the Babylonian Exile, and only a small group returned after seventy years. When all this happened and the Exiles remembered the prophet's words in our reading, promising forgiveness and compassion from the Lord, there must have been a temptation to believe that these words were hollow.

---

<sup>1</sup> Esp. chapter 2

<sup>2</sup> Micah 3:5-8

<sup>3</sup> Micah 5:7-8

For a moment, let us put ourselves in the shoes of one of these Exiles. After all, the Assyrian captivity was accomplished in Micah's lifetime. It is easy to believe in Divine pardon when things are going good, to grasp the forgiveness God offers when your belly is full and you sleep well at night. But imagine being a man among the tribe of Issachar, being led away with a fish hook in your mouth, to brutal slavery in some remote corner of the Assyrian Empire. Chained to a wall and forced to sift grain for hours and hours, only being let go to drag heavy carts from one farm to the next. The woman you once called your wife is now part of a harem of slave women to an officer in the Assyrian army. Being beaten regularly, perhaps tortured to inflict cruel deformities on your flesh, all the while knowing that you were told by this prophet Micah that you *deserve it*. Perhaps you dream every night of the prophet you once laughed at, now dancing and mocking you as he sings "I told you so! I told you so!" And so the torment goes on until you are too weak to work, and so they put you down like an old dog.

The reality of God's Judgment being fulfilled did not wake the Northern Israelites out of their idolatrous stupor. In fact, idolatry persisted in Samaria, both among the remnant that remained and the foreigners brought in by the Assyrians.<sup>4</sup> Even though the prophets had foretold that this would happen, predicting it for *centuries*, the Captivity did not bring many of them to repentance. The most we could say about any improvement in their character is that they were more afraid of God than they were previously – but they did not *fear* God in the sense of true faith and reverence.

## Holding On

So then, we come to our reading today and feel even more puzzled. An Israelite living under Exile lived with the constant reminder that the prophets were right (especially Micah), and that it was wrong to ignore and persecute them for their oracles. Why then, did they not also rejoice in the promise of pardon? Why did the majority of them turn to idols even more? Surely, if the promises of judgment were proven true, then the promises of forgiveness and restoration must also be true! And yet, sadly they did not see it that way. Why is this the case?

The reason is very simple. In our reading, Micah writes that God pardons iniquity and passes over transgression "for the remnant of His inheritance." This is not referring to a remnant of *survivors*, but of *believers*, for precious few receive the forgiveness offered. To receive forgiveness requires faith in the One who forgives. It is an active faith, not the kind of belief that says "God exists and He punished us," but the kind which says "against all appearances, God shall be merciful." It is the kind of faith which *holds on* for dear life to the promises of God, even if it looks like He has abandoned you. Luther says in the *Bondage of the Will*, that God "conceals His eternal mercy and loving-kindness behind His eternal wrath." Thus he also says, "This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that He is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many."<sup>56</sup>

Only a tiny, miniscule remnant of Northern Israel was given mercy, because only a tiny and miniscule remnant of them believed what God said about it. For the rest of them, they relied on their reason, their senses, and their pain to come to the conclusion that our Lord just hated them forever. These Exiles would say something like this: "Oh, Micah, you say that He does not retain His anger forever? But I am chained to this wall. My legs were broken by the Assyrians so that I do not run away. They killed my children, and I am rotting away in my pain. It seems to me, Micah, that He has made His eternal hatred very plain." And so, resisting the Gospel offer of pardon, they choose to stay in their punishment.

## The Difference

What about the modern day though? Are things really so different when it comes to the Church? Absolutely. The words Micah wrote ring so true in our hearts that we cannot do otherwise but rejoice.

---

4 2 Kings 17

5 *Bondage of the Will*, section XXIV

6 <https://www.covenantor.org/reformed/2015/7/8/the-sovereignty-of-god-sections-9-27>

Today, there are countless believers who live in dire conditions. They live in their own personal versions of the Exile, whether their pain is merited or not. We have brothers and sisters in Christ who are afflicted with diseases and cancer, some being a consequence of their actions and others being simple tragedy. Men who were brought to the faith after years of being drug addicts, now living under the burden of HIV from a shared heroin needle, children born with severe fetal alcohol syndrome, and more. There are criminals on death row, awaiting execution, that are now Christians. And all of them, despite these horrible things that none of us would ever want to experience, rejoice in the Lord. They all *hold on* to the promises the Gospel gives us of forgiveness and eternal life. They sing hymns of praise even though their existence might involve – for now – constant unending pain.

This is the difference between the nonbeliever and the saint when it comes to suffering. Whether the pain is something we deserve or not, you and I can remember the Gospel and then sing with the Psalmist, “His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”<sup>7</sup> Like Job we can hold on for dear life to the mercies of God and proclaim that, whether this pain is our fault or not, He shall deliver us. It is not so with those who lack the capacity to exercise their faith. Believers may be sanctified by God's discipline,<sup>8</sup> but hardly ever will an apostate be brought back by His wrath, let alone a nonbeliever. The damned look at the punishments inflicted on them, and they conclude that it means God's love is impossible.

## Conclusion

Beloved, take a moment to think about your life today. What are your struggles? Are you having difficulty paying the bills, finding a spouse, or dealing with injuries and sickness? Does it get hard to wake up every morning and get out of bed, knowing that there is pain and frustration to confront? Do you wonder if what you are going through is a punishment from our Lord for your past sins? Then whatever the answer, now is the time to *hold on* to the promises of our Lord, for in so doing you shall receive a mighty restoration by His Right Hand. He has granted us faith in our Baptism, and now we are called to actively exercise that faith by trusting in His promises. For just as He promised mercy to the remnant of Israel who believed, so too does He promise mercy and blessing upon the remnant of humanity who will believe. Christ proved this love and forgiveness by dying on a Cross for our sins, and guaranteeing an eternal inheritance for those who trust in Him; let us then hold on no matter what the difficulties, and rejoice.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>7</sup> Psalm 30:5

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 12:3-17

Sermon for July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 50:15-21

**15** When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." **16** So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: **17** 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. **18** His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." **19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Psalm 138

**1** I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;  
**2** I bow down toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,  
for you have exalted above all things  
your name and your word.  
**3** On the day I called, you answered me;  
my strength of soul you increased.  
**4** All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,  
for they have heard the words of your mouth,  
**5** and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD.  
**6** For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,  
but the haughty he knows from afar.  
**7** Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life;  
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,  
and your right hand delivers me.  
**8** The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Romans 8:18-25

**16** The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.  
**18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.  
**20** For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope  
**21** that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of

the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

#### Luke 6:36-42

**32** “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. **37** “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; **38** give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” **39** He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? **40** A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. **41** Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **42** How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

Our text for meditation this Fourth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

St. Paul says that we are heirs with our Lord Jesus, meaning that we shall enjoy everything in eternity with Him. But what is it exactly that we shall inherit? Eternal life, we can mostly understand. Not being beset by disease or sorrow, these we can understand as well. But these all refer to a certain state of being, and it would be odd for us to inherit a state of being and not inherit any *stuff*. Can you imagine receiving such an inheritance? The executor of the will gets you in a room and lets you know that your dear departed relative has bequeathed upon you...a back massage, a health club visit and some time in a sauna – how would you respond? While of course our eternal life is of infinite value to us, far more than any massage or spa, what I'm getting at is that eternal life as a state of being is *part* of an inheritance, not the whole. God plans on giving us much more.

Christ tells the Apostles that He goes to prepare a place for them – and for us.<sup>1</sup> There remains an *inheritance* for us, something that goes *along with* death being abolished and sin being no more. Christ receives something in His inheritance, and He shares it with us! What is that inheritance though? What is that place? Thankfully St. Paul tells us in our passage today: we shall receive an unblemished, uncursed world. We are to inherit this world in a way that shall bring us joy beyond measure.

### **The Earth is Cursed**

When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, God made this pronouncement to the man: “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.”<sup>2</sup> The way things are now is *not* how they were supposed to be. Nature, designed to

---

<sup>1</sup> John 14:2-3

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:17-18

be man's friend and loyal servant, is often for his enemy and competitor as a result of this curse. We live in a world where our beloved pets die, where plants harm us with allergic reactions, where massive ocean waves destroy homes and locusts eat up our crops – the crops that man had to work *very hard* to grow.

Man has to struggle to receive blessings from nature, but even when we *can* use something it still bears the weight of the curse. To eat our food we have to work, or put animals to work for us, which itself requires work. We have to use bait to catch fish, but the bait is often found in worms that look like they should not exist; the bloodworm, for example, has venomous *copper fangs*, the only species that has it. Imagine getting a bite from one of those while trying to catch fish to feed your family! From the difficulties of life to the bizarre mutations all around us, everywhere in our world there is a feeling that something just isn't right. Haven't you ever walked outside and gotten that sense? Beautiful creation all around us, from the fragile butterfly to the majestic mountain, yet there is this daunting sensation that something heavy is hanging around the world's neck. I can name that feeling – it is *guilt*. Guilt over the fact that our sins are what caused this grave corruption.

Everything in nature feels the same way. St. Paul writes that creation “waits with eager longing,” and that it is “groaning” under the futility it was subjected to in the curse. I dare say, animals don't *want* to die. They don't *want* to fight each other. Parasites do not *want* to victimize other living creatures. Though their minds are far less intelligent than ours, creatures are aware that they are yoked to this curse despite never having fallen in the same way that mankind did in Eden.

Why then this curse? St. Paul says that creation was subjected to futility and corruption for the sake of hope. Let us imagine for a moment what life would be like without that creation being cursed. If fallen man lived without disease, discomfort, endless labors and hostility from nature itself, then we would all go about happily waiting for death. We would simply conclude that death is a part of life, but everything being so *perfect* around us that we would never be confronted with our need for repentance. Humans would simply wait around in bliss, sinning for 80 or so years until old age takes us out and then we get sent to hell. To put it simply, the curse placed on creation is the way God tells us that *we* are bad, not creation. But both need a Savior.

### **Christ Inherits a Purified Earth**

So all of creation *longs* for this curse to be undone, so that it can finally be what it was created to be. God's promise is that when the sons of God are revealed, when believers are given the crown of eternal life in Christ Jesus, then creation “will be set free from its bondage to corruption.” Our sin led to the world being cursed, lest sinners never feel any need for repentance. But Christ, having died for our sin, shall receive a world where this curse is *removed*, and it shall be perfect in every way.

You might wonder at this message. Haven't we heard that the earth is to perish by fire? Indeed there is fire, as the Apostle St. Peter tells us that “the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”<sup>3</sup> But while the heavens are to be dissolved, the earth will be burned in such a way as to “expose” it.<sup>4</sup> Oh there will be burning, but the burning that refines and purifies as the last vestiges of the curse are incinerated away from the world that God loved when He first created it.

Christ rose from the dead so as to be the firstfruits of the Resurrection. Upon His Return, He shall receive His inheritance. St. Paul writes elsewhere that there is a proper order observed here. First, He arose from the dead, and the first thing He shall receive is His Church, as we meet Him in the clouds with the rest of the risen saints.<sup>5</sup> Then, the world shall be purified and freed from the curse as He slays death itself once and for all.<sup>6</sup>

---

3 2 Peter 3:7

4 2 Peter 3:10

5 1 Thessalonians 4:17

6 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

## Conclusion

This purified world is what God promises as an inheritance. If you are a Baptized believer in Christ Jesus, then you shall be saved along with every other believer and all of creation. For the moment that involves suffering; the devil and all nonbelievers hate us for the message of hope that we proclaim. They hate Christ because they love evil, and they hate us because the Church represents Him here on earth. Thus we have even more difficulties in this life than *just* the curse placed on the ground; unlike the nonbeliever, we have to contend with terrors and persecutions on every side.

But beloved, it shall be *worth* it when we receive the eternal life and the new earth. Exploring the world without getting tired, swimming as long or deep as we like without fear of drowning, and delighting in animal companions without having to shed a tearful goodbye to them. We shall enjoy a newfound relationship with nature that retains everything we love about it in our current sojourn, but without any of the things that we hate about it. And after billions of years, it will be just as good – if not better – than when our ultimate deliverance began.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 19:9-21

**9** There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” **10** He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” **11** And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. **12** And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. **13** And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” **14** He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” **15** And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. **16** And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. **17** And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. **18** Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” **19** So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. **20** And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” **21** And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Psalm 16

- 1** Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.  
**2** I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;  
I have no good apart from you.”  
**3** As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,  
in whom is all my delight.  
**4** The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;  
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out  
or take their names on my lips.  
**5** The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;  
you hold my lot.  
**6** The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.  
**7** I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;  
in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I have set the LORD always before me;  
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.  
9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;  
my flesh also dwells secure.  
10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,  
or let your holy one see corruption.  
11 You make known to me the path of life;  
in your presence there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written,  
“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”  
20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. 22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Luke 5:1-11

1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, 2 and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. 3 Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” 5 And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” 6 And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. 7 They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” 9 For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, 10 and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” 11 And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Our text for meditation this Fifth Sunday after Trinity is on our Psalm.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**The Misery of the Non-believers**

Anton LaVey, founder of the so-called “church of satan,” had these last words: “Oh my, oh my, what have I done, there is something very wrong. . . there is something very wrong.”<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, infamous atheistic psychiatrist, here are his last words: “Now it is nothing but torture and makes no

---

1 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nWt\\_U2gEEI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nWt_U2gEEI)

sense anymore.”<sup>2</sup> How about the infamous hedonistic journalist Hunter S. Thompson? He wrote in his suicide note, “Football Season Is Over. No More Games. No More Bombs. No More Walking. No More Fun. No More Swimming. 67. That is 17 years past 50. 17 more than I needed or wanted. Boring. I am always [expletive removed]. No Fun – for anybody. 67. You are getting Greedy. Act your old age. Relax – This won't hurt.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, there are other nonbelievers who gave final words before their deaths, and not all of them were so dour and painful. Some of them go out with no other expression than screaming in pain as they die from some catastrophic injury. Others go out suddenly, for they were not expecting their deaths: John Entwistle, a musician for a band called The Who, was found dead by the stripper he was shacking up with after he fell asleep and had a cocaine-induced heart attack.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, we cannot judge a man's emotional state just by how he passes away.

But one thing is for certain. As the Psalmist proclaims, their sorrows multiply. Anyone who runs after another god, whether it is a false religion or a more personal idol like money or sexual perversion, shall find himself absolutely *miserable* both in this life and in the next. There is simply no getting around it, their lives and their eternal fates are not good; so long as they continue resisting faith in Christ, they forfeit any chance of having a happily ever after.

Beloved, be not tempted by the nonbelievers and the apostates. Do not listen to them when they say they are “happier without religion” or trumpeting whatever cult they joined. Even if you see these people partying, having fun, enjoying worldly means like money or fame, the Psalmist tells us plainly that they have their own miseries which will only get worse over time – especially on Judgment Day.

## The Joy of the Believer

Truth be told, you have no *reason* to go off into the temptations presented by the wicked. Things may be hard for us here on earth, but they can be for the atheist, the hindu, the muslim, or any other path to hell that people take. The difference is, God has made promises to us which make it all *worth it*. David writes that the Lord is his portion – and belonging to God means having a beautiful inheritance. Don't let the apostate tell you that he or she has “more fun” when trying to get you to slip away from your faith; God promises that at His Right Hand are pleasures *forevermore*. The nonbeliever's fun ends; yours will not, even into eternity.

The joy of the believer is an ever-present facet in life that we should always return to, as the Apostle tells us directly to rejoice always.<sup>5</sup> But let us remember that this joy is not on account of ourselves. King David writes “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” He does not write this about himself, but he writes from the perspective of Christ, seeing as a prophet that our Lord would rise from the dead.<sup>6</sup> David saw corruption as he slept with his fathers; Jesus Christ rose from the dead before bodily decay could set in.

We might wonder, how does this Psalm preach the hope and joy of the believer if the tenth verse is about Jesus? Sure, Christ rose from the dead and shall never die again – but how does that benefit the believer? Ah, but there is where the Psalmist writes “You make known to me the path of life.” He knew that faith in Christ justifies us; union with Christ means rising with Christ;<sup>7</sup> He rose from the dead precisely to ensure that whoever trusts in Him for salvation shall be counted worthy to rise again as

---

2 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-grief/201704/a-collection-of-last-words>

3 <https://www.gdargaud.net/Humor/FamousLastWords.html>

4 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/stripper-found-entwistle-dead-after-heart-attack-triggered-by-cocaine-135736.html>

5 1 Thessalonians 5:16

6 Acts 2:27, 13:35-39

7 Romans 6:4

well.<sup>8</sup> And what's more, our flesh dwells secure as the Psalmist says, because Jesus promises that whoever believed in Him *shall never die*.<sup>9</sup> Even if you shed this mortal coil, death has no power over you; what happens to you is *not* the same as what happens to the nonbeliever, for you are accepted into the arms of our Lord in His Heaven while the believer goes into darkness.

## Conclusion

The promises of our Lord were enough for King David to proclaim his diligent allegiance to God forever. No other being in the entire universe could do such wonderful things for a man, to promise that he shall not only live forever, but that he shall live forever with pleasures forevermore. So he declares his loyalty, and so must we. Today beloved, say with the Psalmist that you shall never run after another god; say in your heart that you shall not partake in the infernal rites of the damned; declare to our Lord that you will use His Name rightly and not in vain. And let us then walk in His mercy, in the forgiveness of all our sins, full of joy at both His present blessings and the eternal life to come.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>8</sup> Romans 4:24-25

<sup>9</sup> John 11:25-26

Sermon for July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Exodus 20:1-17

1 And God spoke all these words, saying,

2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Psalms 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours out speech,  
and night to night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words,  
whose voice is not heard.

4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,  
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,  
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them,  
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

**7** The law of the LORD is perfect,  
 reviving the soul;  
 the testimony of the LORD is sure,  
 making wise the simple;  
**8** the precepts of the LORD are right,  
 rejoicing the heart;  
 the commandment of the LORD is pure,  
 enlightening the eyes;  
**9** the fear of the LORD is clean,  
 enduring forever;  
 the rules of the LORD are true,  
 and righteous altogether.  
**10** More to be desired are they than gold,  
 even much fine gold;  
 sweeter also than honey  
 and drippings of the honeycomb.  
**11** Moreover, by them is your servant warned;  
 in keeping them there is great reward.  
**12** Who can discern his errors?  
 Declare me innocent from hidden faults.  
**13** Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;  
 let them not have dominion over me!  
 Then I shall be blameless,  
 and innocent of great transgression.  
**14** Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart  
 be acceptable in your sight,  
 O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

#### Romans 6:1-11

**1** What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

**5** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

**12** Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

#### Matthew 5:21-26

**21** "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will

be liable to the hell of fire. **23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. **26** Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Our text for meditation this Sixth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction: Sticks and Stones**

There is an old saying that goes like this: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” The idea behind it is that words are simply words, sounds or markings on paper (or these days a screen), so they cannot inflict physical damage. A father might repeat this tired old line to his son after hearing that some mean children teased him at school. A mother might reassure her teenage daughter that the rumors spread about her are “just words,” and encourage her that she should move on. So the saying spreads in the hopes that people get “thicker skin.”

In recent years, anti-bullying campaigns have seen exponential growth because it turns out nobody really believes that old saying. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the people who live under constant criticism from their unpleasable spouses. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the victims of false accusations as they sit in prison. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” If you ever decide to tell a grieving widow that you are glad her husband is dead, get back to me after and tell me whether she was unaffected – assuming she doesn't knock out your teeth. At this point, no one thinks that words are harmless. Even though it is good to raise your children to have “thick skin” so to speak, it does not make them invulnerable to the great fires set by the untameable tongue of mankind.<sup>1</sup> The tongue is an instrument of murder.

### **Turning the Weapon on the Self**

Today's reading introduces this dynamic and expands on it. Our Lord Jesus tells us that the tongue is not just an instrument for killing *others*. It is also the tool by which countless men and women shall be damned, effectively committing spiritual *suicide*. It is not the words themselves which do this, so much as the intent behind them. The words you use make your heart, the very thing which God values the most, suspect. St. John tells us that we must love one another, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows Him. However, “anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”<sup>2</sup> Your words to another believer – whom you are *supposed* to love – will reveal whether or not your heart really belongs to God.

If you are angry with your brother, you are liable to judgment. This is to say, if your brother or sister in Christ upsets you, then your motives must be examined, and I pray for your sake that you are the first to examine them and correct yourself. Perhaps you are justified in your anger; Christians sin all the time, and unfortunately we sin against *each other* quite frequently, so some momentary anger is expected, it's perfectly natural. But I advise you, judge that anger before God judges you. Does that anger reflect a refusal to forgive? Does that anger turn into boiling hate for a fellow believer, someone

---

<sup>1</sup> James 3:3-12

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:3-4

that our Lord *died* to save? If so then beware, for the unforgiving one and the one who hates his brothers, if they do not repent, are hellbound.<sup>3</sup>

Our Lord brings up anger first, because it is from anger that the man is inspired to say things he may regret. But from there He mentions insults; in a more literal translation of the text, Christ says “whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!’” Raca is an Aramaic word which roughly means “empty-headed.”<sup>4</sup> It would be the equivalent of calling a fellow Christian an idiot. Bring this moment to judgment before *you* are brought to judgment. Did you mean those words? Was there real contempt for him behind it when you said it? Harmless teasing is fine. Using insults to cut someone down and wound their soul is deadly to your eternal fate.

Our Lord also brings up calling someone a *fool*. It may sound like He is just repeating Himself here. He just warned us for when we call someone “Raca” - or any other such insult. Why warn us about greater severity for calling someone a fool? Because to Christ's audience, a fool was not just a dunderhead; all throughout the book of Proverbs, the fool is presented as either amoral or immoral.<sup>5</sup> Our Lord is saying that you risk hell when you *condemn* someone as wicked, apostate, or lacking in character when you *know* that they are a brother or sister in Christ. This is someone who has been justified by faith in Jesus Himself, declared righteous by our Heavenly Father. To call them a “fool” or to revile their character in some other fashion is to effectively accuse God of *lying* or making a mistake. When you pronounce that condemnation on someone, no wonder you are at risk of damnation – you'd better make damned sure you are right, because if you are wrong then God treats it like blasphemy! And we know exactly what happens to blasphemers.

Now, on that topic, maybe you have leveled such an accusation at someone. But when you called that individual Christian an idolater, an apostate, wicked, or whatever else, you reasoned to yourself “well they weren't really a Christian anyway.” Are you sure? Do you know this person? Are you willing to risk eternity in hell for the brief satisfaction of attacking them? Unfortunately, too many people will find out – all too late – that they should never have taken that risk. By their tongues, by which I mean the outpouring of their rotten hearts, they have slain their own souls.

## Turning Away from the Ledge

As we speak, there are people who believe they are Christians who are in the process of sealing their damnation by their impenitent words and motivations. With what they say, with how they feel, they demonstrate to our God that they care nothing about Christ and the Cross on which He died for us. Such people deserve hellfire for their careless presumptions and foolhardy anger. Ironically, they feel quite righteous as they stand on the ledge of damnation. I am not alone in this interpretation by the way. Here is Luther's comment on this very passage:

Therefore, it is as if it were said: He who is angry in heart is already deserving of death before God; but he who goes further and says: Raca, or, Thou fool, has already had sentence pronounced upon him, etc. In short, he is already damned to hell fire who is angry with his brother. But he who says Raca, deserves to go still deeper into hell; still deeper, however, he who kills also with words and fist. So the punishment and condemnation is entirely one and the same, and yet the same is heavier and more severe as the sin progresses and breaks out more fiercely.<sup>6</sup>

My friends, turn away from the ledge before you fall off of it. Christ says that before you so much as make an *offering* at Church, before people would see you as a Christian, repent of this sinful anger towards your brethren. Forgive them. Note here that the first thing Christ tells us to do is be reconciled – not necessarily *in person*, for such things may not always be possible. Saying something

3 Matthew 6:14-16, 1 John 3:15

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4469.htm>

5 <https://www.gotquestions.org/fool-Proverbs.html>

6 From Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, found here: <https://godrules.net/library/luther/37luther1.htm>



nasty on the internet to a fellow Christian is not easily mended by direct apologies, or perhaps someone we offended shed their mortal coil before we could apologize. But that part of reconciliation is always secondary. More important to our Lord is that we change our *mind* and work on our hearts. Drop the silly anger, let the burning hatred of someone God loves be extinguished. There is a time and a place for righteous anger, but even then it must be brief, never permanent.<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

We have all been guilty of this errant anger and salty language towards our fellow Christians. If we hold onto it, then our Heavenly Father shall look at our faithlessness, and upon Judgment Day tell us “Ah, you like anger do you? Have as much as you like in the fires prepared for the devil and his angels, there you shall experience all the anger you could ever take – and infinitely more.”

The good news is that such a terrible fate is not *guaranteed*, beloved. Our Lord Jesus took all the Divine wrath which we deserve, paying the price on that Cross which we could never pay on our own. As we go forward, let us meditate on our unfounded hatred, anger, and reviling, and lay it all on the foot of the Cross. Let us request mercy from our Savior, and help from the Holy Spirit to keep us from offending once more.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

7 Ephesians 4:26-27

Sermon for August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 2:7-17

**7** then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. **8** And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. **9** And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**10** A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. **11** The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. **12** And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. **13** The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. **14** And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

**15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. **16** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Psalms 33:1-12

**1** Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!

Praise befits the upright.

**2** Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;  
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

**3** Sing to him a new song;  
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

**4** For the word of the LORD is upright,  
and all his work is done in faithfulness.

**5** He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD.

**6** By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,  
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

**7** He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;  
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

**8** Let all the earth fear the LORD;  
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

**9** For he spoke, and it came to be;  
he commanded, and it stood firm.

**10** The LORD brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;  
he frustrates the plans of the peoples.

**11** The counsel of the LORD stands forever,  
the plans of his heart to all generations.

**12** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD,  
the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

Romans 6:19-23

**19** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented

your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

**20** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

#### Mark 8:1-10

**1** In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him and said to them, **2** “I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. **3** And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some of them have come from far away.” **4** And his disciples answered him, “How can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?” **5** And he asked them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven.” **6** And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. **7** And they had a few small fish. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. **8** And they ate and were satisfied. And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. **9** And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. **10** And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

Our text for meditation this Seventh Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

Today's passage has a different voice than it used to. It does not *hit* the way that it did five hundred years ago, or even a *thousand* years ago. The early Church read it differently than we do, the Reformers read it differently than we do – and as far as I can see, St. Paul himself, writing the book of Romans, looked back at the final draft of his tome and read it back to himself, seeing it vastly differently than we do today. Beloved, Christians were quietly listening to this passage and finding themselves edified by it, enjoying the simple and beneficial message without raising a fuss. But today, we hear it and risk feeling a dreadful sense of *despair*.

It is not that the *meaning* has changed. A small child could understand it. Simply put, we were once bad but now we are good, because Jesus saved us; now, because Jesus saved us, we should do good instead of bad. It is that simple. Sin destroys, so why sin? We used to be slaves to sin before we became Christians, but now we see that sin leads to death so we ought to avoid it. In generations past, believers heard those words, took them to heart, and did their best to please the God who saved them by being better day by day.

Us moderns though... like I said, it hits different. Something is getting in the way of it, making us feel defensive, argumentative, irritated, sad, and ultimately afflicted with a sense of creeping, ugly dread. Perhaps not all of us feel this way. I certainly used to, and I have spoken to people who still have this despairing response, and it seems that modernity is doing us no favors. And why is this the case? Because we are frustrated with a seeming inability to stop certain sins, and our vocabularies have changes in the past hundred or so years to reflect this. We don't talk about habits, we talk about addictions. We don't talk about personalities, we talk about psychological conditions. The development of culture surrounding psychology has rendered us feeling powerless and unchanged by the Gospel. Unfortunately, the Church has played along with these changes.

## A Curious New Voice

Before I wrote this sermon, I did some research. Nowhere does Luther talk about addiction. The Church Fathers use words like “addict” and “addicted,” but they typically reserve such words for relatively benign concepts like being prone to *reading*. While the Reformers talk about a sin nature, or original sin, that inspires us to transgress, they do not countenance the medical terminology of our day. Back then, if you had a particular sin that you found yourself committing over and over again, or if you had the same problems with lust that Augustine had, then you simply did your best. Because of sin dwelling in us, of course we will find ourselves sinning over and over again; the solution is to get back up each time, hear the words of absolution, and try again. You only find a concept of “sinless perfectionism” among the monastic writers, and truth be told we can safely ignore their nonsense; everyone else just talked about the need to continue on seeking to get better over time – with the Holy Spirit's help of course, we call that *sanctification* or becoming more holy and righteous. Today though, we are treated to a new voice that responds whenever we hear passages like these, an *accusatory* voice.

St. Paul says,

present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

But the new voice replies,

*Dear St. Paul, I cannot! I continue to (insert sin here, whether it is pornography, fornication, drug use, drunkenness, etc.). Does this mean that I remain a slave to impurity?*

St. Paul says,

**20** For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death.

But the new voice replies,

*These sins lead to death, yet no matter how hard I try I continue in them. Woe is me, must I perish?*

St. Paul says,

**23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But the new voice replies,

*All I have done is sin – surely this means I merit death!*

You see beloved, there are countless people out there who are feeling a dour weight of despair – and is it because they keep sinning? No, for the Church has proclaimed absolution for centuries. It is not their sin, but their belief that they are *addicts*, hopelessly doomed to continue compulsively repeating the same sins forever until they are tossed into the lake of fire. They feel this way because they are listening to the devil and the world, who preach an *anti-Gospel* to them.

## Answering the New Voice

Dear Christian, the Word of God says you *were* a slave of sin. The devil and the world say you *are* a slave of sin. The Word proclaims that you have been set free from sin to start serving God. The world and the devil says that because you still transgress, any such freedom is an illusion. You see, the world has offered up this new understanding of our sinful habits, calling them *conditions* that must be accepted as something inherent to our identities. The world says you are not just a man who likes beer and should watch out against drunkenness – oh no, actually you are an *alcoholic* who will always be an alcoholic even if you haven't gotten drunk in ten years. The world says that you are not someone with a healthy sexuality which must be expressed in marriage – no, actually you are a *porn addict* who must live in constant fear of his own body for his whole life.

There is some truth to the concept of addiction. A hard drug like heroin is powerfully addictive, isn't it? Someone gets started on it, and before you know it the sensations the drug provides are all he can think about. But what is addiction? It is a chronic, habitual impulse to engage in a behavior or to partake in a substance. For example, let's say our friend Bill uses heroin; after he gets started, he will be

burdened with impulses that encourage him to do it more. But the world and the devil both have played a trick on us all by claiming that Bill *is* what he *feels*, or that he is how he sees himself. Bill is not a man who experiences those habitual impulses – the world proclaims that he *is* his addiction. He is no longer Bill the man, but Bill the junkie. And if Bill isn't a Christian, chances are he will like his drug enough to accept the label and find himself laid out in the street with all the people like him.

But what if Bill becomes a Christian, having heard that Jesus died for his sins and rose again so he could live eternally *without* the heroin? Does God see him as Bill the junkie? Is *that* the label that our Lord would give him? Of course not! Bill is justified by *faith* in our Lord Jesus; when our heavenly Father looks at the man, he only sees the perfect righteousness of Christ who shed His blood to cover those sins. Even if Bill relapses a month after his Baptism and does heroin, if he goes to our Lord for forgiveness and trusts in the mercy offered to him, God shall not think of him as an apostate or slave of sin. Bill *was* a slave of sin. He *was* a junkie. But now, even though he might struggle with those impulses to go do the drug, God says he is *free*.

### **Freedom in Christ**

Our reading is received differently in the modern era because we have forgotten that it is about how God sees us. Neither you nor I nor the devil nor the world have any power to change what our Lord has declared – and He has declared that believers are no longer slaves of sin. If you believe in Christ, then you are free from sin. The Apostle is saying that we should do our best to live the way God sees us; if He says that Bill is not a slave to sin, then Bill should do his best to live that way, and work on avoiding his former drug use. Someone who has a bad drinking habit, drink less! A woman who slept around, she should find a husband! Let us live our lives with the penitent faith that results in looking the way God sees us. But let us not think for even one moment that our Lord shall abandon us just because we are still struggling. For His love, which endures forever, shall always say to us that we are *free*. Let us rejoice in that freedom, and strive to live according to it.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Jeremiah 23:16-30

**16** Thus says the LORD of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. **17** They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”

**18** For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD

to see and to hear his word,

or who has paid attention to his word and listened?

**19** Behold, the storm of the LORD!

Wrath has gone forth,

a whirling tempest;

it will burst upon the head of the wicked.

**20** The anger of the LORD will not turn back

until he has executed and accomplished

the intents of his heart.

In the latter days you will understand it clearly.

**21** “I did not send the prophets,

yet they ran;

I did not speak to them,

yet they prophesied.

**22** But if they had stood in my council,

then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,

and they would have turned them from their evil way,

and from the evil of their deeds.

**23** “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? **24** Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. **25** I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ **26** How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, **27** who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? **28** Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. **29** Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? **30** Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another.

Psalms 26

**1** Vindicate me, O LORD,

for I have walked in my integrity,

and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering.

**2** Prove me, O LORD, and try me;

test my heart and my mind.

**3** For your steadfast love is before my eyes,

and I walk in your faithfulness.

**4** I do not sit with men of falsehood,  
nor do I consort with hypocrites.  
**5** I hate the assembly of evildoers,  
and I will not sit with the wicked.  
**6** I wash my hands in innocence  
and go around your altar, O LORD,  
**7** proclaiming thanksgiving aloud,  
and telling all your wondrous deeds.  
**8** O LORD, I love the habitation of your house  
and the place where your glory dwells.  
**9** Do not sweep my soul away with sinners,  
nor my life with bloodthirsty men,  
**10** in whose hands are evil devices,  
and whose right hands are full of bribes.  
**11** But as for me, I shall walk in my integrity;  
redeem me, and be gracious to me.  
**12** My foot stands on level ground;  
in the great assembly I will bless the LORD.

Acts 20:26-38

**26** Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, **27** for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. **28** Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. **29** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; **30** and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. **31** Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. **32** And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. **33** I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. **34** You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. **35** In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

**36** And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. **37** And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, **38** being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

Matthew 7:15-23

**15** "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16** You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? **17** So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. **18** A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. **19** Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. **21** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' **23** And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Our text for meditation this Eighth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

A common false teaching going around, coming from “Christian Zionists” like John Hagee, is that God blesses those who bless “Israel” - that is, the geopolitical entity *calling* itself “Israel.” To get to that conclusion, false teachers will misread Genesis 12:3, in which our Lord says to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” The claim they make is that this means a particular subset of the physical descendants of Abraham – the Jewish people – are subject to this promise from God. Thus whoever “blesses” them, not with blessings like evangelism or the rebuke of the Law, but with *money* is supposed to be blessed, and that means *material* blessing; in their view the only reason God makes countries like America or Canada “rich” is so that they can continue giving unspeakable wealth to the Zionist state and fund various synagogues. Meanwhile, they believe anyone *opposing* the Jewish people is accursed, even if they claim to be Christians.

So many countries give aid to the Jewish state,<sup>1</sup> and yet the promises made by these “Christian Zionist” preachers have turned out to be largely false. America has sent billions of dollars to Israel every year for decades, yet the average American has little to no savings, housing prices have been extremely high to the point where most millennials will never own one, and marriage rates are extremely low. Germany and England send material support to Israel, but their economies are dying, their people are afflicted with rising crime rates, and they hardly have militaries to speak of when it comes to their *own* national defense. The world is undergoing harder and harder times, and those “blessings” promised haven’t materialized. Even if the dispensationalist claims that the blessings are more “spiritual,” as if giving money to Israel meant the Gospel shined more brightly in the countries that did so, this too has shown to be false. Few of these countries are majority Christian, and our moralities have gone down the toilet in record timing.

## The Mask

You might wonder why I’m bringing up “Christian Zionism” like this. What does it have to do with our Old Testament reading? Think of it this way, beloved. Jeremiah writes during a time when the nation of Judah was on track to be punished for their wickedness. They had abandoned God almost entirely, either by secretly worshiping idols and the stars<sup>2</sup> or by observing the sacrifices God required while oppressing the poor around them.<sup>3</sup> Judah at this time was all about paying *lip service* to our Lord, but their hearts were far from Him.

As Jeremiah prophesied, they went into Exile for their sins. Why did this happen? In Jeremiah’s day, as he was warning everyone, they had the Law. Josiah had found it a few decades prior and declared a reformation of the country. The Mosaic Law was being proclaimed regularly, so they *knew* that they must fear God, and they *knew better* than to violate the commandments. Yet despite this, the people ignored the commandments to love God and love their neighbors. They decided to reject what Jeremiah was warning about and seek after pleasure, perfidy, and profits.

Why didn’t they listen? They knew what they were doing was wrong, and they heard Jeremiah speak. The problem is that there were *other voices*. There were other prophets, but unlike Jeremiah or Daniel or Ezekiel, these were *false* prophets. They said to the king and all the people “It shall be well

---

<sup>1</sup> Example: military aid during the Gaza conflict that began in 2023.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_military\\_aid\\_to\\_Israel\\_during\\_the\\_Gaza\\_war](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_military_aid_to_Israel_during_the_Gaza_war)

<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel 8

<sup>3</sup> Jeremiah 5 and elsewhere.



with you,” “no disaster shall come upon you.” They claimed to have dreams, which they believed were *superior* to the Word of God, and would cancel out whatever warnings He had given them previously.

The false prophets of Jeremiah's day gave the people an excuse, a doctrine, a *mask* that they could wear. By believing the dreams these men cooked up, the children of Judah could pretend that they were pious while engaged in all sorts of sins. They believed the prophets when they taught seeing the Temple in Jerusalem was *proof* they were God's chosen people.<sup>4</sup> You can almost hear them replying to Jeremiah's warnings, saying “Ah, but our Lord brought His glory down into the Temple when Solomon built it, He approves of this city and it shall never fall.” And then they would go right back to making offerings to false gods.

False teachers offer the same masks to people today. The “Christian Zionists” tell people that our lands will be blessed and prosperous and never fall, all because we support the Israelis with lots of foreign aid. But it is not just the Zionists that pass this cheap confidence. The “Prosperity Gospel” teachers tell their audience that everything goes well for them if they just send in a big enough “seed offering.” The “Social Gospel” people tell their parishioners that if they're just *nice* enough to people and never condemn real sin for what it is, then their societies will be happy. Each and every one of these false teachings gives people a mask to wear, a false piety to drape over their impenitent sins as they go about their merry way to hell. Judgment looms on the horizon over our countries, and our theological *excuses* are wearing thin.

Sins for which God obliterates masses of people are being tolerated, or even encouraged. Our Lord killed *twenty four thousand* Israelites for impenitent sexual sin and idolatry in the wilderness;<sup>5</sup> modern evangelicals today are apparently unafraid of such judgment, because a majority of them are perfectly fine with people fornicating in a “cohabitation” relationship.<sup>6</sup> A full *quarter* of my home country's marriages are “mixed religion,” meaning that unequal yoking and idolatry in the homes is accepted at alarming rates.<sup>7</sup> Our lands are tolerating *massive pagan statues* being erected,<sup>8</sup> mosques are being built, usury is everywhere, our women are signing up for porn sites as a get-rich-quick scheme, and believers are not expecting the judgment that comes with such abominations. Why? Because false teachers are telling us it will be well; oh but we support the Israelis, oh but we put our seed money in the offering plate, oh but we are nice to sexual degenerates and we use the “correct” pronouns. God *can't* judge us, the moderns say. The children of Judah said the exact same thing before they were cast into Exile.

## Coming Judgment

God is a God at hand, as He says. He hears everything and sees everything, and that means He can hear our nations' blasphemous thoughts and see right through our false-pious masks. He saw right through the empty promises of the false prophets in Judah, and He knew that the people were using their blasphemous declarations as an excuse to keep sinning. Today, I invite you to ask yourself, “am I wearing a mask of false piety the same way they did?” Am I excusing my own sin, telling myself that some theological loophole gives me permission to live as I please?

I advise you to truly examine yourself here. False teachers are everywhere, and they know that what they are emphasizing has nothing to do with the true Gospel. But God's Word stands forever, and He has declared that there is salvation in *no other name*; it is only by appealing to the mercies of Jesus Christ that you can avoid the wrath to come. Living every day in a truly penitent faith, a faith that turns away from our sins and does not see Christianity as a blank check for sinning freely.

True faith says that only Christ can deliver us from the wrath of God. Not our works. Not our

---

4 Jeremiah 8:13-14

5 Numbers 25:1-9

6 <https://ifstudies.org/blog/cohabitation-among-evangelicals-a-new-norm>

7 <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/religious-intermarriage/>

8 <https://www.hindustantimes.com/htcity/trips-tours/north-america-s-tallest-ram-idol-rises-in-mississauga-netizens-say-make-canada-great-again-101754396855304.html>

money going to some near-eastern country. Not our nice-sounding words, spoken softly. Only the God-man who bled for our sins, who washes us in the waters of Baptism, who promises to come back to deliver us from the judgment to come – only *Jesus!* And we will take off whatever confidence we had in worldly things, whatever mask we were wearing, and bow humbly at His feet to receive the mercy He promises.

We must repent and believe in Him – every day. The great tragedy of Judah as it went into Exile was how willing God was the entire time to accept them back, to offer them peace, and to forgive all that they had done; all they had to do was turn from their idols and ask God for forgiveness. Our populations have the same offer, and if they turn around and clean up their acts then it is fairly certain that God will restore much of our countries' well-being. More important to us is that we, as a *body of Christians*, because He is offering deliverance from something far worse than an exile or being taken as a colony. And He is offering us Paradise as the alternative to it. Let us then cast off our masks, say “Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner,” and rejoice at His promised restoration.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Samuel 22:21-34

- 21** “The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness;  
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.  
**22** For I have kept the ways of the LORD  
and have not wickedly departed from my God.  
**23** For all his rules were before me,  
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.  
**24** I was blameless before him,  
and I kept myself from guilt.  
**25** And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,  
according to my cleanness in his sight.  
**26** “With the merciful you show yourself merciful;  
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;  
**27** with the purified you deal purely,  
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.  
**28** You save a humble people,  
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down.  
**29** For you are my lamp, O LORD,  
and my God lightens my darkness.  
**30** For by you I can run against a troop,  
and by my God I can leap over a wall.  
**31** This God—his way is perfect;  
the word of the LORD proves true;  
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.  
**32** “For who is God, but the LORD?  
And who is a rock, except our God?  
**33** This God is my strong refuge  
and has made my way blameless.  
**34** He made my feet like the feet of a deer  
and set me secure on the heights.

Psalm 51:1-12

- 1** Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your steadfast love;  
according to your abundant mercy  
blot out my transgressions.  
**2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
and cleanse me from my sin!  
**3** For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is ever before me.  
**4** Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
so that you may be justified in your words  
and blameless in your judgment.

**5** Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,  
and in sin did my mother conceive me.

**6** Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,  
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.

**7** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

**8** Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

**9** Hide your face from my sins,  
and blot out all my iniquities.

**10** Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.

**11** Cast me not away from your presence,  
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

**12** Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

#### 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

**1** For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** and all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

**6** Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. **7** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." **8** We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **9** We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **10** nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

#### Luke 16:1-9

**1** He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. **2** And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' **3** And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. **4** I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' **5** So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' **6** He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' **7** Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' **8** The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. **9** And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."

Our text for meditation this Ninth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction

A little boy is told to do his chores. This includes sweeping the floor, taking out the garbage, tidying the living room, tidying his *own* room, and feeding the dog. Of course, he does not want to do them, and for a moment he feels like grumbling against his father. But then he remembers how God was angry when the children of Israel grumbled in the wilderness, so he thinks twice. He does his chores and feels a little better after his father says “good job.”

A young man is sitting at his computer desk alone. His fingers begin to type the addresses of websites that he shouldn't be looking at. He feels anxious while he's engaged in his lust, like something is trying to pull him away from it. The entire time, a part of him is praying for help peeling himself away from the things he's looking at, because he knows that it was lust that brought about the destruction of so many in Israel's history. Finally he pulls away, shuts off his computer, and asks for forgiveness for that momentary lapse in self-control.

A woman begins following all the latest “drama” accounts on Instagram, and finds herself embroiled in the scandals between celebrities, ex-boyfriends and ex-girlfriends. She starts to ignore her duties at home, always focusing her heart on the latest *juicy* story to the point where she cannot concentrate. Then, one day she snaps out of it when her father tells her that idolatry – expecting all of one's good to come from something that isn't God – was the reason so many Israelite women were carried off into slavery.

### Old Testament History

For all of these examples, we see how St. Paul advises us regarding the use of the Old Testament histories. If you could summarize the Old Testament in a single sentence from a theological perspective, it would sound like “The history of Creation, mankind's fall, and God's preparations for the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus to fix it.” But from a *human* perspective, centering on the actions of persons like Moses, the judges, the kings, and the priests of the Old Testament, it is best described as a dismal record of human failure.

Here is a brief history of humanity according to the Old Testament. Adam and Eve fell in the Garden. Then Cain killed Abel. Then mankind became so wicked that God killed all of them except Noah and his family. Then Nimrod tried to make a tower to spit in God's face. Abraham lied about his wife. Sarah pimped out her maidservant to her own husband. Jacob engaged in sorcery and openly cared little for one of his wives. Jacob's children tried to kill their brother Joseph (they ended up selling him into slavery instead). The Israelites forgot God while they were slaves in Egypt. They rebelled against Him and grumbled and went after idols *right after He delivered them from slavery*. During the period of Judges, they constantly ran off into idolatry, and the priesthood became corrupt under Eli's sons. Israel's first king, Saul, consulted a witch after a lifetime of trying to murder his rival. David was a land-pirate before he won Israel's civil war and let men die in battle to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba.<sup>1</sup> The kings after David were almost all bad, going after pagan religions, bathing the land in blood, sacrificing their own sons, and doing deals with evil empires to consolidate their power. Most of the priesthood followed suit. When God said “enough” to all of this, the Assyrians took the northern Israelites into captivity and almost none of them repented. When He took the children of Judah into Exile in Babylon, few of them returned – and even fewer had truly changed their hearts. The post-exilic prophets and Ezra and Nehemiah write about how even *after* God mercifully permitted Judah to return home, they still grumbled against making good offerings, dragged their feet with Temple restoration, and many of the men divorced their aging wives to marry pagans. When God used Esther to deliver the

---

<sup>1</sup> Lest we forget that Uriah the Hittite was made to die in *battle*, where other Israelites were fighting as well.

children of Judah from a madman named Haman – who wanted to *kill them all* – they respond to that great deliverance by celebrating themselves and refusing to even *mention* our Lord.

This is only scratching the surface. The Old Testament chiefly speaks of those people who knew the promise of the Messiah and had the Law of the Lord revealed to them. The rest of humanity during that time was almost universally in deep spiritual darkness – God concurs with Habakkuk the prophet that they were *even worse* than the Israelites.

### **The Purpose of Old Testament History**

So the Old Testament shows a great amount of just, *awful* failure on the part of humanity. At the best of times, the battle between good and evil could be described as a bloody stalemate; even then, evil had an advantage, because all the devil had to do was wait until the generation of saints turned over to the next. Then temptations could hit the young people all over again and the bloodletting of humanity would continue. The Old Testament gives us a unique point of view; unlike any other ancient historical book, the Word is crystal clear about how bad humanity had it before Christ came to save us.

Now God has saved our souls, and in the battle between good and evil He has leveled out the playing field. Christians have the advantage of seeing the mistakes of the eras before Christ, can learn from them, *and* we have the advantage of knowing that we are covered by Jesus's precious Blood, our sins are washed away in Baptism, and the Holy Spirit actively helps us in sanctification. The Christian can read his Old Testament, receive the warnings from it, and move forward.

### **A Gentle Warning**

Someone might say we don't “need” it anymore, because we have the Gospels and Acts and the Epistles and Revelation. Why keep the Old Testament around, other than *maybe* retaining the Psalms for prayer and the wisdom literature for daily living? Ah, St. Paul won't hear it beloved. Those records of the Israelites sinning in the wilderness, of their sinful living before and after the Exile, *all* of it is there to help perfect you. Let no one disparage the right use of the books of the Judges, Samuel, Kings, Chronicles, and more to help us in our walk with Christ.

And we need that warning more than ever before. St. Paul writes “let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.” We cannot – *must* not – be arrogant in how we see those who went before. The Holy Spirit uses the Word here that you may learn from the old believers' mistakes, and thus have the head start to sanctification that they did not have. If anything, as we read about the dour painful histories there our studies ought to make us grateful to have the Scriptures – and even more grateful that we have the fullness of revelation in Christ Jesus.

The Old Testament is there to help perfect us. Let us rejoice and read it *every day* with true devotion.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Jeremiah 7:1-11

**1** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: **2** “Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. **3** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. **4** Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

**5** “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, **6** if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, **7** then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

**8** “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. **9** Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, **10** and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? **11** Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.

Psalms 92

**1** It is good to give thanks to the LORD,  
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;  
**2** to declare your steadfast love in the morning,  
and your faithfulness by night,  
**3** to the music of the lute and the harp,  
to the melody of the lyre.  
**4** For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;  
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.  
**5** How great are your works, O LORD!  
Your thoughts are very deep!  
**6** The stupid man cannot know;  
the fool cannot understand this:  
**7** that though the wicked sprout like grass  
and all evildoers flourish,  
they are doomed to destruction forever;  
**8** but you, O LORD, are on high forever.  
**9** For behold, your enemies, O LORD,  
for behold, your enemies shall perish;  
all evildoers shall be scattered.  
**10** But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;  
you have poured over me fresh oil.  
**11** My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;  
my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.  
**12** The righteous flourish like the palm tree  
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.  
**13** They are planted in the house of the LORD;

they flourish in the courts of our God.  
14 They still bear fruit in old age;  
they are ever full of sap and green,  
15 to declare that the LORD is upright;  
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

#### 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

#### Luke 19:41-48

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

45 And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 46 saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

47 And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, 48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Our meditation for this Tenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament and Gospel readings.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Introduction**

These days everyone hates financial crimes – except those engaging in them, I suppose. In our Gospel reading, we read about Christ chasing out the money-changers, and I am sure that everyone is commenting “based!” Online forums are absolutely full of young people condemning usury, vulture capitalism, finance capitalism, capitalism itself, government-backed student loans, loan sharks, and so on it goes. Their instincts are right to condemn most of these things, even if their proposed solutions (often involving rope and guillotines) are ill-conceived. For these youth, they love to see Christ whipping the money changers and driving them out, screaming at them, because it quite rightly shows them that our Lord fights for the downtrodden.

The anger is understandable. The poor get poorer and the rich get richer. The wealthy stay in their station, and the unspoken caste system that reaches over the whole world continues to dominate just about *everything*. Those who have continue to oppress those who have not, and they never consider



how God will respond to their wickedness. The arc of modern history is lurching toward a return to feudalism, and they want upward mobility to be impossible for most people.<sup>1</sup> No matter what government is in charge, whether it says it is socialist or capitalist or nationalist or anything else, the rich will usually stay rich and the downtrodden will usually stay in their place. So people get bitter.

### **The Self-Righteous Judges of Greed**

The anger is understandable when you consider that few of the people that feel this way ever have an ounce of self reflection. There is a unique temptation in the modern era to look at either the richest or the poorest of people engaged in greedy sins, and act like that makes us better than others. Sam Bankman-Fried pulled a massive theft operation with peoples' cryptocurrency, resulting in the largest fraud of all time; people see him, as they formerly saw Bernie Madoff, and assume that they could not *possibly* be guilty of sinful greed. We do the same when we shake our heads at some poor thug stealing a car or enslaving people to his drug dealing business. “Oh I would *never* do that” we say about the usurer. “Oh my goodness, I would never be so greedy,” we say to ourselves about the call-center scammer.

There are women who laud Christ whipping the money-changers while they get rich selling pictures and videos of themselves doing heinous, degenerate things online. They fool young men into parting with their money over illusory parasocial relationships... while condemning the bankers or finance capitalists. Hardly any of them will consider how they are ruining entire generations by manipulating male biological urges for money. Or let us consider the men shouting that we need another “whipping the money changers” moment as they engage in drop-shipping scams – but call it “hustling” to make it sound better. Older and middle aged people are not off the hook either. Whenever a well-to-do family meets the death of their patriarch, there are times when this results in a flurry of lawsuits as the family goes to war with itself re-writing the last will and testament. The truth of the matter is that most human beings are engaged in *some* sort of con, scam, hustle, or any other term we could put out there for acts of greed.

There are those who have no such issues – on *paper* they seem innocent, but their heart tells a different story. They are so full of envy over people who have more than them that they cannot *sleep* without looking at the wealthy with their large houses, their million-dollar cars, and their five-star meals. They may or may not be full of anger at the affluent, but on the inside they earnestly wish they could be one of them. They still define themselves by money and how much of it they do not have.

The vast majority of people on earth are committing some form of greedy, covetous sin at all times. To their credit, most of them will not rob a liquor store, nor commit wire fraud, nor file false tax claims. Little do they know though that they are engaged in an almost more heinous iniquity, namely shutting their eyes and ears to the plight of the poor. They already don't give any money to the Church or whatever ministry is helping them – this we can understand: keep your ministers humble, right? But the most common act of greed is seeing someone in need and doing absolutely nothing for them. Not one single mite goes out to the homeless, the jobless, or the starving; when someone *does*, chances are they will give a paltry amount. Just enough to feel good about himself despite his usual neglect.

### **The Righteous God Judges the Greedy**

It feels good and we feel happy to see Jesus stick it to the money-changers. But as we see memes with old paintings of Him brandishing His whip of cords, how many of us consider that He may

---

<sup>1</sup> For just one example, let us look at housing. These days the rich are going so far as to attempt to abolish home ownership entirely, *just* to keep people from having the chance to invest in a home. Banks and investment firms are spending *oodles* of money to buy up entire neighborhoods just so they can rent them out and keep poorer people paying that rent forever. Home-as-hotel companies promising old people a way to make extra cash, like AirBnB, are keeping houses that *should* be sold to young families off the market. Large conglomerates and lobbying groups are pushing for endless immigration, increasing the competition one has to engage in just to buy a home. This is driving up the costs for houses to an absurd degree.

one day drive *us* out and castigate us in the same way. As He drives them out of the Temple, He cites our Old Testament reading, which goes into more detail about the crimes of Judah. He is not referring to a single verse, but the *entire passage*.

When He says “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers,” He points to Jeremiah's oracle that accuses them of *far more* than just unfair monetary exchange policy. God says to Judah, “amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.” What were they up to? Oppressing the guest, the orphan and the widow, extracting money and labor from them all. They were shedding innocent blood. They were engaged in idolatry – and in that day, especially with baal worship, it was idolatry for the sake of crass gain. They were stealing, committing adultery, murdering, lying, scheming and abandoning God, and since our Lord tells us this amounted to the Temple being a den of robbers, we learn that they were doing *all* of these things out of greed. And it was not just the priests or the kings or the rich; it was *every* man who entered the Temple gates to worship. God did not discriminate over who was doing it, He condemns *all* of Judah as guilty, with so few exceptions that they were negligible in the grand scheme of it all. In other words, if Christ were next to Jeremiah, He would have driven every last man out of there – and His accusation against the money changers was precisely this, that they and all of Judah were guilty of all the same sins as their forebears whom Jeremiah addressed. And all of the judeans would be cast out by the Romans, for they were all guilty.

They say that when you point your finger at someone, your curled fingers point back at yourself. We live in an era that, when it comes to money, everyone has an accusation to hurl at the worst offenders, but so many of us are guilty of the same kind of sin that the hypocrisy would make the pharisees themselves blush. We are like barracudas complaining that the sharks are eating too many little fish. We are like hyenas complaining that the lions are hunting more often than us. God looks down at this worldwide parade of hypocrites, and it seems to me that it is only a matter of time before He crashes it all down. The Exile of Judah was traumatic, but it is a pleasant vacation compared to what the world deserves today. The Roman destruction of Jerusalem will be a party with friends compared to what may come if God decides to enact justice.

Maybe you, reading or listening to this sermon, are one of the few. Money is not your god, you worship the *true* God. You give to the Church, you give to the poor, you do not defraud your neighbor, you do not scam others, and you earn your money in an honest, Christian way. You have no envy in your heart for those more fortunate than yourself, and you do your best to help your neighbors keep their property. If this is you, good! You are in a tiny, minuscule minority here on earth, and God sees your labors; your reward in Heaven may be great. But you know as well as I do that if there is a reward for it here on earth, we shall be fortunate to have bread and shelter when the Day of the Lord arrives. Trust in Him, and let no greed nor resentment enter your heart.

### **The Judge Offers Mercy – And More**

God hates sins of greed, no matter what kind and who does it. He hates fraud, He hates theft, He hates manipulations. There will be a great act of justice against those who refuse to repent of it. But you may be asking, why? What brings such Divine judgment against these sins? The reason for it, beloved, is that the greedy man does not trust what God has to offer. Sure, the Scriptures tell us it is good to save our money. But the greedy, covetous one denies the promise that our Lord makes to those who believe in Him.

Christ came to die for our sins and rise again for our justification. What does that mean? It means that whoever believes in Him and is Baptized will be granted eternal life at the Resurrection. When Christ returns, there will be no want, no hunger, no poverty, no need to worry about money. Chances are there won't be any money at all, for the very *streets* of the New Jerusalem will be paved with precious metals, the walls lined with magnificent jewels. Believers are promised this blessed estate for *all eternity*, that there will be no starvation nor homelessness forever. This earthly life we live

will seem as though it went by in a mere instant after a thousand years of living in perfect blessedness. To sacrifice all of that because you think you'll be better off with momentary, vapor-like riches, is the height of foolishness.

Being rich is no crime. God gives some people more than others, both in this life and in the next. He does this so that they may bless those who are in need and celebrate as well. The Apostolic exhortation for those with means is this:

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.<sup>2</sup>

This is to say, *instead* of craving money, we should share it. *Instead* of loving it and making an idol out of it, a cause of all sorts of evils,<sup>3</sup> we are to be generous. Refusing to scam one another or pull a “hustle,” let us entrust ourselves to Christ who promises eternal riches. And let us do so *now*, for as things stand, we are the money changers, and Christ holds the whip in His hand. Shall we drop our greedy practices and follow His promise of salvation? Or shall we hold onto our sin and await being driven out?

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.

---

<sup>2</sup> 1 Timothy 6:17-19

<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 6:10

Sermon for August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025  
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 4:1-15

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it."

**8** Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. **9** Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" **10** And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. **11** And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." **13** Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." **15** Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Psalms 50:7-23

**7** "Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.

I am God, your God.

**8** Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

**9** I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.

**10** For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.

**11** I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

**12** "If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.

**13** Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
or drink the blood of goats?

**14** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and perform your vows to the Most High,

**15** and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

Ephesians 2:1-10

**1** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of

this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

#### Luke 18:9-14

**9** He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: **10** “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Our text for meditation this Eleventh Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Almost every man on earth defines death incorrectly. The way that the culture around us teaches it, death is when the body goes limp. The heart stops beating, brain function ceases, the body gets cold, and the lungs no longer breathe. According to the world's definition of death, it also involves the cessation of consciousness, and is thus the worst thing that could happen to anyone. With this understanding, countries across the world spend between ten to twenty five percent of their money on medical care trying to stave “death” away.<sup>1</sup>

On the one hand, this is perfectly understandable. Scripture declares that death is the final enemy of God and man to be destroyed,<sup>2</sup> so it is right for us to valiantly do battle with it. But a problem with this understanding arises when we consider how God made humanity and what this means for us. When someone has a catastrophic heart attack, and everyone gathers at their funeral, do we say that he is “in a better place?” Well that isn't possible under the normal definition of death; the man would be right there, *all* of him, in the casket! But therein lies the problem; we have a bad definition of death in our heads, but a good one in our *hearts*.

### **The Biblical Understanding of Death**

Scripture gives us a better way of looking at it, something that fits the instincts we all have. Death is not a *cessation*; it is a *separation*. When God created Adam, He told the man “you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”<sup>3</sup> Some time after, Adam and his wife Eve both eat that forbidden fruit and die. Do they become corpses? No. Do they need to be buried? Absolutely not. But

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS>

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:16-17

they are *separated* from having a direct relationship with God from that point forward. They hide from Him because they can no longer sense His immediate presence the way they used to. They died that day, even though blood still ran in their veins and air was still in their lungs.

Death is a separation from someone; you do not die in general, you die *to someone*. Adam and Eve died to God on the day they fell in the garden of Eden, and all of their descendants were born dead to God because of that. In the same way, when someone sheds their mortal coil they do not cease to exist, and nor does their consciousness go away; instead, they are dead *to us*, to the rest of humanity living here on earth. They are from that moment on separate from those of us whose hearts are still beating.

The fate of every nonbeliever who never repents is to be dead twice over. They spend their entire lives unregenerate, being dead to God but alive to their transgressions. Then they pass on and are separated from mankind. Where shall they go? They are dead to the saints in Heaven, dead to God, dead to people on earth, and dead to everyone else; the resulting isolation means that they are only fit for one place, and that is the lake of fire – which they shall experience *alone*.

This very condition is a horrific malady that besets everyone unless they are saved. The condition is one which the devil, that wicked spirit, is more than happy to encourage in every pagan. Such were we, beloved, that at one point we were led along by his hypnotic songs: the songs of paganism, atheism, hinduism, buddhism, the idolatry of lust and greed, or whatever other belief system sends people straight to hell.

### **How Christ Defeats Death**

Of course, God created us to live, not to die. So when Adam and Eve fell in the garden, He promised that one day He would send someone who would fix the problem of death. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. He underwent death *for* us on the Cross, a separation from mankind and even the Father's care,<sup>4</sup> taking the very sins upon Himself which led to the terrible separation in the first place. He went to the place of the dead *for us*, descending into hell so that whoever believes in Him would never have to go there.

God created us for harmony and fellowship with Him, not separation! And so, in order that we may live *forever* in a holy and joyous relationship with the Divine, He separates us from our sins when we are brought to the faith – *killing* us to sin – that we may forever be united to Christ. Once we were dead in our trespasses. Once we were doomed to die to our fellow man and stay separate from them forever; but *now*, in uniting believers to Jesus, who is our eternal God, He has made sure that believers will never die *again* once the great Resurrection takes place. No more separation, no more confusion, no more bad definitions. All will be well.

### **Why He does this**

You may wonder, "*but why?*" Why would our Lord go to such great lengths for people who have sinned against Him? Why save the souls and lives of those who were *dead* to Him? The Apostle tells us plainly that He does it out of love for us. We are His creation after all, and despite our straying away into sin, He sent His Son to win us back. It is out of pure love, the kind of love which forgives any transgression you may have committed, that God decided to save you.

But let us rejoice that in the process, He *kills* us in order that we may live. He kills our sin, destroys our old self, takes away whatever wicked weight was around our necks, all to make us new. Each time someone is converted to Christianity, it is as though he or she is a rock with precious gold inside of it; in order to get the gold out of the stone, the craftsman melts everything down and purifies it to separate – to *kill* – the unwanted, worthless material. He is left with the good material that He wanted out of it. When the Apostle tells us that we are God's workmanship, created (created anew, even) for good works, this is what he means; in the process of conversion and sanctification and

---

4 Matthew 27:46

bringing us to new life, the final death which we experience is being made dead to sin that we may be alive to righteousness. Thus we begin a *new* life, created to be better men and women than we once were. And that life, won for us by Christ upon the Cross and in His Resurrection, shall never be harmed by death again.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Isaiah 29:17-24

**17** Is it not yet a very little while  
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,  
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?

**18** In that day the deaf shall hear  
the words of a book,  
and out of their gloom and darkness  
the eyes of the blind shall see.

**19** The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,  
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

**20** For the ruthless shall come to nothing  
and the scoffer cease,  
and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,

**21** who by a word make a man out to be an offender,  
and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,  
and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

**22** Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall no more be ashamed,  
no more shall his face grow pale.

**23** For when he sees his children,  
the work of my hands, in his midst,  
they will sanctify my name;  
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob  
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

**24** And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding,  
and those who murmur will accept instruction.”

Psalms 146

**1** Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

**2** I will praise the LORD as long as I live;  
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

**3** Put not your trust in princes,  
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

**4** When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;  
on that very day his plans perish.

**5** Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

**6** who made heaven and earth,  
the sea, and all that is in them,  
who keeps faith forever;

**7** who executes justice for the oppressed,  
who gives food to the hungry.



The LORD sets the prisoners free;  
**8** the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.  
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;  
the LORD loves the righteous.  
**9** The LORD watches over the sojourners;  
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.  
**10** The LORD will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, to all generations.  
Praise the LORD!

Romans 10:9-17

**9** because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”  
**14** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Mark 7:31-37

**31** Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. **32** And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. **33** And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” **35** And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. **36** And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. **37** And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Our text for meditation this Twelfth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

Just before our reading took place, our Lord was in Tyre to deliver a Syrophoenician woman's daughter from demon possession. Just before He exorcised the demon, He proclaimed that He was sent only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”<sup>1</sup> He also called Gentiles *dogs*, explaining to the woman that it was not right to use His ministry in service of Gentiles. Jesus Christ was born a Jew according to His human nature, and so He reserved His earthly ministry for witnessing to and teaching His kin. This was done to fulfill what the Old Testament prophets had spoken concerning the Messiah; if He did not go first to the Jews, then He would not have been the true Christ.

But is that the whole story, or is there more to it than that? While it is true that He was born a Jew, did Christ *truly* refuse to go to Gentiles? Before we make the mistake of thinking that our Savior is

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 15:24

a Jewish supremacist, our passage shows Him going immediately from Tyre to the Decapolis. The Decapolis, which means “ten cities,” was a group of Gentile-populated towns near Galilee. Famous pagan poets were born in this loose confederation of autonomous Greek towns. Their populations were infamous among the Jews for being part of Alexander the Great's program of *Hellenization*, or trying to make the world adopt Greek culture, Greek customs, the Greek language, and even Greek paganism. Alexander's successors built these ten cities as a monument to the Hellenization project, like a certain “home base” for Gentiles so that Judea would slowly be remade in Alexander's image. This is one of the core reasons our very own New Testament was written in Greek in the first place. Alexander planted the seed of Hellenization some centuries prior, and it was in full bloom by the time our Savior walked in His ministry.

From the very beginning we can tell that Christ is doing something very controversial to the Jews at the time – who *hated* the Decapolis and everything it stood for. He went to a city of Gentiles to heal a Gentile and start teaching. Make no mistake; in our reading, Jesus intentionally goes to the Decapolis with the intent of healing a *Greek* man. Someone might tell you that, since He uses the Aramaic phrase “Ephphatha,” surely he must be speaking to a Jew; after all, that was one of the three languages Jews spoke in that day, and the Greeks in those cities would not understand it. But if that were the case, it would make no sense for Him to perform the healing in secret. If the deaf man was Jewish, He would have stood as a witness to all the Greeks there that He, the Jewish Messiah, was there healing Jews so they should convert in order to receive the same blessing. But Jesus isn't there for that; He has no desire to reverse Hellenization or strip the Gentiles of their Greek identity; He came to heal this man for his own sake. Furthermore, Jesus charges the men who were with their deaf friend to not tell anyone, but they disobey Him and tell everyone in the Decapolis: in the first century, Jews had no dealings with Gentiles so long as they could help it, so they would not have disobeyed Jesus and proclaimed it to the surrounding Greeks!

### **The Healing of Gentiles**

So Jesus heals a Gentile man, right after telling a Gentile woman in Tyre that He was sent only to the Jews. Why would He act this way? Why say one thing and appear to be harsh, but then go around healing people that He *seemed* to reject? Ah, here with our reading we have our answer. First, by healing this deaf man our Lord is showing His disciples that He really does care about us Gentiles. By curing his deafness using an Aramaic term, he keeps anyone from thinking that it was some false god like zeus or apollo behind the miracle. And it is not in any god's name that Christ performs the miracle; being truly Divine, He merely tells the man's ears to open and they are opened. He shows that He is the Lord of all things by opening the ears and mouth.

The deaf man receives this message without needing any extensive catechism or a lesson plan or anything of the sort. He quickly understands that Jesus Christ is the Lord over his well-being, and that no pagan deity can match up. So he and his fellow Gentiles were converted, and they proclaimed His marvelous deed to everyone who could hear. Imagine the refreshing message they spread! This Man, this Jesus of Nazareth, was the only One who actually cared about them; He was *different* then all the hucksters, con artists, black magicians, sorcerers, and pagan priests they were used to seeing. Christ did not ask for money, did not demand his followers become slaves, He did not try to take their women into a harem and He did not instruct him to convert to judaism. He simply came to the man, healed him, and charged him with not saying anything about what happened.

There is a splendid simplicity in their message. The formerly deaf man and his friends go about saying “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” What does that amount to? To put it simply, people in the Decapolis heard “Look at what this man Jesus did for me! So I believe Him, because He has done wonderful things, and you should too.” I can tell you right now that this was an effective message: immediately after our reading, over four thousand from the Decapolis show up *just to hear Christ speak*, and He feeds them all before going back to His mission to

the Jews.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why the Healing?**

So why would our Savior do this? Clearly He has a specific mission to the Jews, and He goes about it for the bulk of His ministry before going to the Cross. But He takes this detour into Gentile lands, a journey from Tyre and Sidon all the way to the Decapolis, to show us that He has bigger things in mind than just declaring His Messianic status to His earthly kin. In fact, by taking this time to teach these Gentile multitudes and healing their sick, He was planting the seeds for their entrance into a kingdom that would give them eternal life.

The Greeks planted the seeds of Hellenization by establishing the Decapolis, with the intent of making everyone Greek. Instead of reversing that, or trying to do the opposite and turn a bunch of Greeks into Jews, Jesus Christ was planting the seeds for *Christianization*. He has no problem with them keeping the Greek language, or their culture, and their way of doing business. They can keep their heritage – after all, God gave it to them and they should treasure it and protect it. But because He cares for them, because He wants *all* men of every race to be in His Kingdom, He sets out to bring them to Himself by showing His mercy. This worked too – the Decapolis was entirely Christian within a couple of centuries.

Our reading is a foreshadowing of what He has done for everyone. He cared about the men and women of the Decapolis for their own sake, healing and feeding them without asking for anything in return. With the same motivations, He went to the Cross willingly for all of humanity, paying the price for all of our sins by the shedding of His precious Blood – and rising on the third day so that whoever believes in Him is justified by faith without any payment or works required on their part. The man whom He healed, whose ears had been shut and mouth had been twisted, understood this message loud and clear. He eagerly used those newly opened ears to listen to Christ's teachings and his newly unmuted mouth to proclaim this good news to everyone he could speak to. The question is now, shall we do the same? May we whose ears have always heard listen to our Lord's message, and may our mouths that have never been stopped up be open to proclaim the Gospel – and above all, may our hearts always belong to the Savior who delivered us without any cost to ourselves.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Chronicles 28:8-15

**8** The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. **9** But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. **10** And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? **11** Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.”

**12** Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war **13** and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” **14** So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. **15** And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

Psalms 32

**1** Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,  
whose sin is covered.

**2** Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,  
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

**3** For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.

**4** For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;  
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

**5** I acknowledged my sin to you,  
and I did not cover my iniquity;  
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”  
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

**6** Therefore let everyone who is godly  
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;  
surely in the rush of great waters,  
they shall not reach him.

**7** You are a hiding place for me;  
you preserve me from trouble;  
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

**8** I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;  
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

**9** Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

which must be curbed with bit and bridle,  
or it will not stay near you.

**10** Many are the sorrows of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

**11** Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,  
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Galatians 3:15-22

**15** To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. **17** This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. **18** For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

**19** Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. **20** Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

**21** Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Luke 10:25-37

**25** And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" **27** And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

**29** But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37** He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Our text for meditation this Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

**"Lawyering" with Jesus**

Today I'd like to focus on the lawyer's question, one which our Savior does not answer. Not his first question regarding eternal life. Christ answers that very easily; if you would live, obey the Law perfectly. Love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself. Simply do all this perfectly from the moment of your birth up to the point where you shed your mortal coil, and then eternal life is yours. The judaizers among us love Christ's answer to this first question – "what shall I do to inherit eternal

life” – because they are deluded, thinking that Christ gives means it is possible for a normal person to truly love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves.

The second question the lawyer asks shows us why we cannot hope to get to Heaven this way. He asks “And who is my neighbor?” This is the question asked by every man who does not want to love his neighbor. It is the question asked by those who have not been loving their neighbors. Because they have not loved their neighbors as themselves, and because they do not want to love their neighbors as themselves, these wretched souls do what the lawyer did, lawyering with Jesus to try to find some escape clause in God's contract with mankind – His immutable, eternal Law.<sup>1</sup>

You might have someone in mind when I describe this sort of person. Maybe you have interacted with someone who saw the high-profile murders that happened this week, and they excused the killings for one reason or another. To them, these victims did not *count* as a neighbor. Many of the people who expressed antipathy to these victims call themselves Christian. They are exactly like the lawyer trying to excuse his atrophied heart. But it is not just failure to have sympathy for murder victims that makes people ask “who is my neighbor.” We see it happen whenever a Christian passes by a beggar, a homeless person asking for food, whenever they judge others to be beneath their compassion.

It would be easy for me to leave it at that. It would be so easy for us to thumb our noses at people who refuse to treat their neighbors with dignity, respect and compassion wouldn't it? We would feel so, so righteous if we left it there and called it a day. But we should be humble here. If we were honest with ourselves we would admit that we *all* do this. We all play the lawyer with God from time to time, seeking some “out” that would justify our selfish behavior. A mother might have a bad day where she is not attentive to the needs of her children; while they cry and she ignores them, lazily spending her time on the phone, she tells herself and God that she is suffering from burnout and the kids will be fine. An employee at a store might be rude to a customer, but he will justify his dismissive behavior by saying to himself and to God that the customer wasn't a regular anyway. In our reading, the lawyer asking this question seeks to *justify* himself for his refusal to walk the path of charity and compassion for others. We all do the same thing, and just like the lawyer we have no excuse.

### How Christ Answers the Lawyer

This is why Christ does not answer him directly. Make no mistake beloved, Christ does *not* tell the man who his neighbor is. He does not open up a dictionary and read the entry of “neighbor.” He does not open a Greek lexicon and tell the lawyer “well you see, the very word πλησίον, transliterated 'Plesion' is properly defined as countryman, friend, or person in close proximity to yourself. Dear lawyer you answered your own question.”<sup>2</sup> He does not limit neighbors to ethnic kin, or else His own parable would make no sense. Nor does he expand the word “neighbor” to mean every human being on earth – to say *that* would make the word meaningless. If everyone is my neighbor, no one is. Telling me to love everyone equally means telling me that love is a meaningless idea.

So Christ does not tell him who his neighbors are. But He *does* answer the lawyer with a message that the lawyer – and all of *us* need to hear. You see, *who* is your neighbor does not matter. Christ did not define the term, so neither will I. What is more important is, who are you a neighbor to? The Samaritan in His parable went out of his way to help someone in need. The Samaritan saw someone in need who wasn't receiving help, and so he bound his wounds up. The priest and the Levite could not touch a possibly-dead body or else they would be unclean and could not do their God-given duty. But the Samaritan, like the lawyer, was no priest nor Levite – and if he is neither of those things, he has no excuse to avoid doing the neighborly thing.

That is Christ's message to *you* beloved. Who is your neighbor? Who cares! What we should be asking is, how can *we* be neighbors to others? Do you have a duty to God or to closer neighbors that

---

1 If any lawyers are reading this homily, I don't assume that all of you do this.

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4139.htm>

keeps you from helping that poor man? No? Then help him! Are you putting yourself in immanent danger if you express condolences to that poor family whose father was murdered? No? Then show your compassion! In a world where so many people are making excuses and justifying themselves before God, our Lord Christ tells the lawyer and all of us to *be* the neighbor instead of asking “who is my neighbor.”

### **The Core Message**

To be a neighbor to someone, as our Savior puts it, is to be like Christ. The parable of the Good Samaritan is clearly an allegory for what our Lord Jesus did for us. He saw us paralyzed in trespasses and sins, victimized by the world and the flesh and the devil, on our way to eternal death. He had compassion on us, and took us when no one else would – especially not the Law, symbolized here by the priest and Levite. Just as the Samaritan pours out wine to treat the man's wounds, so too did Christ pour out His precious Blood upon us that we may be healed. And just as the Samaritan promises to return, presumably to take the poor victim back home, so too does Christ promise His Return someday to take us to Paradise. And the victimized man was unable to save himself; Christ is our Savior, knowing full well that we shall never, so long as we live on this earth, love God and neighbor as we ought.

Jesus did this all for us without asking which of us was His neighbor. In fact, He went to the Cross willingly, knowing that all of us were His enemies before we became Christians. He tells us with this parable, saying “go and do likewise,” to say that we too must be willing to show neighborly, Agape love towards everyone we meet and know so long as it is within our power to do it. Not that we must *die* for our neighbors necessarily, and not that we are barred from defending ourselves when attacked, but rather the Golden Rule – to do unto others as you would have others do unto you – is established here as a means of being like Christ. Let us do so beloved, for Christ first showed this love to us.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025  
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Proverbs 4:10-23

- 10** Hear, my son, and accept my words,  
that the years of your life may be many.  
**11** I have taught you the way of wisdom;  
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.  
**12** When you walk, your step will not be hampered,  
and if you run, you will not stumble.  
**13** Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;  
guard her, for she is your life.  
**14** Do not enter the path of the wicked,  
and do not walk in the way of the evil.  
**15** Avoid it; do not go on it;  
turn away from it and pass on.  
**16** For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;  
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.  
**17** For they eat the bread of wickedness  
and drink the wine of violence.  
**18** But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,  
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.  
**19** The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;  
they do not know over what they stumble.  
**20** My son, be attentive to my words;  
incline your ear to my sayings.  
**21** Let them not escape from your sight;  
keep them within your heart.  
**22** For they are life to those who find them,  
and healing to all their flesh.  
**23** Keep your heart with all vigilance,  
for from it flow the springs of life.

Psalm 119:9-16

[Collect text in Bold]

- 9** How can a young man keep his way pure?  
By guarding it according to your word.  
**10** With my whole heart I seek you;  
let me not wander from your commandments!  
**11** I have stored up your word in my heart,  
that I might not sin against you.  
**12** Blessed are you, O LORD;  
teach me your statutes!  
**13** With my lips I declare  
all the rules of your mouth.  
**14** In the way of your testimonies I delight  
as much as in all riches.



**15 I will meditate on your precepts  
and fix my eyes on your ways.  
16 I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word.**

Galatians 5:16-24

**16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **19** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **21** envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Luke 17:11-19

**11** On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. **12** And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance **13** and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” **14** When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. **15** Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; **16** and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? **18** Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” **19** And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

Our text for meditation this Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

St. Paul begins this passage by exhorting us to walk by the Spirit. What does he mean by that? The answer is simple, really. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. Our “flesh,” as the Apostle calls it, is fallen and still has the stain of sin in it. The Holy Spirit, however, having brought us to the new birth from the moment of our Baptism onward, is *not* fallen. In fact, He is God who dwells within us, walking with us at every moment. How do we walk by the Spirit then? By listening to His Word and receiving it. But as we shall see, this is not something which should cause us to worry that we must be saved by how much we sanctify ourselves.

### **The Corruption of the Flesh**

By the flesh, St. Paul means that sinful part of us, the distortion of our human nature which constantly wants to sin. The Apostle is *not* telling us that our bodies are wicked just for existing, and nor is he telling us that enjoying things is sinful! Otherwise he would not include sins like jealousy or strife, sins which have nothing to do with the human body. But for too long, the Church has had a problem with monks and nuns and all other sorts of ascetics who believe that enjoying anything earthly is bad. They go on long fasts, deny themselves sleep, and endlessly mouth the same phrases trying to empty their minds, thinking that all this earns Heaven for them. Certain monastics even favor whipping

themselves, wearing itchy hairshirts, and even subjecting themselves to intolerable isolation, believing that in this way they can “mortify” the flesh and thus be perfect. Such people, whether they be Catholic or Orthodox, are terribly misguided – St. Paul says so himself! In Colossians 2:23, he says “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are *of no value* in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” Self-inflicted pain and hunger do not take away the problem!

You see, St. Paul uses the word “flesh” as a catch-all term for the sinful part of our nature because that sin is what is *wrong with it*. We were created *good*, but sin rises up to twist that good nature into something bad. The Scriptures are replete with descriptions of God blessing people and rejoicing to see them enjoying earthly matters, from food to alcohol to sex to sleep.<sup>1</sup> These are good things! But sin within our flesh rejects marital fidelity and prefers fornication, orgies and other sexual sins. Sin dwelling in our flesh rejects the joy of having our needs met and turns it into oppressive greed. It misdirects what should be proper worship and devotion, turning it towards witchcraft and idolatry. Enjoying a mild buzz from a couple of beers gets warped into a week-long drunken *bender*. Loving justice gets turned into abject hatred.

The Apostle warns us that whoever makes a practice of these sins is damned. By practice, what I mean is that those who do not have true faith in Christ will not *struggle* against this sinful part of their flesh. The man who is comfortable with his fornication, who loves it and continues in it, doesn't even think it is a sin – such a man does not believe in Jesus. Otherwise he would agree with Jesus that fornication is wicked. The man who loves his fits of rage, who loves causing strife, who thinks that enmity and schisms are good, such a man does not believe in Jesus. When St. Paul tells people that such people do not inherit the Kingdom of God, he is talking about *faith* and life practices more than individual deeds. Everyone messes up out of moments of weakness, no matter how long he has been a believer; the man who makes a life out of them though is not stumbling, but rather committing spiritual suicide.

## The Work of the Spirit

Let no man fool you beloved. Take careful note of the language here. St. Paul lists **works** of the flesh, but he does not then list “works which we do to walk alongside the Spirit.” He lists **fruit** of the Spirit, as though we are plants and He is watering us. When it comes to the wickedness of our sinful nature, he says “those who **do** such things will not inherit the kingdom of God;” sin, especially living in sin, is a choice. But when it comes to the Spirit, he says “if you are **led** by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” The virtues that St. Paul lists – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – these things are the result of what the Holy Spirit does *for us*. He is the One who takes believers, those who are already Baptized, already justified by faith, and sanctifies them as they continue onward.

The believer is not under the Law, particularly under its sentence of damnation, because the Holy Spirit is there to lead the believer in the proper paths which avoid that sentence. If we stray (which we all do from time to time) and find the Law accusing us of our sins, the Holy Spirit leads us back to His Word, where we are brought safely back to the saving message of the forgiveness of our sins by Christ Jesus. This makes the Holy Spirit crucial to our salvation; He leads us in penitent faith through this life, making sure we are not shipwrecked.

St. Paul ends this passage by saying that believers “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” What does that mean? It means that the flesh is crucified by your reception of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit offered salvation to you when you first heard the Gospel, and you did not resist; then you were Baptized, and you received the forgiveness of your sins that Christ won on the Cross; from that moment on your sinful nature was crucified. Crucifixion is typically a *slow* death, a kind of

---

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 104:27, 145:15, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes 5:12, Deuteronomy 28:11-12, 1 Kings 3:13, and much more.

asphyxiation that occurs as the human body, hanging on the wood, cannot maintain the posture necessary to take a fresh breath of air. Eventually, the expansion of the chest makes inhaling nearly impossible, and the victim has to push their whole body upward to breathe. That is happening to the corruption of our nature, our old Adam; our sins and sinful nature are not *dead* yet, but they still keep coming up for air trying to survive the sanctification that the Holy Spirit is working. Eventually, as our sinful nature gets exhausted, those breaths it takes – the times when we stumble and sin – get less frequent. Eventually it dies, and we await the Resurrection, where the Holy Spirit will rise us from whatever grave our body is in, and ensure that we are completely perfected.

### **Walking by the Spirit**

Our flesh is a stubborn thing. A 90 year old man who has been a devout Christian his whole life will still sin on occasion, because the corruption of his nature *clings* to him and aches to breathe, to preserve itself. But that devout man knows better than to let sin reign over him, for he walks by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired the Word, the Scriptures, the Gospel proclaimed to us all. To walk by Him is to hear His Word gladly, to receive the forgiveness of our sins at the Divine Service, and to have our faith strengthened through these means that He has provided. After all, it is that faith which justified us before our Lord, and by faith we receive the gifts He gives us – especially that gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us in every step we take.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 17:8-16

**8** Then the word of the LORD came to him, **9** “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” **11** And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” **12** And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” **13** And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. **14** For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” **15** And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. **16** The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Psalm 146

**1** Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

**2** I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

**3** Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

**4** When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

**5** Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

**6** who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

**7** who executes justice for the oppressed,

who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

**8** the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

**9** The LORD watches over the sojourners;

he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

**10** The LORD will reign forever,

your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load. 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

#### Matthew 6:24-34

24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Our text for meditation this Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Our reading begins with God speaking directly to Elijah the prophet, telling him to go to the Gentile territory of Zarephath and live with a poor widow. While many a sermon has been preached on the widow, on the faith she received from the Word of the Lord spoken, and the way that God provides for the needy, today I want to look just a bit deeper at Elijah himself and ask some questions about the office of prophet.

This is all the more necessary, since this very week a prediction regarding the "rapture" was proven to be false.<sup>1</sup> Some South African minister declared himself a prophet, declared he had a vision of Christ, and that the "Rapture" would happen on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September; no such thing happened. But men and women are doing this more often, having caught the prophet-envy bug. It seems that some people are feeling *envious* of the prophets, thinking of them as wizard-like figures who changed the world, the *top dogs* of the faith who deserve all this acclamation and praise. Having imbibed this idea that the prophetic experience is somehow more legitimate, mystical, or "spiritual" than the experience of any other believer, they say "I want that for me," and rile themselves up. Sadly, they fall into all sorts

---

1 <https://apnews.com/article/rapture-end-times-evangelical-christians-tiktok-e7d065520186503a6223ee12df1f02dd>

of delusions, thinking that being a prophet makes someone more special to God. Let us discuss why that isn't exactly the case.

### The Prophetic Experience

Before we begin, beloved is that you? Have you thought about the prophets wondered what it would be like to be one, or thought it must be nice to be in their shoes? We normal Christians can sometimes feel a burden when we consider how we trust in a God that we can't see with our eyes, while the prophets got to have all these big visions. We have to engage in apologetics and arguments to shore up our faith with evidence and reason, while the prophets got to work miracles. We operate on faith; the prophets operated on total certainty. We are cast down in the drudgery of having daily jobs and bearing contempt from nonbelievers every day, but the prophets are respected by billions of people. I believe that it is this sort of feeling of jealousy, if not resentment, that leads to so many deciding they have magical powers or mystic visions.

But the prophetic experience was not glamorous nor magical, beloved. They were not wizards – if anything, being a prophet was *painfully* mundane. The first verse in our passage says “Then the word of the LORD came to him.” How exactly did the Word come to him? Was it an audible voice ringing in his ear? Did an angel visit him? Did he just get a *funny feeling* like he was supposed to go to Zarephath, and he interpreted the physical-emotional stimulus, something normal people do not feel, so as to head to that Gentile territory?

Before dwelling further on such a question, we must recognize that the prophets already had the Word in the normal sense. The prophets of old were stewards of the Scriptures, at least the ones who arrived after Moses. Elijah heads to Zarephath after he predicts a drought in front of the wicked king Ahab. He says “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”<sup>2</sup> That is not *just* a prophecy, beloved. Elijah was citing one of the covenant curses, which states that if the children of Israel are disobedient to His Law, then:

“ 22 The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with **drought** and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. 23 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. 24 **The LORD will make the rain of your land powder.** From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”<sup>3</sup>

You see beloved, in that moment Elijah was referring to that passage. Moses had made the previous prophecy, and the prophets who came after him were like attorneys for God. You can almost imagine Elijah if he were born today, wearing a cheap suit and reading glasses, declaring to the leaders of the nation: “Here, Israel, this is the stipulation which was in the contract, and you violated it. So in accordance with *this* stipulated consequence, drought shall be an affliction which you will bear until your nation is no longer able to take it. If at any time you should repent *during* this drought however, and return to covenant faithfulness under our Lord's Commandments, then this drought shall cease and rain will return promptly.”

Over and over again, the Old Testament prophets were these Covenant prosecutors, calling the people to task over their disobedience to the Law. In painstaking detail the prophetic author of the books of Kings details the prosperity of Israel under Solomon when he was faithful, and the way that he bankrupted Israel when he turned away from the Lord;<sup>4</sup> these were *both* foretold as conditions of obedience or disobedience to the Covenant.<sup>5</sup> Elisha the prophet does not bat an eye when the conditions of apostate Israel are so bad that they devolve into cannibalism of children,<sup>6</sup> for this too was a curse

---

2 1 Kings 17:1

3 Deuteronomy 28:22-24

4 1 Kings 10:14-22, 9:10-14

5 Deuteronomy 28:12-14, 43-44

6 2 Kings 6:24-33

that God has spoken through the mouth of Moses should the Israelites continue to rebel.<sup>7</sup> This isn't just relegated to the books of the Kings, the same dynamic shows up in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so so many more. The prophets were the Biblical scholars of their day, and Elijah was no different; much of their time was spent in study.

### **The Provision for Prophets**

So how did the Word of the Lord come to Elijah to tell him he must go to Zarephath? I can only conclude this: the man knew the Word by virtue of studying the Scriptures that he had available, and when God desired that he should have immediate direction, He brought about that the prophet *knew* what he must do. Certainly there were times when God spoke to him with an audible voice, just as our Lord did on the mountain as Elijah covered his face out of reverence.<sup>8</sup> We know that angels interacted with Elijah, as they did on the day he was taken up to Heaven.<sup>9</sup> But here, since Scripture does not mention voice nor angel, all we have left is the prophet suddenly *knowing*.

You see, most of the time God prefers to work through *means*. We receive the forgiveness of our sins through Baptism, Absolution, and through Communion. God provides us with our daily bread through our neighbors who grow food for us, and He makes us safe by providing us with police and our own means of protecting our lives. He extends our lifespan by raising up men to be doctors. And the Holy Spirit gives us the Word by means of the Scriptures. He speaks through every page of the Bible to us, using the plain meaning of the text to reach the souls of those who read it. He speaks through those who proclaim the message of the Scriptures to others. But with the prophets, He spoke to them *without* means of the Word, but having the same effect as when they studied the inspired books they had. Elijah knew that he had to go to Zarephath the same way he knew the contents of Deuteronomy. He could cite what God had put into his very soul and mind the same way he could cite the Scriptures to king Ahab and proclaim a drought.

Do you want to feel what it felt like for the prophets to receive a message from the Lord? Then read your Bible every day. Study it, cherish it, learn it like the back of your very hand, and you will have an internal knowledge of the Scriptures the way that the prophets had knowledge of God's messages. When you remember a Bible verse that is applicable to your life, that is how it felt for the prophet to receive a message from God most of the time. It was a much more mundane vocation than the modern would-be prophets would have you believe, and they often had day-jobs to provide for themselves. Amos the prophet spent most of his time farming,<sup>10</sup> Isaiah and Jeremiah were priests, and so forth. As it stands, visions were mostly a once-in-a-lifetime event for them.

### **The Purpose with Prophets**

Now, this is not me saying we should all act like the prophets, or that whenever we some funny feeling from a bit of bad food we should put on sackcloth and start condemning our leaders. Heaven forbid! Not every thought that comes into our heads is from the Holy Spirit. Beloved, you must realize that God's messages came with a *purpose*, something that accomplishes His *goals*. He told Elijah to go to Zarephath, because this accomplished the preservation of the widow and her son's lives with the flour and oil being extended. He told Elijah to go there knowing that he would convert souls to the true faith, and by the miracle of the flour the prophet would foretell a much greater miracle: when our Lord Christ multiplied bread and fish, feeding *thousands*. Elijah and men like him did not wait around for a funny feeling or a spontaneous thought; almost universally they simply related what the Scriptures meant for the people in the times they lived, and only performed their prophetic office, effectively, when God made them do so.

---

7 Deuteronomy 28:52-57

8 1 Kings 19: 9-18

9 2 Kings 2

10 Amos 7:14-15

We are under no command to be Old Testament styled prophets today, for God accomplishes His purposes through us in a much more clear, much more advantageous way. Did not know beloved that by listening to and heeding the Word of God you *also* do great things? Did you know that you accomplish God's purposes when you trust in Christ for salvation, when you obey the Ten Commandments, when you pray? All these are taught to us in Scripture, and they are all great things which put us on the same level as the prophets when we do them.

I mean this. Here on earth there may be hierarchy between persons, but every one of us is justified by faith alone in Christ alone whether we are a plumber or a prophet. Yes, the prophets did a good work before God; so do Christian mothers when they raise their children well; so do Christian janitors when they do a good job at work. Elijah might have a distinct calling to do what he did, but he is not *special* in himself for having done it, he is not *superior* to a faithful believer who simply listens to the Word at Church and lives the Christian life. Let me put it more succinctly; you are not a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God. God values you for who you are and your good works in your vocation no matter how mundane it is, just as much as He values a Hosea or a Zechariah.

How do I know this? Because with our reading it is clear that God valued a poor widow of Zarephath just as much as He valued Elijah. He preserved both of them through that famine, effectively sending Elijah to *serve* that widow and her son. Elijah does not demand that the widow bow down to him or call him “sir,” nor does he start barking orders at her that she respect and honor everything about him. Instead, because God sees her faithfulness and obedience as valuable, the prophet treats her honorably. May we then, instead of having “prophet envy” as so many have today, focus on humble faithfulness as well.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 17:17-24

**17** After this the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, became ill. And his illness was so severe that there was no breath left in him. **18** And she said to Elijah, “What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance and to cause the death of my son!” **19** And he said to her, “Give me your son.” And he took him from her arms and carried him up into the upper chamber where he lodged, and laid him on his own bed. **20** And he cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, have you brought calamity even upon the widow with whom I sojourn, by killing her son?” **21** Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, “O LORD my God, let this child's life come into him again.” **22** And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. **23** And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, “See, your son lives.” **24** And the woman said to Elijah, “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth.”

Psalms 30

**1** I will extol you, O LORD, for you have drawn me up  
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.  
**2** O LORD my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.  
**3** O LORD, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.  
**4** Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints,  
and give thanks to his holy name.  
**5** For his anger is but for a moment,  
and his favor is for a lifetime.  
Weeping may tarry for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.  
**6** As for me, I said in my prosperity,  
“I shall never be moved.”  
**7** By your favor, O LORD,  
you made my mountain stand strong;  
you hid your face;  
I was dismayed.  
**8** To you, O LORD, I cry,  
and to the Lord I plead for mercy:  
**9** “What profit is there in my death,  
if I go down to the pit?  
Will the dust praise you?  
Will it tell of your faithfulness?”

10 Hear, O LORD, and be merciful to me!  
O LORD, be my helper!"

11 You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;  
you have loosed my sackcloth  
and clothed me with gladness,

12 that my glory may sing your praise and not be silent.  
O LORD my God, I will give thanks to you forever!

#### Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

#### Luke 7:11-17

11 Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. 12 As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. 13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." 14 Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." 15 And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. 16 Fear seized them all, and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!" 17 And this report about him spread through the whole of Judea and all the surrounding country.

Our text for meditation this Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Over the past twenty years or so, strength training and athletics have become far more mainstream than it once was. More men have been seeking to attain athletic capability and better-looking physiques than ever before. Barbells, kettlebells, calisthenics, martial arts, climbing, running, swimming, hiking, all of these and more have reached a zenith of popularity. Along with it comes popular supplements: protein powders, nutrition bars, "pre-workout" shakes, vitamin candies. Along with those comes the instructionals: classes, workout plans, books, online articles, motivational videos, and announcements for competitions. Whereas fitness was once a special interest among very few, it is now a world-spanning industry that circulates hundreds of billions of dollars every year.

On the one hand this is fantastic. Despite all the articles bemoaning obesity rates all over the world, It is safe to say that there are more healthy people than ever before. This is a *good* thing, because to be in shape means being able to love your neighbor more readily when they need help moving furniture, being carried to the hospital, getting protection from threats, or even carrying groceries. A

young man helping his grandmother, a mother playing with her children, and so many more things that exercise enables means that we can better glorify God by serving others in our vocations.

But there is a great price to be paid with this trend of physical culture. Now things are getting *competitive*, to the point where looking a certain way or hitting certain numbers is surpassing any previous emphasis on being healthy. Sinful vanity abounds, with multitudes of people sacrificing their old age in service of their youth. A rising number of young men doing steroids to feel more confident about their bodies (one study showed that *half* the gymgoers are using in Iran alone).<sup>1</sup> There are too many young women trying to maximize their looks with lip fillers and surgery instead of diet and exercise. Sinful greed and deception gets mixed in, with businesses touting various dubious claims regarding what works and what doesn't. Sinful pride and fits of wrath have crept in, as drama between competing influencers leads to all sorts of time-wasting arguments and sometimes violence. When St. Paul says that bodily exercise is of "some" or limited value,<sup>2</sup> I believe he had these potential pitfalls in mind; while it is good to exercise, we must be careful to not fall into such traps ourselves.

### **Christian Strength**

But did you know that there is a kind of strength which does not have any of this sin problem attached to it? And it is so important that the Apostle St. Paul says that he prays on his knees that the Ephesian congregation would all have it. It is a strength which is so important that a Christian cannot go without it, and with it the Church conquers much of the world.

It is a kind of spiritual strengthening, one which can only be described in terms of growth. A human being is born weak, being unable to stand, walk or eat by itself. But over time that infant grows in a strength that requires little to no training; he becomes able to support himself on all fours, then he can crawl, then he can stand, then he can walk. Teeth begin to grow at the same time as a kind of curious hunger that draws him away from his mother's breast and toward other kinds of foods. His mind grows as he takes in the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and feels around him. Before you know it, what was once a powerless infant is now a young man who possesses great capabilities, able to navigate the challenges of the world.

So it is with Christian strength. When we are Baptized we are born anew, and spiritually we are weak. We can only just barely cooperate with the Holy Spirit's guidance, and just barely listen to the Word. But by the Grace of God, over time we grow into our faith. Christ dwells in our hearts and minds and we hear Him more easily. We find ourselves caring about others for their own sake, seeking nothing in return as we have a new foundation in Christian love. We find ourselves able to make right decisions and to remember good doctrine, not because we have a bunch of dogmatic information in our heads, but because our souls are made capable the same way a young man is made capable by a lifetime of being raised by his father.

### **Free Strength**

This strength is only granted by God Almighty. You cannot get it by fasting. You cannot get it by refusing sleep, engaging in night vigils, following the seven hours, going to Church four times a week, or anything of the sort. Any man could inject some anabolic steroids and increase the size of his muscles or put extra weight on a barbell;<sup>3</sup> *Christian* strength, on the other hand, cannot be obtained by *your* effort. It is a function of Grace alone.

Thankfully, God is abundantly *giving* by nature. He is our Heavenly Father, not our Heavenly *miser*: He shall not refuse you if you ask. Those who earnestly wait on Him shall receive this strengthening which makes all things possible. St. Paul's prayer is answered whenever a Christian gladly hears the Word, whenever he spends time with God in prayer and receives what God offers by

---

1 <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10938795/>

2 1 Timothy 4:8

3 For anyone reading this, please do not do this – performance enhancing drugs will destroy your health.

faith. When believers are *sanctified*, they are made stronger in the love of Christ and the knowledge of God. To receive this gift, all you have to do is open your heart to God and patiently wait for His provision.

It is this strength that gave the martyrs the ability to stand firm in the face of pagan threats. In 2015, when twenty-one Christian men were told by islamic militants that they would die if they did not recant their faith, this very strength from God kept them firm in their confession that Jesus is the Christ. The knives went to their throats, but they did not submit to primal human fear, and now they are in Heaven with our Lord.<sup>4</sup> On the flip side, it is this spiritual strength that gave the Christian armies under Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain the bravery they needed to reconquer their homelands away from the wicked caliphate that held it for centuries.

It is this very same empowering, which only comes from God, which comes to you beloved. With it you can conquer lands, love your enemies, cast out demons, save the poor, help those in need and danger alike. Being rooted in love and given power by the Spirit you can wage war against your own sin while lifting others up to your level. God shall use this to preserve your soul should you ever come under the threat of a pagan knife to your throat, but He also gives us the grace to make it through the crushing grind of modernity with its daily battle for holiness. It is this enabling which we must covet, and by His love for us He offers it freely. Shall you believe and be made greater than you are?

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

4 For a recounting of this incident, watch this: <https://youtu.be/XwPQqkeeCTg>

Sermon for October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Proverbs 25:6-14

- 6** Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence  
or stand in the place of the great,  
**7** for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"  
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.  
What your eyes have seen  
**8** do not hastily bring into court,  
for what will you do in the end,  
when your neighbor puts you to shame?  
**9** Argue your case with your neighbor himself,  
and do not reveal another's secret,  
**10** lest he who hears you bring shame upon you,  
and your ill repute have no end.  
**11** A word fitly spoken  
is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.  
**12** Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold  
is a wise reprover to a listening ear.  
**13** Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest  
is a faithful messenger to those who send him;  
he refreshes the soul of his masters.  
**14** Like clouds and wind without rain  
is a man who boasts of a gift he does not give.

Psalm 2

- 1** Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?  
**2** The kings of the earth set themselves,  
and the rulers take counsel together,  
against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying,  
**3** "Let us burst their bonds apart  
and cast away their cords from us."  
**4** He who sits in the heavens laughs;  
the Lord holds them in derision.  
**5** Then he will speak to them in his wrath,  
and terrify them in his fury, saying,  
**6** "As for me, I have set my King  
on Zion, my holy hill."  
**7** I will tell of the decree:  
The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;  
today I have begotten you."  
**8** Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,  
and the ends of the earth your possession.

**9** You shall break them with a rod of iron  
and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”

**10** Now therefore, O kings, be wise;  
be warned, O rulers of the earth.

**11** Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.

**12** Kiss the Son,  
lest he be angry, and you perish in the way,  
for his wrath is quickly kindled.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

#### Ephesians 4:1-6

**1** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, **2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, **3** eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

#### Luke 14:1-11

**1** One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of a ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully. **2** And behold, there was a man before him who had dropsy. **3** And Jesus responded to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” **4** But they remained silent. Then he took him and healed him and sent him away. **5** And he said to them, “Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?” **6** And they could not reply to these things.

**7** Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, **8** “When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, **9** and he who invited you both will come and say to you, ‘Give your place to this person,’ and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. **10** But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. **11** For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Our text for meditation this Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Our Old Testament reading comes from the book of Proverbs, and at first blush it seems like a disjointed pile of advice. What's going on here? What's the point of this sort of passage? To put it simply, king Solomon wrote the Proverbs as a means of imparting wisdom to all who would read and put his exhortations into practice. What is wisdom? It is the skill for living well, and behaving in such a way that things go well for you. We all want to live the good life, right? We want to be well-off financially, healthy, suffering as little as possible, and having as little conflict as possible. We all want to live with few problems and many blessings. But in order to have that, we must have wisdom. Living the good life means making good choices, speaking good words, building up good habits, thinking good thoughts – are you noticing a pattern here?

*Good* is the operative word here. Not only good in the sense of shrewdness or cleverness, but good in the *moral* sense as well. Solomon ties wisdom to keeping God's Commandments from a heart that is devoted to His ways. For this reason, he writes to us that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy one is insight.”<sup>1</sup> To fear God and follow in His ways is the first step in health, wealth and happiness, to live the good life one must first seek to be a good and Godly person. Now, lest I be accused of advocating for a “theology of glory,” wisdom is found in doing the right thing even if we are having a hard time in life, even if it does not seem to pay off, even if we are persecuted. But generally speaking, this obedience *does* have visible rewards now and in the future.

So what does this all have to do with our reading? Much in every way. You see my friends, whenever Solomon writes a proverb, he writes with the intention that we would connect it with the Commandments of our Lord in mind, especially the Second Greatest Commandment. God commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves.<sup>2</sup> How do we love our neighbors? By caring about them the same way we care about our own well-being. But in order to do that, we must love ourselves. How do we do that? Ah, there is a secret of wisdom that I am happy to reveal to you: in order to love yourself, you must show love to your neighbor by obedience to God's commands.

### **The Eighth Commandment and Wisdom**

Our Old Testament reading is a fantastic example of this dynamic. Following Solomon's admonitions will not only be pleasing to God, it will also teach us wisdom regarding the Eighth Commandment and help us live better lives. The Eighth Commandment is *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*. And what does this mean? Dr Luther says in the Small Catechism,

*We should fear and love God, and so we should not tell lies about our neighbor, nor betray, slander, or defame him, but should apologize for him, speak well of him, and interpret charitably all that he does.*<sup>3</sup>

When Solomon writes that we must not run off to court quickly, he has the Eighth Commandment in mind. His hypothetical scenario is that we have seen what *looks* like some misbehavior that our neighbor has done. If we sinfully desire to ruin our neighbor's reputation, we will hurry to drag him to court or “cancel” him on social media. But what will that win us? Solomon says it will lead to our own ruin. We shall not get away with it; either in the court or in public air, our neighbor will be vindicated against our slander. If that does not happen, then we should fear all the more, because it may be that our neighbor cries out to God over all this, and God Himself will see to it that we are punished for our slander. So you see my friends, not only are there *consequences* for failing to heed this warning, it is also beneficial to our own lives that we follow Solomon's commentary here. If I do not run off to the judge trying to ruin my neighbor, then my reputation is protected.

This is also true in the beginning of the passage. Solomon adjures us to take a lower place before a king. This too is in obedience to the Eighth Commandment! If you intentionally choose a place of lower honor before someone in authority, then you are speaking well of all those men who must have more honor as they take their places. You are, as Luther puts it, interpreting their reputation and deeds charitably with my humility. This humility and obedience brings about many blessings for those who do it. If they are in the proper place, then they are protected from embarrassment; but if they are sitting in too low of a position, then they are given honor by God and the one in authority!

If you are honest and tactful, then Solomon praises that as well, saying that your fitly spoken and faithful words adorn your reputation. Maintain tact, and even if you have to rebuke someone they will be thankful. Think of it my friends! Just by obeying this commandment and caring more about your neighbor's reputation and honor than yourself, being truthful but respectful, people will like you more and treat you well. In loving your neighbor *by* obeying this command, you love yourself through

---

1 Proverbs 9:10

2 Mark 12:28-31

3 <https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/ten-commandments/>

your neighbor and receive great blessings!

### **The Benefits of Obedience**

This is the exquisite secret that permeates the Book of Proverbs, repeated over and over again. Such is the way that God has ordered things, that obedience to His Commandments for the sake of our neighbors results in our neighbors treating us well and in our own immunity from various disasters. A key part of living well, living the *good* life, is living for others and being good to them.

If you have any doubts, remember that we are called to live by the example of our Lord Jesus. No one else has loved anyone as much as Jesus Christ loves us, no one has done anything for anyone else as much as Jesus has done for us; He healed, He taught, He comforted, He labored, and above all He paid the ultimate price for the sake of our salvation. And no one is as blessed as our Lord Jesus, who has been elevated above and beyond any man in terms of reputation, authority, power, and adoration. The more we emulate Him and practice benevolence to all men, the more we receive blessing from on high in the same way. Certainly, that means we suffer and are persecuted, but that does not preclude nor exclude being blessed in and through that, until we find ourselves with the ultimate blessing of eternal life at the Resurrection. Let us then walk in wisdom by walking in Agape love for one another.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Deuteronomy 10:12-21

**12** “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, **13** and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good? **14** Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. **15** Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. **16** Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. **17** For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. **18** He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. **19** Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. **20** You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. **21** He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. **22** Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Psalms 34:8-22

**8** Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!  
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!  
**9** Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him have no lack!  
**10** The young lions suffer want and hunger;  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.  
**11** Come, O children, listen to me;  
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.  
**12** What man is there who desires life  
and loves many days, that he may see good?  
**13** Keep your tongue from evil  
and your lips from speaking deceit.  
**14** Turn away from evil and do good;  
seek peace and pursue it.  
**15** The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous  
and his ears toward their cry.  
**16** The face of the LORD is against those who do evil,  
to cut off the memory of them from the earth.  
**17** When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears  
and delivers them out of all their troubles.  
**18** The LORD is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.  
**19** Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

20 He keeps all his bones;  
not one of them is broken.

21 Affliction will slay the wicked,  
and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

22 The LORD redeems the life of his servants;  
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

#### 1 Corinthians 1:4-9

4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 8 who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### Matthew 22:41-46

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, 42 saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” 43 He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying,

44 “‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I put your enemies under your feet’”?

45 If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” 46 And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Our text for meditation this Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

There is a question out there that everyone must answer. It is the single most important question there is, and it is on the most important *topic* there is. It is also a question that few people can answer adequately, even among the most learned scholars. Almost everyone will answer this question incorrectly, and the result of this will be the vast majority of humanity being burned forever in the furnace of hell. And it is not because people don't *know* the answer to this question, but rather because they do not *like* the answer.

That question is, “Who is Jesus?”

### **Bad Answers from Nonbelievers**

Nonbelievers do not want to answer this question correctly, so they will say all sorts of insane things. Some, typically secularists, will claim that Jesus is nothing more than some moral teacher, ignoring what He said about Himself. Some moral teacher, some *philosopher* does not predicate all of their teachings on who they are, but Jesus does. He does not say “follow my teachings because they are the correct things to do,” but instead He says “follow my teachings because I am the Son of God.” His

exhortations are not mere advice or counsel, but *Divine Commandments*.

Other nonbelievers, like buddhists or hindus, will claim that Jesus is one god among many. Muslims try to demote Jesus to the status of prophet. But these positions betray His own words, for He Himself says that there is *only one God*,<sup>1</sup> and He is that very God. He says to us all, “I and the Father are one,” and “unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity, so anyone trying to answer that He is anything *less* than God is in a position of deadly error.

Worse yet are the nonbelievers who respond with hostility or antipathy. The modern take coming from non-Christians on the “dissident right” is that Jesus is just some jewish rabbi peddling jewish religion to Gentiles in order make them more jewish. Meanwhile, jewish documents like the “Toledot Yeshu” or the talmud claim that Jesus was just some evil sorcerer. There are also angry “new atheists” that have written books attacking the morality of Christ's teachings, with their arguments predictably boiling down to complaining that Jesus is not tolerant enough for their liking. Of course, there are also plenty of nonbelievers who simply claim that He never existed.

Finally, there are the cultists who want you to think they are Christians, but ultimately have answers similar to the other nonbelievers out there. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is just some powerful angel. Mormons believe Jesus is a powerful polygamous space alien and brother to satan. The Christian Science cult claims that Jesus was a man who “best embodied” the “Christ principle” that seeps out of their omnipresent gas-like deity. Unlike the people who hate Jesus openly, these groups seek to use Him as a mascot for whatever subversive, ugly teachings they have. And like the secularist, like the buddhist, like the hindu, like the muslim, like the atheist, and like the jew, they are all hellbound so long as they answer this question incorrectly.

## **Bad Answers from Believers**

Let us not think though that only non-Christians are answering the question “who is Jesus” poorly. You hear quite a few believers saying things *about* Jesus that are true, things that we must confess if we are to be Christians in the first place, but not much in the way of Who He is. Yes, it is true that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God just as St. Peter confesses,<sup>3</sup> but there are plenty of satanists, people who *hate* Jesus, that would agree with you, but they are not saved. Perhaps you emphasize that Jesus is Divine – good! But so do many of the judaizers and other heretics, people that Scripture calls *cursed* on account of having a different Gospel than what the Scripture gives us.<sup>4</sup>

This is one of the points that Christ is making in our reading for today. Jesus asks the Pharisees about the Christ and whose Son He is. The Pharisees are *correct* when they say that the Messiah would hail from the line of David, making Him the “Son of David” as a result – a royal title for the coming King of all Israel.<sup>5</sup> This is certainly true. But they missed what David himself said about the coming Messiah: if they read the very Psalm Jesus quotes from, they would recognize that the Messiah would also be David's Lord, that He would be immortal, that He was pre-existent and that He belongs to the endless order of Melchizedek.<sup>6</sup> Because of these things, King David bowed down and worshiped Christ, *calling Him Lord*. In other words, by asking these questions He confronts the pharisees with their staunch refusal to believe *in* the very Christ who stood before them.

---

1 Mark 12:29

2 John 10:30, 8:24

3 Matthew 16:16

4 Galatians 1:8

5 Isaiah 11 demonstrates that the Christ would come from the “stump of Jesse.”

6 Psalm 110

## The Answer God is Looking For

And that is the answer God is looking for. It is not an answer made with our intellect so much as it is an answer with the heart, with our *faith*. If you are asked the question, “who is Jesus?” the answer should *always* be, from the heart, “He is my Lord and my Savior.” From the bottom of your heart you must understand that He did not *just* die for sins and rise again from the dead; Jesus died for *your* sins, He rose from the dead *for you*. He is fully Divine and fully human, absolutely, but Jesus sees you, cares about you, and earnestly desires for you to trust in and worship Him. To not merely say “Jesus is King,” but “Jesus is *my* King.”

The reason so many people get this answer *wrong* is not because they have the wrong information. Someone can know and affirm everything there is to know *about* Jesus Christ but still get that question wrong, because they refuse to say “Jesus is *my* Christ, *my* Lord, *my* Savior.” Our Lord confronts the pharisees about their refusal to understand that David *called Him Lord* – not just in recognition of His Divinity, but in actually adoring and worshiping Him. The vast majority of humanity, no matter what they say they believe about Jesus, simply does not want this to be the case. But let us, like David the man after God's heart, recognize from our innermost parts that who Jesus is matters to us, applies to us, and brings us all salvation and the glory of the world to come. For that, at the end of the day, is the thing that matters the most.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
REFORMATION SUNDAY

READINGS

Revelation 14:6-13

**6** Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language and people. **7** And he said with a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water."

**8** Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality." **9** And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, **10** he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. **11** And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name."

**12** Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.

**13** And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

Psalms 46

- 1** God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.
- 2** Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,  
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,  
**3** though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*
- 4** There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,  
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- 5** God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;  
God will help her when morning dawns.
- 6** The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- 7** The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*
- 8** Come, behold the works of the LORD,  
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
- 9** He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the chariots with fire.
- 10** "Be still, and know that I am God.  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!"
- 11** The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Romans 3:19-28

**19** Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. **20** For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. **21** But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— **22** the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. **26** It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. **27** Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. **28** For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Matthew 11:11-19

**11** “Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. **12** From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. **13** For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, **14** and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. **15** He who has ears to hear, let him hear. **16** “But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates,  
**17** “‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’ **18** For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ **19** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.”

Our text for meditation this Reformation Sunday is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## **Introduction**

I had a conversation with a Roman Catholic man a few years back, and the discussion turned to religion. Naturally that turned into a friendly debate between our denominations. Now whenever you have a debate between Lutheranism and papism, the entire discussion will hinge on authority over matters of truth. As Lutherans, we confess *Sola Scriptura*, that the sole source of all dogma and morals is the Bible; any doctrine which *adds* to it or *takes away* from it is at best non-binding, but in most cases it is false. We accept nothing as doctrine which does not come from Scripture. The papist disagrees of course, believing that his church – and especially his pope – are so guided by the Holy Spirit that they can create or define new doctrines at will and be guaranteed that it is true.

So over the course of our discussion, the catholic brought up an interesting argument. “You believe in *Sola Scriptura*? Fine. Show me, where are Protestants in the Bible?” Now that sounds kind of funny, but he meant it seriously and it was a good question. You see, he could point to an established Church, but he did not know where there was anyone protesting that Church that God accepted. He has a point, if we are thinking about specific organizations. There are no groups *calling* themselves Protestants in Scripture, but to his dismay I was able to show them exactly where the Protestants were, and I started with our Gospel reading for today.

## John the Baptist, Protestant

Our Savior begins by saying that no one has arisen that is greater than John the Baptist – except Jesus Himself. When He says “the one who is least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than he,” what Christ means by that is that though He is Divine, Christ made Himself the lowest of men and most humble so that He could accomplish the plan of salvation. But aside from Jesus, John the Baptist was greater than anyone living. Why is this the case?

In his day, John the Baptist contested the ruling religious authorities who had become corrupt, the church of his times. This was not because they had no authority, but because the entirety of the institution needed reform. He corrected their theology, and stood at the bank of the Jordan to call *everyone* to repentance. He condemned the pharisee and the sadducee alike as vipers, and warned against their belief that Abrahamic lineage guaranteed salvation or prosperity.<sup>1</sup> He warned that the wrath of God was something to *flee*, not something from which we could earn clemency with our merit or heritage. He called everyone to be baptized with a baptism of repentance, instructing everyone to amend their ways in preparation for the Deliverer; St. Luke also records that he preached *Gospel* to them.<sup>2</sup>

These are all things define the Protestant. We do our best to witness to everyone both inside and outside the Church, directing them to true doctrine and correcting the places that the Church has erred. We advocate for both religious and societal reforms, and we *do not care* if some old dusty institution says we cannot do it, for we are called to loyalty to God over any established church. John the Baptist was not part of the organized religious structure of his day. He was not ordained through the “proper organizational procedures,” did not launch his protest through the “proper channels,” did not bow the knee to the high priest, and did not follow the extrabiblical rules that the pharisees cooked up. All that he proclaimed was the Word of God Almighty, and the only thing he cared about was showing God's love to the people by exhorting them to *faith*.

## Elijah the Prophet, Protestant

Our Lord Jesus tells the crowd that “the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” The Church of their day, the ruling religious authorities, had the backing of the Roman Empire with all of their military might; priesthoods were bought and sold, and no one could raise their voices about it without risking their lives. To the Empire, religion was not about loyalty to God, but a way to keep the people quiet; the jewish authorities were more than happy to collude with them to make this a reality. And what does God do when the Church starts serving the state and saying what the state wants and following after state morality? Well, He sends a Protestant.

It is not just John the Baptist who is a Biblical Protestant, but Elijah as well. Christ says that John is “Elijah who is to come.” Not that the two are the same *person*, but they have the same *spirit*, the same *purpose*, and similar enough circumstances that such a Protestant figure was necessary. Elijah was tasked with bringing the Northern Israelites to repentance after they had begun to worship the false god baal.<sup>3</sup> The Kingdom of God was placed under the pagan rulership of Jezebel and her thug prophets, and all the *true* servants of God were either martyred or sent off into hiding. Like John the Baptist, Elijah was not part of the prevailing religious institutions of his day; he had no part in the golden calves of Samaria, and he accepted none of their false teachings that blended pagan doctrines with what the Bible teaches. He did not – *shocker of shockers* – go to seminary either. But he stood up, proclaimed the Word, demanded an end to the corruptions and abuses of his day and exhorted all people to live according to God's ways.

Elijah represents *all* of the prophets here, by the way. Almost universally the prophets of old did

---

1 Matthew 3:7-10

2 Luke 3:3-18

3 1 Kings 17-18

exactly what Elijah and John the Baptist did; protest an erring Church that had been taken over by force, exhort people to repentance, engage in independent worship, and preach the Gospel. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, and more, all of these men preached the Solas and went up against the establishment, becoming a different sort of spiritual leader than most men are used to. *Whenever it gets this bad, God sends a Protestant.*

### **The Response of the People**

We have seen this play out many times in Church history. Athanasius fought against the mass acceptance of the Arian heresy, William of Ockham protested the opulent luxuries of Rome, and no one could forget Luther's efforts to bring about reform in the Church. Each time this happens though, they are met with the same dynamic that our Savior complains about in the midst of His message. Yes, some people followed the Lord at the encouragement of John the Baptist; so too did a good number of people listen to Athanasius, William, and Luther. But by and large the masses of people out there resist the idea that something could be wrong in the first place.

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.” In other words, the people were *uncomfortable*, because John the Baptist did not act the way *they* wanted him to. He stubbornly refused to conform to their go-along-to-get-along way of living, calling them to conform to the message *he* was preaching instead. John would not play their games, so they refused to repent; instead they simply concluded that he had a demon. Then Christ Himself comes along. Jesus is humble enough to reach tax collectors, prostitutes, bums and criminals with a message of repentance and faith, and this makes the crowd more worried. John was too strict, but Jesus wasn't strict enough for them! Neither would follow the established culture, so the people were perplexed and would not listen.

Our Lord ends the passage by saying “wisdom is justified by her deeds.” This is to say, the wise man listens to and follows the one God has sent. The wisest men and women in Judea heard John the Baptist's message, got baptized, and changed their lives for the better. When he was taken into custody by Herod, the wisest people in Judea listened to Jesus and followed *His* ways. It is not wisdom to go with the crowd during times of corruption, beloved. It is wisdom to follow after God.

### **As it Stands Today**

As it stands today, the Protestant is more necessary than ever before. Few denominations calling themselves Christian are *actually* Christian. Far too many of them have imbibed worldly doctrines, worldly morality, and worldly priorities. They scream from the rooftops that we have to take in every refugee from every poor place, but never say a word about the fate of their souls. They tell us that “love wins,” when all their kind of love is winning for them is diseases and molested children. The papacy has given up none of her errors but only added more, while many historic Protestant branches have hollowed out their doctrines to make room for things Rome approves of – mass universal tolerance of absolutely everything, ecumenism, the dissolution of borders, and robbing the Godly to pay the godless. The conditions of the Church are so decrepit and corrupt that we have had to establish this present Catacomb Synod just so that people could keep receiving Word and Sacrament.

The good news is, we stand in good company when we struggle against this corruption. If you are here amid the Catacomb Synod, you belong to the great heritage of believers who *don't* go along to get along. You belong in the company of Elijah and the John the Baptist, men who foresaw the coming Christ and *followed* where He led them instead of saying “We played the flute for you, and you did not dance.” Elijah won though. John won. And so too shall we, with patience and steadfastness, see victory through the movements and actions of our Lord Jesus.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.



Sermon for November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2025

ALL SAINTS' DAY

Revelation 7:9-17

**9** After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, **10** and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" **11** And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, **12** saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

**13** Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" **14** I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Psalm 149

**1** Praise the LORD!

Sing to the LORD a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of the godly!

**2** Let Israel be glad in his Maker;  
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!

**3** Let them praise his name with dancing,  
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

**4** For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;  
he adorns the humble with salvation.

**5** Let the godly exult in glory;  
let them sing for joy on their beds.

**6** Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
and two-edged swords in their hands,

**7** to execute vengeance on the nations  
and punishments on the peoples,

**8** to bind their kings with chains  
and their nobles with fetters of iron,

**9** to execute on them the judgment written!  
This is honor for all his godly ones.

Praise the LORD!

1 John 3:1-3

**1** See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

### Matthew 5:1-12

1 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.  
2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:  
3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.  
5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.  
6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.  
7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.  
8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.  
9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.  
10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
11 “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Our text for meditation this All Saints' Day is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

The Sermon on the Mount begins with what we call the Beatitudes, the set of blessings that our Lord Jesus pronounces on people with certain traits. Let's get something out of the way, and here I choose to engage in a crass complaint. The way in which this passage is used to manipulate people into a weird false vision of Christianity, and the way that people have *rejected* Christianity on account of that false vision, is perverse. I agonized over how exactly to preach on this passage *precisely* because of this stupid bad-faith dynamic that gets passed around by false teachers and anti-Christians alike.

This confusion is absolutely everywhere my friends, to the maddening point where people are rejecting Christianity without even reading this passage for themselves. Christ says the poor in spirit are blessed; a monk takes up that verse, claims that Jesus demands vows of poverty and starts telling everyone that they should be poor; then the conservative rejects Jesus because he doesn't want to be homeless! Jesus says the meek shall inherit the earth; some stupid pacifist trumpets that as support for his limp-wristed worldview and then men hear this and reject Christianity because they don't want to be wimps. And on and on it goes. To this day, just typing in “Beatitudes” in a search engine will show you endless examples of would-be theologians turning Christianity into a religion for losers, and idiots taking those teachers at their word as a pathetic excuse to reject salvation.

On account of this dynamic there is so much nonsense out there. What is to be done about it? Well, the only way to solve this problem is to teach the text for what our Lord is actually saying. Let us not waste our time trying to refute the distortions made by evil men, nor spend hours and hours reassuring nonbelievers (who won't listen anyway) that those other guys are wrong. For lack of a better way of putting it, we must simply dive into the text and become stronger Christians.

### **Whom does Christ Address?**

St. Matthew records that Jesus went up a mountain (likely a very large hill for our modern understanding), and His *disciples* went to Him. He reserves this teaching for those who already believe in Him, and who come to listen to what He has to say. These are already disciples, and so they do not apply to those who do not believe. When Christ says someone is blessed, this *does not apply* to someone who doesn't belong to Him. A nonbeliever can be poor in spirit, mourning, meek, desiring righteousness, merciful, seeking purity, a peacemaker and persecuted – absolutely none of that will bring him blessing from on high. This is a message solely for the *Saints*.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with the assumption that whoever is listening is already a disciple. If you are Baptized and believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again on the third day *for you*, then all the treasury of Heaven is flung open to you, and our Heavenly Father looks upon you with nothing but Grace and love. But if someone does not believe, there is no point in sharing this teaching with them. Our Lord went up *away* from the braying crowds, and this sermon was only delivered to those who by all means were saved. And being assured that they were, our Lord sets about teaching them – and us – what it *looks like* to have a Christian personality. This is who His followers shall become, how the Saints come to behave as they grow in the faith.

### **The Beatitudes**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This does not mean the physically poor, but spiritually poor. Over time, the believer will have a loose grip on his or her possessions whether they are physically rich or not. We recognize that our true wealth is in eternity, and can be content in all situations whether we have plenty or are in want.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

We are told here that the mournful are comforted, but elsewhere Scripture tells us to rejoice always.<sup>1</sup> This leads us to ask, what exactly are we mourning over? Well, the Christian grows to understand sorrow over his own sin, sorrow over seeing tragedy and injustice in this world, and at the same time holds a deep abiding joy in the salvation by which God promises to *fix* everything sorrowful in the world. We end up becoming a more *moral* people because we are aware that something is *wrong*.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

By “meek,” our Lord means that the Christian is not a bully. He does not browbeat, rob, or intimidate people with his power, but uses it for good things in this life. Believers are loathe to see violence as the first resort in any conflict, let alone the nastier and sneakier ways to use power like blackmail or sabotage. When Christ says the meek shall inherit the earth, He means it: He fits us for our royal estate in the latter days by training us for our eternal rulership with Him over the universe.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

This is related to the second. As we learn to mourn over our own sin and the ugliness that infects the world, at the same time we begin to foster a true desire to see *cleansing*, both in our *own* character and in the world around us. Christ promises to us that we shall see that day and be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

As Christ has been merciful to us, so are we to be merciful to others. As He has forgiven us our sins, so too must we forgive those who sin against us. Certainly we still oppose our enemies, but as mercy grows within our hearts we wish to see them *stopped* more than exacting some orchestrated fantasy of revenge.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

---

1 1 Thessalonians 5:16

In a word, the purity of heart that our Lord speaks of is a clean conscience. The believer does his best to live according to the Word of God, and when some sin or impurity occurs within his heart, he goes to our Lord for forgiveness so that he can go right back to living properly. Christians must not be hypocrites!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

St. Paul elaborates on this line of thinking by saying “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”<sup>2</sup> While conflict is unavoidable in some senses, the Christian is an adult about it. We don't start fights over stupid matters, we don't solve everything with violence, and we prefer to settle everything without any casualties if it can be helped. And why is this the case? Because our Heavenly Father gave us life and peace, He loves life and peace, and He would see to it that we preserve both of these as much as we can.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

These are the same blessing for the same dynamic. Everybody on earth suffers, but the Christian who lives for God and follows His ways suffers for a good cause. Surely, people are persecuted out there for various political and religious causes; sometimes they deserve it, other times they are just unfortunate. But the Christian suffering for his faith is suffering despite there being nothing wrong and everything right with his beliefs. And since his faith in Christ deserves none of the pains of persecution, God sees to it that the believer is as richly rewarded as the prophets of old were. He shall make it right!

### **Christ Fulfills ALL of the Beatitudes**

To finish up, we ought to be aware that at the end of the day Jesus is pointing to Himself in all of these things. No one has ever been poorer in spirit than the Son of God who humbled Himself to being born in a human body in a dirty little manger. No one has mourned more than our Savior who took all our sins upon Himself and felt the Father turning His face away. No one is more meek than Christ, who did not use His omnipotent power to destroy those who blasphemed Him to His own face. No one hungered and thirsted more for righteousness than our Savior, for He died so that *billions* of people in the future would counted righteous through faith in Him. No one is more merciful than Jesus, who freely offers everyone forgiveness and life in His Name no matter how much sin they have committed. No one has made peace as much as Jesus has and will – especially in terms of the peace He makes between us and His Father. And indeed, Jesus Christ suffered the worst persecution there is, having committed no sin whatsoever but still being murdered by those ugly authorities who hated the truth He told.

This means that Jesus Christ is all these things *normally*, but in His ministry He is all these things *for you* my friends. If you believe in Jesus, you must not worry that you haven't been enough of a peacemaker in life. You do not need to fret as though not being poor enough in spirit means you shall not inherit eternity. Instead, let us breathe a sigh of relief as our Savior tells us “I got this,” and receive

blessing from our Heavenly Father on Christ's account. If you believe in Jesus, you are counted as being the peacemaker, the meek one, the persecuted one, and pure in heart – even if you do not match up with your deeds.

Indeed, these are lofty and virtuous ideals to strive for in life, that we must serve and honor our Lord by trying our best to be like Him! By the help of the Holy Spirit we indeed shall find ourselves doing so as time goes on. But that does not require us to go off and be monks or pacifists, and we are under no obligations reject Christ's teachings which do not require us to be such ugly pseudo-Christians. Instead, let us walk in His strength and in the confidence that His obedience will bring us to greater maturity in the faith.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
TWENTY FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS  
Genesis 1:1-2:3

**1** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. **2** The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. **3** And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. **4** And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. **5** God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

**6** And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” **7** And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. **8** And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

**9** And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. **10** God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

**11** And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. **12** The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **13** And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

**14** And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, **15** and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. **16** And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. **17** And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, **18** to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. **19** And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

**20** And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” **21** So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. **22** And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” **23** And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

**24** And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. **25** And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**26** Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

**27** So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

**28** And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” **29** And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. **30** And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. **31** And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

**2:1** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. **2** And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. **3** So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

### Psalm 8

**1** O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
**2** Out of the mouth of babies and infants,  
you have established strength because of your foes,  
to still the enemy and the avenger.  
**3** When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place,  
**4** what is man that you are mindful of him,  
and the son of man that you care for him?  
**5** Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
**6** You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under his feet,  
**7** all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
**8** the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
**9** O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

### Ephesians 6:10-20

**10** Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **11** Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. **12** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. **13** Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. **14** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, **15** and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. **16** In all

circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; **17** and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, **18** praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, **19** and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

#### John 4:46-54

**46** So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill. **47** When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. **48** So Jesus said to him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” **49** The official said to him, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” **50** Jesus said to him, “Go; your son will live.” The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. **51** As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. **52** So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” **53** The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” And he himself believed, and all his household. **54** This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Our text for meditation this Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity is on our Gospel reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

Our Lord Jesus goes to Cana for this healing. Truly, this must have been the only thing He was there for: He goes to Samaria and speaks with the woman at the well, then He goes to Cana and heals the official's child, and then heads to Jerusalem. St. John reminds us that Cana was the place where He gave us the first official “sign” miracle, turning water into wine at a wedding, and the last verse of the passage emphasizes this as the *second* sign. So our Lord wants us to pay attention to the miracle itself and the *message* that He gives us before He accomplishes the healing.

So what exactly is our Lord saying with His words and actions here? He goes to Capernaum, speaks with the official, heals the official's son, and leaves. If we were reading this in Matthew or Mark or Luke's Gospels, we would not bat an eye at it; each of these three, called together the “Synoptic” Gospels,<sup>1</sup> includes plenty of Christ's miracles that happen over the course of His ministry. But St. John wrote about comparatively few of them, because he assumes that we have read the Synoptics already. Every one of the “sign” miracles then is something with a special *point* he wants to show us from Jesus's time here on earth.

### **Signs and Faith**

So what is so important here? The official's son is dying. Our Lord responds to this information by telling the man and everyone around him, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” Plenty of Christ's miracles were accompanied by messages He gave, but this makes for quite a short sermon! What did Jesus mean by this? Was it a statement of contempt? If we read these words aloud,

---

<sup>1</sup> Synoptic meaning “seeing the whole together.” Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels on account of their similarities. St. John's Gospel includes the things that the other Gospel writers left out.



we might well conclude that our Lord was grumpy. After all, if you got sick and went to the doctor, you would think the doctor was angry with you if he only answered you with a single prickly comment!

But is Christ truly expressing contempt? Is He saying “you despicable, hard-hearted fools, I can only get through to you people if you see supernatural things, like jingling keys in front of a baby?” Nothing of the sort, thankfully. The text shows us that what Jesus says is simply fact; when the man saw that his son had been healed, he and his whole household believed. The intention of His statement is more to *teach* the official than to condemn. It is so that after he believes, he will see that Christ was the One who provided him faith through the miracle. And the disciples – both the Apostles and us – are to see this and learn from it as well.

## The Bound Will

There is nothing special about the people of Galilee or the official with his sick son. They are not the only ones who require miraculous intervention to be brought to faith. We are *all* like that, my friends. Original sin, that is our sinful nature, keeps us from voluntarily seeking the true God and appealing to Him for salvation. No nonbeliever wakes up one morning, gets his coffee and says of his own volition “you know what? I think I’ll become a Christian today.” No one who lives in the darkness of sin, being led around by the devil, makes the free choice to believe. Certainly, they make *other* free choices, but their nature is too corrupted by wickedness to make the first move.

This is what our Lord is getting at. In order for someone to believe in Him, God makes the first move. He makes the offer to bring about faith, all we can choose is whether to receive it or resist what He is trying to do. He presents Himself through these signs and wonders, offers to change our hearts and renew our spirits, to make us *different* than we once were; if we accept it, He saves us by bringing us to true faith.

## How do signs work?

So when it comes to conversion, to becoming saved, we are exactly like the official at Cana. We need to see signs and wonders or else we shall not believe. But what does Jesus mean by signs? Does He only mean miraculous wonders, like a child being healed of a deadly sickness? Yes, but insofar as the sign has to do with the Word. One does not have to be present to see that the sign has taken place. St. John records that the official's entire family believed. But they believed *after* the healing had taken place, and especially after discussing the matter! The official himself believed before he saw that his son was healed. It was not the healing itself, but the Word concerning the One who healed. As St. Paul says, “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

You may be wondering to yourself, “this is all well and good. The official and his family believed after the Word accompanied the sign. Well we have the Word, pastor. Where is the sign? Which sign do we believe?” And I am glad you asked. The sign is this, that a Man died for your sins and rose again from the dead. The Resurrection is that sign and miracle by which all men who hear of it may be brought to faith. We may not have been there at the empty tomb, and we may not have seen His Ascension into Heaven, but like the official of Cana's household – many of whom were not there when the boy was healed – we hear the *Word* concerning this most important sign, we see the *effects* concerning it, and we rejoice to receive the faith as well.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
TWENTY SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 6:1-8

- 1** Hear what the LORD says:  
Arise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.
- 2** Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth,  
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.
- 3** “O my people, what have I done to you?  
How have I wearied you? Answer me!
- 4** For I brought you up from the land of Egypt  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,  
and I sent before you Moses,  
Aaron, and Miriam.
- 5** O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,  
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD.”
- 6** “With what shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
with calves a year old?
- 7** Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”
- 8** He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

Psalm 116:12-19

- 12** What shall I render to the LORD  
for all his benefits to me?
- 13** I will lift up the cup of salvation  
and call on the name of the LORD,
- 14** I will pay my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people.
- 15** Precious in the sight of the LORD  
is the death of his saints.

**16** O LORD, I am your servant;  
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.  
You have loosed my bonds.  
**17** I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving  
and call on the name of the LORD.  
**18** I will pay my vows to the LORD  
in the presence of all his people,  
**19** in the courts of the house of the LORD,  
in your midst, O Jerusalem.  
Praise the LORD!

Philippians 1:3-11

**3** I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, **4** always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, **5** because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **6** And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. **7** It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. **8** For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. **9** And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, **10** so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **11** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Matthew 18:21-35

**21** Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” **22** Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.  
**23** “Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. **24** When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. **25** And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. **26** So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ **27** And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. **28** But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, ‘Pay what you owe.’ **29** So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ **30** He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. **31** When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. **32** Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. **33** And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ **34** And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. **35** So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart.”

Our text for meditation this Twenty-Second Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

The past is a foreign country to us, and the further back you go in history the more alien it becomes to us. There are now two generations of people born who have not lived without the internet, gen Z and gen Alpha, and they literally cannot imagine what life was like. Even if you took a twenty year old man and put him in a town with no internet connectivity for a month, he would filter the experience through *comparison* with his life online. In the same way, most of us cannot imagine a life without cars or roads. If we were required to go to some quaint village with no automobiles for a month, most of us would feel trapped there simply because there is no mechanized ability to escape. Maybe we could *imagine* what it was like two hundred years ago, to be without cars or the internet, but we cannot live that experience without it being and feeling alien to us. This, with other things like running water and modern medicine, separates us from the ancients in too many ways to count. We simply take too many things for granted.

Christians living today also suffer from this feeling when it comes to the Old Covenant. We understand *what* the Mosaic Law said and we can read the requirements placed on the faithful to stay in relationship with our Lord, but we cannot understand what it was *like*. And no, looking at the way Jews live today does not count; there is no Temple nor tabernacle nor Ark of the Covenant standing for the Jews to live in an accurate “Old Testament” way. We do not even know what their Temple furnishings *looked* like, since these were all gone by the time the Romans sacked Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Meanwhile, we have lived with the privilege of being part of the New Covenant. We understand that God has sent His only Son to die for our sins and rise again so that we may have the full assurance of salvation. We live in great freedom as well; we do not have to get our sons circumcised, we can eat pretty much whatever we want, we have few clothing regulations and we do not have to make sacrifices. I have gotten a good number of tattoos, something verboten under the Old Covenant, and I stand in confidence that I have not sinned in the slightest by getting them.

This New Covenant reality often leads to us being too quick to judge the men and women of Israel during the Old Covenant times. While the Church praises men like Abraham or David, we point our fingers at the Israelites who fell into baal worship or gross sins, as though we are better than them. Yes, their apostasy was evil, but condemning it is meaningless if we have not even tried to understand *what it was like*. Today's Old Testament reading gives us a window into their point of view. We may not understand it fully, but Micah gives us a hint.

## The Exasperated Israelite

God tells the Northern Kingdom of Israel that He has an indictment. Many prophets had come to Israel to condemn their sins and command them to repent, but now it is time to go to court, and our Lord Himself will be the prosecutor. Micah the prophet has to serve as the unhappy middleman between the two, going around and making this proclamation from God to the people and seeing how they respond. God's case is this: “What have I done to you? How have I wearied you?” In light of the good things God has done, for the children of Israel to engage in half-hearted worship and flirt with idolatry and consider His ways a *burden* is downright insulting. After all, our Lord reasons, He has brought them out of Egyptian slavery, given them prophets, and blessed them; even when a pagan king Balak paid the prophet Balaam to curse them, God promised more blessings! What more could they want? How could they respond to all of this goodness from God with “weariness?”

Shockingly, we actually have the Israelites' response in this passage. Micah relates that they point to the offering system and amplify it. They have come to the conclusion that God is *unpleasable*, and they downright *explode* their discontent towards our Lord. It is as if they were to say,

“Oh, You're mad again, Lord? Like You always are? You send us prophet after prophet telling us how bad we are all the time. Never any praise,

never any promises. Oh yes, You blessed us alright, blessed us with dour oracles and this heavy Law yoked around our necks like an anchor pulling down a sinking boat! You told us with the Law to make sacrifices to expiate our sin, and we do that, and yet here You are still mad! So what is it You want? Are the sacrifices not enough? Here then, have another sterling year-old calf that my family won't get to eat because You are upset again. Oh, what's that? You're *angry again*? Fine, have a *thousand* rams, a *thousand* rivers of oil! Still not enough? It's NEVER enough! What, should we sacrifice our children to You? Is that it, you want us to suffer? WHAT DO YOU WANT?"

This was their argument, and honestly I imagine there was something of a pause before Micah relayed God's response to them. The prophet must have been taken aback! The people were doing what they could under the Mosaic code that had been given to them, and it never seemed like they were doing enough, they never got the “attaboy” that we all crave to hear from God. Sure, the prophet could argue that the Israelites in the northern territory had been following a corrupted system. He could bring up that Jeroboam instituted the wrong priest system and that God did not approve of their two temples and so many other flaws,<sup>1</sup> but what would *that* accomplish? These people were not *born* in Judah where the true Temple was, and it was not like they could immigrate there, since the children of Judah were likely to keep them out – just before Micah wrote his book, Israel and Judah had just been at war!<sup>2</sup> So even if they wanted to, they could not fix these problems. The prophet, unhappy as he was, had to wait for a response from on high.

### God's Answer

The answer God gives must have been even more puzzling to him. “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” This is to say, He wants their hearts. The sacrifices and ceremonies wouldn't do anything, even if these people did them correctly. God wants them to start doing the right thing because it is the right thing to do, and He wants them to love kindness – His kindness, surely, but also for them to be kinder to their neighbors. This is all well and good, Micah must have thought, but the prophets had been saying that to them for centuries and it *did not answer their question*.

The Israelites ask God how exactly they are supposed to gain forgiveness for all of these sins, and God never answers the question. Remember my friends, they are under the *Old Covenant*, where the full Gospel had not been revealed. You and I can listen to any sermon and hear the Gospel, that our sins have been forgiven by the shed blood of our Savior on a Roman cross. *We* get to hear that sacrifices are not necessary, because we know that Jesus Himself was the final sacrifice for sin; back then, neither the prophets nor even the angels knew what the plan was.<sup>3</sup> God kept the plan of salvation hidden so that nothing could be done to prevent it.<sup>4</sup> So what is the message God gives the Northern Israelites? “Walk humbly with your God.” This is to say, He tells them “*Trust Me*.” He'll take care of their sins, He will do something, but in the meantime they must rely on Him without knowing the details and work on their character.

After this, the prophet details even more defects in Israel's national character, explaining why they are to go into Exile. Micah's response to this entire episode is to become completely miserable, until God gives him an oracle telling the children of Israel (and him) that they should wait on God's

---

1 1 Kings 12:25-33

2 The Syro-Ephraimite War, waged in 735 B.C., 2 Kings 16.

3 1 Peter 1:10-12

4 1 Corinthians 2:6-8

later mercies.<sup>5</sup> But the difficulties and frustrations persisted for another seven hundred and fifty years, until Christ went to the Cross and rose again to justify all who believe in Him.

## Conclusion

My friends, it is safe to say that living under the Old Covenant was difficult. Being so far in the past, the men and women living under it had an entirely different experience than we have, such that we cannot even begin to imagine it. Surely, the past is a foreign country. But with passages like this, we understand at least that their experience was a painful, frustrating one with only the slightest hope to live with day to day. St. Peter, commenting on the Old Covenant, says that the yoke was something “that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.”<sup>6</sup> But this is why they rejoiced so much at everything Jesus did for us! This is why St. Paul celebrated freedom from the Law, why the author of Hebrews triumphantly brings up the New Covenant over and over again in his book.<sup>7</sup> No longer do men have to wallow in the fog of uncertainty when it comes to their sins. No more do they have to groan with the men of Israel that they cannot shed so much blood anymore. No longer do they have to fear that some infraction will lead to their merciless death.<sup>8</sup> *Now* men have Christ, and the good news that they have forgiveness, freedom, and salvation in His Name. *Now* men know that the terrible yoke of the Law has been taken off of their necks and shattered, and even the Moral Law, the Ten Commandments, does not accuse the soul of one living in penitent faith.

We may not know exactly what the old Israelites were thinking, what life was like for them, or how it felt to live under the old system. But we can look at passages like this, and see the joy of the Apostles and the rest of the early Church, and have the same joy. Let us meditate on how our Lord has freed us from our *own* former religions, which were even more oppressive and dour than what the Israelites had (even if we did not notice it). Let us take hold of the joy set before all the saints in the salvation and freedom won for us by our Lord Jesus.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

<sup>5</sup> Micah 6:9-7:20

<sup>6</sup> Acts 15:10

<sup>7</sup> All seventeen uses of the word “Covenant” in Hebrews are in comparison between the Old and the New, celebrating that the New had superseded the Old.

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 10:28

Sermon for November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025  
CHRIST THE KING SUNDAY

READINGS

Isaiah 65:17-25

**17** “For behold, I create new heavens  
and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered  
or come into mind.

**18** But be glad and rejoice forever  
in that which I create;  
for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy,  
and her people to be a gladness.

**19** I will rejoice in Jerusalem  
and be glad in my people;  
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping  
and the cry of distress.

**20** No more shall there be in it  
an infant who lives but a few days,  
or an old man who does not fill out his days,  
for the young man shall die a hundred years old,  
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

**21** They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

**22** They shall not build and another inhabit;  
they shall not plant and another eat;  
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

**23** They shall not labor in vain  
or bear children for calamity,  
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,  
and their descendants with them.

**24** Before they call I will answer;  
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

**25** The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;  
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,  
and dust shall be the serpent's food.  
They shall not hurt or destroy  
in all my holy mountain,”  
says the LORD.

Psalm 149

(Collect verses in **bold**)

**1** Praise the LORD!  
Sing to the LORD a new song,

his praise in the assembly of the godly!  
**2** Let Israel be glad in his Maker;  
 let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!  
**3 Let them praise his name with dancing,  
 making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!**  
**4 For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;  
 he adorns the humble with salvation.**  
**5 Let the godly exult in glory;  
 let them sing for joy on their beds.**  
**6** Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
 and two-edged swords in their hands,  
**7** to execute vengeance on the nations  
 and punishments on the peoples,  
**8** to bind their kings with chains  
 and their nobles with fetters of iron,  
**9** to execute on them the judgment written!  
 This is honor for all his godly ones.  
 Praise the LORD!

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

**1** Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. **2** For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. **3** While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. **6** So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. **9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

Matthew 25:1-13

**1** "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. **2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. **3** For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, **4** but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. **5** As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. **6** But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' **7** Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. **8** And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' **9** But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' **10** And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. **11** Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' **12** But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' **13** Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

Our text for meditation this final Sunday of the Church Year is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



## Introduction

Our Old Testament reading is confusing and difficult to interpret. But that said, it is critical that I preach on it to prevent confusion. Is Isaiah prophesying about the end of the world? If so, then why does he talk about men dying and sinning? But if he's prophesying about something else, then we have to ask why God would tell the prophet He is creating a new Heavens and a new earth! If I did not engage in a more exegetical sermon here, I would be neglecting my pastoral duties and leaving people horribly confused.

## Isaiah's Near and Far

To understand our reading, we need to be aware that Isaiah has a habit of mixing prophecies together. This dynamic, mixing short-term and long-term prophecies, permeates the entire Book of Isaiah. For instance, in Isaiah 7 he gives the prophecy concerning the Virgin Birth, which tells us “the virgin shall conceive and bear a son.”<sup>1</sup> But he says this to verify that a *near* event, the conquest of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, will happen before then. Why does he do this? After all, the Virgin Birth occurs over seven hundred years after he prophesied about it! It is because he is speaking to two audiences. On the one hand, Isaiah speaks to people in ancient Israel and Judah, beckoning them to come to true faith; on the other hand, he speaks to the Church that has already received the Gospel – to us! – so that we can see the faithfulness of God. How do we know that the Virgin Birth happened just as Sts. Matthew and Luke said it did? Because Samaria fell to the Assyrians, just as Isaiah prophesied. How did the children of Judah know that a Virgin Birth *must* happen in their future? Because they were able to see the same thing happen during their lifetimes, thus learning that the latter sign would occur.

So Isaiah stands in the middle of time, speaking to two audiences, and our reading continues that style of prophecy, *mixing* the near and the far. The first part of the chapter is an oracle that the prophet is giving against the children of Israel, in which those who trust in and worship God shall be spared while the ones who rebel against Him shall go off into Exile and death. But then we start this passage, where our Lord says that He will create “new heavens and a new earth,” and he begins blending things together. The soon-fulfilled prophecy of exile for the Israelites and the children of Judah is *mixed* with the far-off prophecy of the Last Day and the Resurrection of the Dead: *near* and *far* are both present in the text.

## Jerusalem

Allow me to give an example of this. When the Lord says “I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness,” this applies in more than one way. Jerusalem was rebuilt under Zechariah the governor and Ezra the scribe, just a few centuries after Isaiah wrote this. The desolation of Judah was finally reversed as the Persian empire permitted the children of Judah to rebuild their ancestral capitol. During that time, Jerusalem was indeed a joy, as it meant a revitalization of the faith and people once more stood in the knowledge that God supported them. Their exile was over, and they could breathe easy knowing that the Covenant was not forgotten.

But at the same time, there is a *heavenly* Jerusalem that is under construction as we speak. Our Savior tells the Apostles, “I go to prepare a place for you,”<sup>2</sup> and this Jerusalem is the place to which He refers. There is a new home, a *real* home, which Jesus is preparing for all who believe in Him. St. John the Apostle *sees* this Heavenly Jerusalem come down to earth in his vision of the last days. God creates it to be a joy, and because it shall last forever He tells us “be glad and rejoice *forever*” in the eighteenth verse. Isaiah proclaims both, weaving them together.

## Life

We see the same dynamic in the next few verses as well. God says that He will rejoice in

---

1 Isaiah 7:10-17

2 John 14:2-3

Jerusalem as well, and preserve the lives of everyone there. Indeed, after the Babylonian Exile, Jerusalem was a safe harbor that did not see violence for centuries. Infants were born without the threat of their mothers being killed or sold into slavery by enemy soldiers. Men were able to grow old and live out their years – even unto a full century! And of course, there were villains who were deemed accursed by virtue of their longer lifespans. God says that they shall build and plant without having to worry about someone else taking over the land; up until the days of Antiochus Epiphanes, this was true – and it was true for a couple centuries *after* the Maccabean revolt that kicked Antiochus out.

But this does not satisfy the full text. Jerusalem being under Jewish control does not require a New Heavens and a New Earth! The return from Exile does not include animals no longer eating meat or snakes eating dust. Mankind's lifespan did not become the indefinite *forever* that a healthy tree enjoys, yet the prophet says these things shall happen. It is just that the matter of living in your body forever is the *latter* prophecy to be fulfilled. One day there shall be no more death, no more sin, and no more of the tragedies that man has faced since the fall in Eden.

### **Why this dynamic?**

So when we read this passage, we are called to look at two separate things Isaiah is prophesying. On the one hand, the prophet speaks of the restoration of earthly Jerusalem after God permits Israelites and the children of Judah to return to the land. On the other hand, he prophesies about the Resurrection, and the blessed eternity given to all who believe in Jesus. Both matters are present, and he does not separate them. Why is this the case?

The first and foremost reason for this dynamic is that it kept the enemies of God from preventing the Atonement from taking place. The prophets, especially Isaiah, wrote their Messianic predictions vaguely enough so that the devil and his servants would never guess how God was going to enact the plan of salvation. Scripture attests that “none of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”<sup>3</sup> If the prophets wrote clearly that Jesus of Nazareth, being fully God and fully man, being born in Bethlehem from the Virgin Mary, dying 33 years later on a Roman cross but rising again on the third day, and permitting whosoever believe in Him to live eternally... well, suffice it to say they would never have allowed the Crucifixion! Satan does not *want* your sins forgiven. He does not *want* us living eternally, for he wants every human being burning in the lake of fire with him when Judgment Day comes. By hiding the prophecies of the Gospel and the Return of Christ, our Heavenly Father ensured that His Will for our salvation would be accomplished.

The other reason is this my friends: these sorts of double prophecies are there for our edification. The verification of one prophecy by another is firmly established in Isaiah's writing. We know that the Virgin Birth truly happened because Isaiah's other prophecy, the fall of Samaria, that most certainly happened. We know that his other prophecies concerning Christ were fulfilled, just as we know his prophecies about Persia, Babylon, and Judah all came true. And when we get to this passage, we rejoice to know that because earthly Jerusalem was restored, that our abundant life in the Heavenly Jerusalem is assured. Though it may appear as though Christ has delayed His return, though we can look at the past two thousand years and be tempted to sadness at the length of waiting, Isaiah comes to minister to us through his writings and reassures us that our God is faithful, and that Christ shall most certainly return to abolish death and bring us to everlasting happiness.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Jeremiah 23:5-8

**5** “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. **6** In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’

**7** “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when they shall no longer say, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ **8** but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ Then they shall dwell in their own land.”

Psalms 24

- 1** The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,  
the world and those who dwell therein,  
**2** for he has founded it upon the seas  
and established it upon the rivers.  
**3** Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?  
**4** He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false  
and does not swear deceitfully.  
**5** He will receive blessing from the LORD  
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.  
**6** Such is the generation of those who seek him,  
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. *Selah*  
**7** Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.  
**8** Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD, strong and mighty,  
the LORD, mighty in battle!  
**9** Lift up your heads, O gates!  
And lift them up, O ancient doors,  
that the King of glory may come in.  
**10** Who is this King of glory?  
The LORD of hosts,  
he is the King of glory! *Selah*

Romans 13:8-14

**8** Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. **9** For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **10** Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.  
**11** Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. **12** The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us

cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. **13** Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. **14** But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

#### Matthew 21:1-11

**1** Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.” **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

**5** “Say to the daughter of Zion,  
‘Behold, your king is coming to you,  
humble, and mounted on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’”

**6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. **9** And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” **11** And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday in Advent is on our Old Testament reading

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Introduction**

I have a question for you. It may sound a little sacrilegious to ask it, and it might be a bit uncomfortable, but it is one that every human being asks at one point in their lives. In fact, it is a question that burns within us whenever we get burned. When the cancer diagnosis comes in, when we have to put a beloved pet out of their misery, and when there isn't enough money for Christmas presents this year, this question rises up in our hearts. Christians answer it a number of ways, while nonbelievers answer it the wrong way. And the question is this: how do you know that God is good? Especially when times are bad, how do we know?

The theologians are often the first to answer this with a tautology, or non-answer. They mean well, but I cannot tell you how often I have heard a man, whose nose is always shoved in some dogmatics textbook, say that “God is good because God is good.” Oh they will use more words than that - “God is Good because goodness is inherent in His nature, having benevolence as an essential attribute which is proper to His eternal existence as the maximally great Being” - or something similar to that. But still, their answer to the question amounts to “God is good because God is good.” The dry, dusty imaginations of such persons really do seem to imagine that this is a satisfactory answer to our longing.

There is another answer that comes from well-meaning people that just doesn't work. Sadly this is the most common one among Christians, especially those who do not read their Bibles very much. Their answer boils down to either feelings or circumstances. “How do we know God is good? Ah, but don't you ever just think about His love and feel that swelling in your heart?” “Oh but we're having a good time over here, so it seems to me that God is very good – just look at all these blessings!” Now certainly we sometimes *feel* that God is good, but that does not mean that we *know* He is good. And we might enjoy some blessings in life, but when times get tough it is harder for us to *notice* those

blessings, let alone learn from them!

While there are plenty of eager answerers out there, few actually sit down and listen to what God says about it. When we ask, “how do I know God is good?” He gives us one consistent answer throughout all the pages of Scripture. He says to us, “I have shown you.” He calls us to remember what He has done in the past, all of His righteous and mighty deeds, and for us to believe on account of these firm facts. But He especially wants us to look toward the latest.

### **The Goodness of God in History**

My friends, God has given us a faith that is rooted in *history*. We are to look at how He has revealed His goodness to us, so that we may look forward to the good things He has promised. Adam and Eve, cast out from the Garden of Eden, knew full well that God had shown them His benevolence by the existence of the Garden itself; because of this, they could trust that one Day He would send someone to destroy the work of the serpent and bring them back to Paradise.<sup>1</sup> They told their children about this, and expected them to *remember* as a fact of history that God had shown them good and promised them redemption.

Noah and his family survived the Great Flood. They saw that God had delivered them from disaster by having Noah build the Ark, and they heard our Lord bless them with a new Covenant;<sup>2</sup> He promised to never flood the world again. From that moment on, the descendants of Noah and his sons were to look back on the Flood, on the survival of men and animals through the Ark, and trust that God would maintain great mercy for them. To remind us all of this moment in history, our Lord established the rainbow in the sky as a sign that He has not forgotten this promise.

Many other moments like these have happened, where our Lord demonstrated His perfect righteousness and goodness, His justice and mercy. One which is particularly emphasized is the Exodus, wherein the Israelites were delivered out of Egyptian bondage. God showed them His justice as He punished the heartless Egyptians with civilization-destroying plagues, including the Passover which killed the firstborn in all the land. He showed them His mercy by inviting everyone to save their children's lives by placing Lamb's blood on their doors – and many Egyptians took Him up on the offer, departing Egypt alongside the Lord's people.<sup>3</sup> For centuries after this, the Israelites and the children of Judah expressed their remembrance by saying “As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” Remembering the Exodus was how they knew that God would fulfill His promises of future deliverance.

Jeremiah records that things would change though. The Exodus would not be forgotten, but the return from Exile would be fresher in their memories. God sent the children of Israel into captivity under Assyria, and He sent the children of Judah into Exile in Babylon, but just as He promised, they were allowed to return home and rebuild the country in peace. From that moment onward for *centuries*, they expressed the remembrance with “As the LORD lives who brought up and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.” This historical event was proof to them that one day God would send the Messiah, the righteous Branch from David's line, to deliver the people.

If you were to ask a believer in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., “How do you know God is good?” his answer would be this, that our Lord brought his people back from Exile and let them return to the Promised Land. But now, our answer to this question is simple; it starts with a manger in Bethlehem, and it ends with an ascension into Heaven. Just as He promised, God sent His only Son to die for our sins, and rose Him up on the third day from the dead. We live in full assurance that because of this fact of history, God loves us and has shown us His goodness – both in His justice against sins and mercy for sinners with the Crucifixion of Jesus. He shows us His infinite Grace with the Resurrection, which is

---

1 Genesis 3:15

2 Genesis 9:8-17

3 Exodus 12:1-39

extended from Christ to the believer through faith. My friends, you do not have a God that merely *tells* you that He is good – you have a God who *shows* you that He is good!

### **Conclusion**

As we begin this year's Advent season, we will be meditating on this dynamic, that God *demonstrates* His goodness unto all men. He calls us to remember what He has done in the past, that we may live in stronger faith that He shall do even more good in the future. The examples that I gave, from Eden to the Flood to the Exodus to the Return of the Exiles, all the way to the Crucifixion of our Lord, these are not the only things He has done! But in remembering them, we walk forward in the comfort of knowing that His promise of the Second Advent – Christ's Return – is sure to happen. May we thus walk through this month in gratitude and faith.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Malachi 4:1-6

**1** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **2** But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. **3** And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.

**4** “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

**5** “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. **6** And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Psalms 50:7-23

**7** “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;  
O Israel, I will testify against you.  
I am God, your God.

**8** Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;  
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

**9** I will not accept a bull from your house  
or goats from your folds.

**10** For every beast of the forest is mine,  
the cattle on a thousand hills.

**11** I know all the birds of the hills,  
and all that moves in the field is mine.

**12** “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,  
for the world and its fullness are mine.

**13** Do I eat the flesh of bulls  
or drink the blood of goats?

**14** Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,  
and perform your vows to the Most High,

**15** and call upon me in the day of trouble;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

**16** But to the wicked God says:  
“What right have you to recite my statutes  
or take my covenant on your lips?

**17** For you hate discipline,  
and you cast my words behind you.

**18** If you see a thief, you are pleased with him,  
and you keep company with adulterers.

**19** “You give your mouth free rein for evil,  
and your tongue frames deceit.

**20** You sit and speak against your brother;  
you slander your own mother's son.

**21** These things you have done, and I have been silent;  
you thought that I was one like yourself.

But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.

**22** “Mark this, then, you who forget God,  
lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

**23** The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me;  
to one who orders his way rightly  
I will show the salvation of God!”

Romans 15:1-13

**1** We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. **2** Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. **3** For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.” **4** For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. **5** May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, **6** that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. **7** Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

**8** For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, **9** and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,  
and sing to your name.”

**10** And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.”

**11** And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,  
and let all the peoples extol him.”

**12** And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come,  
even he who arises to rule the Gentiles;  
in him will the Gentiles hope.”

**13** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Luke 21:25-36

**25** “And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, **26** people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **27** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. **28** Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

**29** And he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. **30** As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. **31** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. **32** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. **33** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

**34** “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. **35** For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. **36** But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to



escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

Our text for meditation this Second Sunday in Advent is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

For today's meditation, let's talk about fire. After Malachi the prophet leads some of the people to repentance,<sup>1</sup> God makes a promise. He tells the children of Judah that a day is coming that *burns*, and He proceeds to remind them of certain men and the times of fire that are associated with them. This passage heats things up with language of ovens, blazes, ashes, and – oddly – even sunlight. What is going on here?

## Fire

Why so much emphasis on fire, burning, and heat? Our world is an electric one these days, so the message does not reach our hearts as readily as it did in Malachi's day. It is easy, in our world of light bulbs and electric heaters and flashlights, to forget just how *central* fire was to people even just a hundred years ago. Without fire, you could not see at night. Without fire, you could not cook your food. In most places without fire you could hardly survive the winters and keep your home livable. Fire was an indispensable part of life for everyone back then, and though it still is for some, the significance of it has been somewhat *extinguished* for modern people today. Nonetheless, fire is a blessing.

Fire was once more important, but at the same time it was also more dangerous. Occasionally you will hear about a forest fire in some state, or some poor soul gets burned, but modern life has afforded us efficient ways of mitigating the hazards of open flames. Our buildings are made of flame-retardant materials. Most of our cities have firefighters with great big red trucks that have big hoses for drenching any blaze and stopping the danger. Whenever someone gets burned we have new medicines that help heal them. The ancients had none of that. A single spark could cause a great blaze, and in a moment a healthy man is completely disfigured from burns. Fighting fires was often a fruitless proposition, as little could be done to keep a village from burning down entirely. Sure, people got around these hazards in different ways, but there was only so much one could do to keep the danger at bay.

It was not lost on our ancestors that the same thing which helped was also that which harmed. Fire kept life going and made great things possible, but it also had the potential to destroy entire civilizations and ruin mankind's greatest efforts. It is the same fire, the same heat, the same light being given, but with a wide spectrum of good and bad things that come with it. It is no coincidence that so many pagan religions include worshiping fire, for even the dumbest pagan understands the danger and blessing that come with it.

In our reading, Malachi's oracle makes the same point. The Day of the Lord will come, he says, burning like an *oven*. And what is God cooking? The wicked! He is burning them to a crisp with His fury against all their sin and arrogance. Yet at the same time, the heat that burns the wicked to ashes is a gentle healing sun for the righteous. Those who entrusted themselves to the Lord are going to be “leaping like calves from the stall” - that is, they will rejoice in the warmth, the light, and the vitality that comes with it like a calf jumping at sunrise. This is the same event. Like fire, it will destroy some while preserving others. Like we see with fire, those who treat God with reverence and honor will see their lives preserved, while those who treat God with contempt and carelessness are to be tormented and destroyed.

---

1 Malachi 3:16-18

## Times of Fire

God drives the point home by calling the children of Judah to *remember*. He tells them to remember the Law, in particular the Law that was spoken at Horeb (or, Mount Sinai),<sup>2</sup> where God came down to earth *in fire*.<sup>3</sup> Oh yes, the people were terrified, and anyone who touched the mountain would die, but they received the Ten Commandments that day, a holy and righteous guide for all living – the Will of God for all men revealed! Our Lord calls them to remember when His presence was made known in the blaze upon the mountain, showing them that both judgment and blessing had arrived.

He also tells them that an Elijah figure shall come. As men and women of the Church era, you and I can easily remember that the “Elijah who was to come” is John the Baptist,<sup>4</sup> who announced the arrival of Christ to the world at the beginning of our Savior's ministry. But Malachi's original audience, hearing all of this talk of burning and ovens and Horeb and ashes, the first thing that would have been on their minds is Elijah's relationship with *fire*. God sent Elijah the prophet to clear away idolatry in Israel, and he did so by calling down fire from Heaven, just before getting the people to slaughter the prophets of the false god baal.

Like the giving of the Law at Horeb, and like the days of Elijah, the promised Day of the Lord is a day in which God's Presence is made known. These are times of fire, when the Lord asserting Himself means blessing for the good, punishment for the wicked, the destruction of false worship, and the proclamation of Truth to all people. When God institutes times of fire, things change, and not just for a moment or a generation, but the trajectory of the future is adjusted, history is made, and the impact goes out into eternity. Malachi promises to the people that this shall happen once more.

## When the Fire Arrives

And indeed, God kept His promise. If fire represents the Presence of our Lord, this most certainly happened when Christ was born. And our Lord Jesus, God in the flesh, has for two thousand years acted as that very central “fire” by which men are either warmed in saving faith, or burned in the flames of damnation. He set the stage with John the Baptist, who warned children and fathers to be united in repentance lest God destroy everyone without the slightest hint of mercy. Thankfully, they heeded that call, and we have the Gospel with us today because of God acting through men like John.

And the fires of God's Presence shall make themselves known once more my friends. The Same Jesus who spoke through the fires to the Israelites at Sinai is the same Jesus who set Elijah's offering ablaze, and He is the same Jesus who was born in a manger that He may grow and die for our sins; this same Jesus shall return, just as He promised, to judge the living and the dead at the Resurrection. The message remains for us just as it did for the children of Judah: *remember, for more fire is coming*.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

2 Sinai and Horeb are synonymous names for the same mountain, as shown when Sinai is called Horeb in Psalm 106:19 and Deuteronomy 9:8

3 Exodus 19:16-18

4 Matthew 11:11-15

Sermon for December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Isaiah 40:1-11

**1** Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

**2** Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended,  
that her iniquity is pardoned,  
that she has received from the LORD's hand  
double for all her sins.

**3** A voice cries:

“In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

**4** Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

**5** And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

**6** A voice says, “Cry!”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

**7** The grass withers, the flower fades  
when the breath of the LORD blows on it;  
surely the people are grass.

**8** The grass withers, the flower fades,  
but the word of our God will stand forever.

**9** Go on up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, fear not;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
“Behold your God!”

**10** Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
behold, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense before him.

**11** He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom,  
and gently lead those that are with young.

Psalm 85

- 1** LORD, you were favorable to your land;  
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.  
**2** You forgave the iniquity of your people;  
you covered all their sin. *Selah*  
**3** You withdrew all your wrath;  
you turned from your hot anger.  
**4** Restore us again, O God of our salvation,  
and put away your indignation toward us!  
**5** Will you be angry with us forever?  
Will you prolong your anger to all generations?  
**6** Will you not revive us again,  
that your people may rejoice in you?  
**7** Show us your steadfast love, O LORD,  
and grant us your salvation.  
**8** Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints;  
but let them not turn back to folly.  
**9** Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
that glory may dwell in our land.  
**10** Steadfast love and faithfulness meet;  
righteousness and peace kiss each other.  
**11** Faithfulness springs up from the ground,  
and righteousness looks down from the sky.  
**12** Yes, the LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
**13** Righteousness will go before him  
and make his footsteps a way.

1 Corinthians 4:1-5

**1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. **3** But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. **4** For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. **5** Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

Matthew 11:2-11

**2** Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples **3** and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" **4** And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: **5** the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. **6** And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."  
**7** As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? **8** What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. **9** What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. **10** This is he of whom it is written,

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,  
who will prepare your way before you.’

11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday in Advent is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Introduction

Our reading for today does not feel, at first anyway, like an Advent text. St. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, which has been plagued by the arrival of competing *factions*, each with its own teachers. The chaos caused by these teachers was immense, so bad that St. Paul – an *Apostle* – had to reply to it. The most prominent faction, competing against the Apostolic witness, were antinomians. These men who believed that Christians could sin as much as they wanted; if our sins were forgiven, they reasoned, then it stands to reason that we can sin without worrying that these sins would have consequences.

These antinomian heretics were like a *skin infection* on the Body of Christ, covering it with boils. In the Corinthian church alone, they tolerated a man who was committing adultery with his stepmother.<sup>1</sup> The members of the congregation were suing one another in court.<sup>2</sup> St. Paul has to respond to some of them approving of fornication, while others were saying that all people must be celibate.<sup>3</sup> The proudest of them were going off to pagan temples to purchase food,<sup>4</sup> and others were engaged in idolatry<sup>5</sup> while getting drunk during the service.<sup>6</sup> Speaking of services, these heretics rendered everything so chaotic that everyone was talking and screaming over one another.<sup>7</sup> Worse yet, they had people there who were crassly denying the promised Resurrection, something Christ Himself promised, in favor of some pagan ghostly fate.<sup>8</sup> Suffice it to say that if you think your church is bad, I can almost guarantee that the church in Corinth was far, far worse.

## The Teacher Problem

So what does our reading have to do with Advent? Much in every way, my friends. Nothing St. Paul complains about and admonishes against in 1 Corinthians was *new* among the people of God. There have always been factions and the Church has always been a mess. Before Christ was born, before the first Christmas, there were all sorts of competing factions among the jews. There were pharisees in the synagogues proclaiming that everyone must do even more than the Law of Moses commanded; there were the sadducees who denied the Resurrection as well and used the priesthood as a political tool; there were sicarii and the Qumran people who told everyone that (if they were not actively trying to murder their enemies) they had to by hyper-ascetics to train themselves for a coming race war between jews and everyone else; there were “Hellenists,” or jews that were so influenced by Greek culture and religion that they synthesized everything about Greece into the faith. And of course, like Corinth there were antinomians as well, who did not bother with anything God commanded:

---

1 1 Corinthians 5:1

2 1 Corinthians 6:1-8

3 1 Corinthians 7

4 1 Corinthians 8

5 1 Corinthians 10:1-122

6 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

7 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

8 1 Corinthians 15

Scripture simply refers to that faction as “sinners.”<sup>9</sup>

Before Christ arrived for His public ministry, these factions had made a mess of Judea the same way the heretics made a mess of the Corinthian church. Few people were giving the right message; only John the Baptist spoke correctly, teaching people to repent of their sins and prepare their hearts for the coming Messiah. Only men like John the Baptist had hearts that were purely dedicated to serving our Lord *for His own sake* and for the sake of the people; every other teacher had some ulterior motive. Whether that be for wealth like the sadducees, for prominence and fame like the pharisees, or political schemes like the sicarii, hellish motivations ruled the day until Christ returned.

So when it comes to teachers within the Church, not much changed between the period before Christ's arrival and the times of St. Paul. For that matter, we cannot say that much has changed at all, especially not when it comes to the Church today. We are beset by easy-believism antinomian nonsense, hard nosed works righteousness, esoteric scribblings, charismatic seizure people, and would-be prophets running around peddling some new revelation (or in the case of the “trad” movement, selling their opinions as historic dogma).

St. Paul says that it is a small thing if he is judged by the Corinthian congregation. This remains the case as well, since it is not *merely* the teachers who are the problem. Bad pastors and evil theologians would not exist if there was no market for them, no buyers ready to lap up their ugly teachings like thirsty puppies drinking urine from a bathroom stall. It is the same situation as with prostitution and pornography; if there were no buyers, there would be no producers. Though there is only one true doctrine given in the Word of God, there are as many “Christianities” as there are Christians: whoever has itching ears to hear the things he wants, there will be some false teacher at the ready to provide exactly what they desire. To those who would categorically hate the pastorate, the Apostle responds with “maybe things are this bad, but who are you to judge?”

### **The Once and Future Judge**

This is not to say that the laity should not discern whether they should follow their minister. If he has spoken heresy, they do well to reject his authority. But even if the Corinthians should decide to no longer listen to the Apostle, this will not bother him in the slightest; God is his judge. So long as he goes to the Lord for mercy and thus keeps his conscience clean, he can rely on the mercies of our Lord as he presses forward in service to the Gospel.

The Apostle says that there will be a time when our Lord will come and bring the truth to light. The ministers will be judged by the purposes of their hearts, and those who are saved shall receive commendation. Of course, *all* Christians end up making errors. Before I was Lutheran, I was a dispensational baptist, and time does not permit me to tell of the thousands of errors present in the dispensational baptist camp! I am sure everyone listening to or reading this homily has held – and taught – at least one wrong thing about the Christian faith. But St. Paul reassures himself and us that it is the *heart* that our Lord is examining here. Our faith, does it trust in Christ alone? Our teaching, is it for the glory of Christ and to bring others to stronger faith in Him? Our good deeds, are they done in obedience and love for the God who saved us? For teacher and layman alike, *these* are the standards by which we are judged. And so far as we are able, these are the things we must look for in those whom we would call teacher.

As an aside, this is also one of the reasons why we reject antinomianism of both the hard and soft varieties. If a man says we can sin as much as we'd like, someone may only say that if he *wants* to sin, and if sin is the true treasure of his heart. Such a man persisting in these teachings will not hear anything good from our Lord on Judgment Day! And if someone is a “soft” antinomian, who says that the Law is preached but not enforced nor used to guide the believer, such a man is protecting his sin as though it were a *secret* treasure. God measures and weighs every heart, but those in the “pro-sin” party in the Church have already revealed it and must be rejected.

## **Conclusion**

Now my friends, do you see how this is an Advent text? Our Lord arrived in the Incarnation to fulfill all of His promises concerning the fulfillment of the Law and the forgiveness of sins. As people waited for His Birth and the ministry He engaged in, there was absolute chaos – but God knew the hearts of those who would follow Him. In the same way my friends, there is doctrinal chaos now as we await the Return of our Lord Jesus, same as there was in Corinth. One Day He shall return to reveal all things. Not “all things” as in the “secret sins” we don't want to talk about or the errant flubbing of our words, not to bring us into judgment over our former errors – but to reveal the thing which matters the most, our hearts and whether they belong to Jesus. With penitent hearts then, let us entrust ourselves to Christ who will see us through the chaos and guide us despite all the insane teachings out there. Having received forgiveness in the words of Absolution, in Communion and in our Baptism, let us stand firm in following Him, having the same confidence and clean consciences as St. Paul.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025  
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

READINGS

Deuteronomy 18:15-19

**15** “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen— **16** just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.’ **17** And the LORD said to me, ‘They are right in what they have spoken. **18** I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. **19** And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.

Psalm 111

**1** Praise the LORD!

I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart,  
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

**2** Great are the works of the LORD,  
studied by all who delight in them.

**3** Full of splendor and majesty is his work,  
and his righteousness endures forever.

**4** He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered;  
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

**5** He provides food for those who fear him;  
he remembers his covenant forever.

**6** He has shown his people the power of his works,  
in giving them the inheritance of the nations.

**7** The works of his hands are faithful and just;  
all his precepts are trustworthy;

**8** they are established forever and ever,  
to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

**9** He sent redemption to his people;  
he has commanded his covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is his name!

**10** The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom;  
all those who practice it have a good understanding.  
His praise endures forever!

Philippians 4:4-7

**4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. **5** Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **6** do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.



Luke 1:46-55

46 And Mary said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
48 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.  
For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
49 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
50 And his mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
51 He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;  
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones  
and exalted those of humble estate;  
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and the rich he has sent away empty.  
54 He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
55 as he spoke to our fathers,  
to Abraham and to his offspring forever.”

Our text for meditation this Fourth Sunday in Advent is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction

“Why can't I go outside and see God for myself?” This is a common question asked by atheists in their contentions against us Christians. Another version of this might be “why doesn't God just show Himself?” Hidden within their question is a silly assumption that if you cannot *see, hear, touch, taste or smell* something it must not exist. If you cannot hear it, it must not make sound; if you cannot see it, it must not have any visage; if you cannot smell or taste or touch it, it must not have any of the tangential properties there either; if it lacks all of these entirely, the atheist reasons, it simply must not be.

Throughout the centuries, various Christian apologists have tried to answer this question to varying degrees of success. First of all, it is absurd for them to argue that God doesn't exist solely because we cannot see Him, especially if they believe in imperceptible bacteria, imperceptible radio waves, and imperceptible photons. Should we say that these things did not exist until there were inventions that made perceiving them possible? If the existence of those things did not depend on our ability or inability to see them, then why should we say that God's existence is dependent on human perception? And then there are numbers, the laws of logic, the laws of nature, and more things that cannot exist physically yet are *crucial* to the operations of reality. If an atheist says “I can't see God, therefore He isn't real,” then he ought to say “I cannot see the number one, therefore there is not one of anything.” Great job, atheists, you just told everyone that you don't believe  $1+1=2$ .

Other apologists have taken a more theological approach. God is Holy, so holy in fact that seeing Him would undo us sinners. After all, God tells Moses “you cannot see My Face, for man shall not see Me and live.”<sup>1</sup> When the elders of Israel shared a meal with God on Mount Sinai, they only saw His feet and the sapphire pavement under them, apparently spending the entire time looking down to

---

1 Exodus 33:20

keep from *dying*.<sup>2</sup> So the apologists say that God walking around would simply lead to everyone perishing. There is some merit to that, but the nonbeliever could reply “well why don't I hear Him then? Wouldn't hearing be enough?” To which point I reply that He has made Himself audible many, many times. He has also shown up *visibly*.

### **When God Shows Up Audibly**

Moses tells the Israelites that there will be another prophet. The office of prophet was established precisely because God spoke the Ten Commandments to them at Horeb, and they were so terrified that they begged Him to stop.<sup>3</sup> Of course, God spoke from the heavens at other times, including at the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>4</sup> and when Christ says “Father, glorify Your Name” after the Triumphal Entry.<sup>5</sup> But for the most part, our Lord spoke through the prophets to deliver messages to the people. If an atheist ever tells us that God ought to be audible, we can reply that He has demonstrated this many, many times.

This is to say nothing of all the prophecies in Scripture which were confirmed to be true. From the prophets predicting the Babylonian Exile to the restoration to the conquests of the Persians and Greeks and Romans, all the way up to the Incarnation and the Atonement and the Resurrection – my friends if you want *confirmation* that our Lord has spoken to men individually as well, these prophecies are the proof of it! This is also the case for prophecies about things that happened *after* the canon of Scripture was completed, as we see with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 70 A.D.<sup>6</sup>

Now of course the atheist might reply that no one is hearing God speak *now*, so whatever evidence I present from the Scriptures does not count. Again, the nonbeliever is being silly here. Plenty of people – hundreds of thousands at this point – have claimed to hear God speak to them, from the first century A.D. to the current day. The nonbeliever *chooses* to not believe them, not out of any proof that these hundreds of thousands were all liars or hallucinating, but simply because he does not want to. Frankly, the atheist would likely tell himself that *he* was hallucinating if God spoke to him.

### **When God Shows Up Visibly**

God has shown up visibly as well though my friends. Yes, He was present at Horeb as the mountain burned, but He arrived many other times as “the Angel of the Lord” and “the Word of the Lord” in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> Even more importantly, He arrived as the Prophet, about whom Moses wrote. Let us reread the last verse in our reading:

**19 And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.**

Yes, it is this chapter in which our Lord has Moses establish the prophetic office, but this *particular* Prophet is different than all the others. For any other man delivering oracles that are presumably from God, the Israelites are called to *not* believe them until they have been tested; if they give a false prophecy, or if they start teaching the people to believe in other deities, then whatever they said must be disregarded and the false prophet must be abominated.<sup>8</sup> But *this* Prophet is different entirely, as our Lord tells everyone to listen to Him or else be judged by our Lord Himself.

Of course, that Prophet whom Moses is writing about is our Lord Jesus. If an Israelite withheld belief in a prophet like Isaiah's words or Malachi's oracle until they had been properly tested, then it was no sin. Even to this day, if some goofball doesn't think Haggai is inspired and does not belong in

---

2 Exodus 24:9-10

3 Exodus 20:18-21

4 Mark 9:7

5 John 12:27-29

6 Matthew 24:1-2

7 <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/examples-of-christophanies-in-the-old-testament.html>

8 Deuteronomy 18:20-22

the canon of Scripture, this does not put his salvation in danger.<sup>9</sup> But to refrain from believing Christ's teachings is *deadly*, for Christ has the words of eternal life,<sup>10</sup> and our salvation is predicated on faith in them.<sup>11</sup> God says to ancient Israel that *this* Prophet is different, because He is the true Divine Messenger – the Logos or the Word<sup>12</sup> – He is *God among us*.<sup>13</sup>

## Remembering

Advent is a time for remembering. Here, with our reading, we remember that God has proven His existence so many times for so many generations. With all of the eyewitness accounts, all of the lived experiences, and the solid evidence of Scripture itself (before we even get to things like nature or archaeology), He has made Himself undeniably known to humanity in a way that *ought* to satisfy any intellectually *honest* atheist. He did so in such a way that although His holy essence would destroy us, we were kept safe so that we could have the opportunity to believe.

But it is this one appearance of our God, as the true Prophet of whom Moses wrote, that is the most important. When Christ was born in that manger in Bethlehem, He arrived to show Himself to us – not just to prove that He *exists*, but to *save* us. It is our God arriving *visibly*, to come and die on a Cross for our sins, that assures us that He is, that He loves us, and that just as Christ was risen from the dead we may be assured of our eternal life as well. May we then listen to His Words.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

9 Nobody should do this, by the way. The entirety of the 66 book canon is fully inspired by God.

10 John 6:67-69

11 Mark 16:16

12 John 1

13 Matthew 1:23

Sermon for December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024

CHRISTMAS EVE

[Note for Deacons and Lay Leaders: I am of the opinion that worship services should not overshadow celebrations of festivities, for we worship God with enjoyment of His blessings: if people are anxious to celebrate, then over-extended liturgy can be counterintuitive to our goal. Whichever day you choose for this message and liturgy, I recommend having a *brief* full service or using the Order for Family Devotion, then and having a short period of devotion, singing, and praise on the other day.]

READINGS

Isaiah 7:10-14

**10** Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: **11** “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” **12** But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” **13** And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? **14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Psalms 110:1-4

The LORD says to my Lord:  
“Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.”

**2** The LORD sends forth from Zion  
your mighty scepter.

Rule in the midst of your enemies!

**3** Your people will offer themselves freely  
on the day of your power,  
in holy garments;  
from the womb of the morning,  
the dew of your youth will be yours.

**4** The LORD has sworn  
and will not change his mind,  
“You are a priest forever  
after the order of Melchizedek.”

1 John 4:7-16

**7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

**13** By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. **14** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **15** Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. **16** So we have come to know

and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. **17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

#### Matthew 1:18-25

**18** Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. **19** And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. **20** But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” **22** All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

**23** “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). **24** When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, **25** but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Our text for meditation this Christmas Eve is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

#### **Asking for a Sign**

A man gets the dreaded letter from his work. “You have been let go,” it reads. Yet another round of layoffs hit the office, and this time he wasn't as lucky as before. The next week, he gets another letter. “We are sorry, but we are closed to applicants at this time.” This would be the first of several hundred letters, emails and phone calls he gets from different places he contacts for work. Eventually saddled with a gig economy job, he barely makes ends meet. This leads to his frustrations with women; when they *do* respond to his offers for dates, it always ends with a cold, unfeeling “not interested.” He isn't rich enough, he isn't handsome enough, and it doesn't look like he has a future. After a number of years, this man throws up his hands and asks God for a sign.

A woman hears it again from her live-in boyfriend. “I'm just not ready for marriage, it isn't the right time. I'm sorry.” When the positive pregnancy test comes in he leaves her, and his last words to her are “I'm just not ready to be a father yet. I'm sorry.” After a struggle to get benefits for her and her child, she finally settles down into a rhythm of life, but when the crushing weight of loneliness brings itself down on her back, she seeks a new man. Men will reject her in online dating, saying she made too many mistakes; in real life, they will reject her more gently saying “I'm not ready to be something like a stepfather. I'm sorry.” Years pass, so she throws up her hands and asks God for a sign.

In 2020 a child hears her parents argue about money for the fifth time in a week. She has no friends, not since the schools were shut down over COVID. The next thing she knows, the schools reopen but they tell her to use “social distance” and wear a mask...for two years. Her only companions are her parents – that is, until the divorce. Then she has one parent for one week at a time, and neither of them talks to her. When the country opens up, and she doesn't have to wear the mask anymore, older people make fun of her for what they call “that blank stare” on her face. It looks like she's still wearing a mask. After everything opens up again, she hopes to make some friends but nothing happens. When

she finds out that nothing changed, she will throw up her hands and ask God for a sign.

An old widower has gone to the nursing home. Then he is told he must leave. The retirement fund isn't paying his bills anymore. Hidden fees from the bank robbed him blind of the money he needed for his sunset years, and the cost of care at the nursing home has increased because of inflation. He spends a number of months in the cold, homeless and begging until his children feel bad enough to let him live with them. Two years later, as he is nearing the time for passing on, he can no longer speak. But his son and his daughter in law, who have cared for him during this time, see him raise up his hands and they wonder if he is asking God for a sign.

## Why Ask for a Sign?

Why ask God for a sign? We hear all the time that Christians are supposed to be made of *sterner stuff* in our faith. There shouldn't be a need to ask for any sign from God, we should just be *sure* of things. Occasionally one of my contemporaries in the pastorate will say that it is even sinful to seek after a sign, because the Law of Moses says "you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."<sup>1</sup> In a certain sense, they are correct. If from a deranged or arrogant heart someone decides they are higher up than God, and can *judge* Him by whether or not He performs miracles, then yes asking for a sign *that way* is a sin. God is not some circus monkey, and He does not have to dance when we tell Him, and He owes us absolutely nothing.

But that is not what we're talking about here when it comes to the *good* sort of sign-request. Of the stories I just told, each and every one of these people was looking for something that only God can provide. Whether or not they were believers, they know that God can hear them. They don't want proof that God *exists*: they already believe He's there, otherwise they would not want a sign from Him. Nobody asks for or hopes for contact from someone who does not exist. What they all really want is something to *hold onto* during the rough years, something to reassure them that God cares about them. I'll tell you right now that from *that* sort of heart, this is a perfectly good thing to ask for. It is no sin.

## The Sign Given

One caveat though, my friends. It is no sin to ask God for a sign that He still cares and loves them. It *is* a sin to reject the sign that He gives in response to that request. God always points us first to the Word, where He has already given the perfect sign. If you ask God to show you that He loves you, He will point you to a manger in Bethlehem. He will remind you that there was a virgin who gave birth to His Son there. He will show you that same blessed Child, grown up to be a man who bravely went to a Cross, and who then rose from the dead. God will promise that if you believe in that very one and *trust* Him, then you will live eternally and have His care forever.

Are you poor, despised and afflicted? God points you to the manger and tells you that the baby there was born so that you have a bright future, free from poverty, shame and pain. Are you lonely? God tells you that the infant who lays in a bed of straw has come to give you a family that will be with you forever. Are you desperate and anxious? Behold, the sleeping baby who was born to give you rest – for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.<sup>2</sup> Are you angry, are you tired of all the injustice you see around you? God points you to His Son, who established and will establish perfect justice.

Two miracles happened when the Virgin gave birth to our Lord Jesus. Yes, there is the Virgin Birth itself, which guarantees that the salvation of our souls is from no one but God. We cannot say that humanity saved itself, nor must we thank any particular race for bringing the Christ Child to bear. The Virgin Birth means that all credit goes to God. Yet more impactful is the second miracle, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 6:16

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 11:28-30

Incarnation. That is, the sign that our Lord gives is God With us. That is what the very word Immanuel means. God with us, my friends. When the young man, the young woman, the poor child and the old widower all raise up their hands and ask our Lord for a sign, He replies with “Here I Am.” Our Heavenly Father sent His Divine Son to earth by way of the Holy Spirit's working through a single poor virgin girl, and from that moment on we have had a guarantee that Jesus is with us, even unto the end of the age.<sup>3</sup> It is to this very sign that He points us, that no matter how difficult things might get, He is with us, He loves us, and He shall see us through it all until we have heard those precious words, “enter into the joy of your master.”<sup>4</sup> Let us hold on to this very sign, with the peace of the Gospel upon us, for that is the very purpose of the sign He gave.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

---

3 Matthew 28:20

4 Matthew 25:21

Sermon for December 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
THE NATIVITY

[Note for Deacons and Lay Leaders: I am of the opinion that worship services should not overshadow celebrations of festivities, for we worship God with enjoyment of His blessings: if people are anxious to celebrate, then over-extended liturgy can be counterintuitive to our goal. Whichever day you choose for this message and liturgy, I recommend having a *brief* full service or using the Order for Family Devotion, then and having a short period of devotion, singing, and praise on the other day.]

READINGS

Isaiah 9:2-7

- 2 The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.
- 3 You have multiplied the nation;  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
- 4 For the yoke of his burden,  
and the staff for his shoulder,  
the rod of his oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
- 5 For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult  
and every garment rolled in blood  
will be burned as fuel for the fire.
- 6 For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- 7 Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Psalms 96

- 1 Oh sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth!
- 2 Sing to the LORD, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- 3 Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvelous works among all the peoples!
- 4 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;



he is to be feared above all gods.  
**5** For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.  
**6** Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.  
**7** Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength!  
**8** Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts!  
**9** Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness;  
tremble before him, all the earth!  
**10** Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns!  
Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved;  
he will judge the peoples with equity."  
**11** Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;  
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
**12** let the field exult, and everything in it!  
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy  
**13** before the LORD, for he comes,  
for he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness,  
and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Titus 2:11-14

**11** For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, **12** training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, **13** waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, **14** who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Luke 2:1-14

**1** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

**14** "Glory to God in the highest,  
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Our text for meditation this Christmas Day is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### Introduction

It is Christmas Day! And of course, as customary, my homily will be short so that we can all go right back to celebrations with our families and friends. But you may be wondering... what does our reading have to do with Christmas? St. Paul speaks of Christ bringing salvation to all people, so the offer of the Gospel rings out everywhere. This is fantastic news, but where is His Birthday in here? For that matter, you may be wondering to yourself, “why is this pastor bringing up a passage that talks about living godly lives and being zealous for good works? *Sheesh*, can we not do one of those commanding, Law-based sermons on Christmas Day?”

### The Great News of Christ's Arrival

But I have good news for you my friends: this passage is anything *but* that sort of message. To the contrary, it is nothing but good news for us. Jesus Christ did not show up to make any demands except for you to trust in Him. He was born to save you, He lived to save you, He died to save you and rose again to save you. It requires absolutely no merit on your part to be saved. You do not have to “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions,” nor do you have to live a “self-controlled, upright, and godly” life or be “zealous for good works” in order to be saved. Salvation is the prerogative of our Lord Alone.

“But wait pastor,” you might object, “this passage speaks of all those things! The reading tells us we are supposed to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, live self-controlled lives, and be zealous for good works.” Ah, you are correct! But my friends, we must ask how these virtues are accomplished in us. Is it by our own efforts? Not in the slightest. Though we are exhorted in the Scriptures to cooperate with everything God is doing in our lives, and we have the freed will to do good things, and we are supposed to obey as best as we can, note here the language that St. Paul uses: it is all about what *Jesus* does, not what we do.

The Apostle makes it clear that our Lord saved us out of pure Grace. But that Grace does not have to be for just one purpose. Our Lord was born in Bethlehem for the sake of saving us from damnation and from sin and death and the devil; but here we see that He *also* saved us to make us *better*. Here, St. Paul says that Christ's arrival was in part to train us for these virtues. It is not required that you bring about your salvation by all these disciplines, but rather that you should *expect* our Lord to foster them within you!

The good news in this is not just found in how salvation is a free offer for us. Making it even better is that our holiness is made greater. Have you ever looked in the mirror and disliked how you looked? Have you ever done so looking *inwards*? Ashamed of your sin, frustrated with your lack of discipline, always feeling disappointed in yourself, I have been there too.<sup>1</sup> But Christ came so that we may be free from these burdens – and like our salvation, this is by *His* efforts, not our own.

### Conclusion

Greater preachers than I have pointed out that part of being a Christian is Christ being “born” in us. When we are Baptized, we are born again as we are united to Christ. But to be *born* is to grow, just like Christ grew. Over time, we become more like Him, being more disciplined and less worldly, more zealous to do good works and less apt to sin. Christ is not literally “born” in us, but by this the preacher of old mean that He raises us to be like Him. Christmas is not just about Christ's Birthday: we include here that He grew for us, and grows us into His Image. Let us then continue our celebrations and enjoy our time with family, unburdened by any perfectionism or anxiety to be “doing enough” for the Kingdom of God. Opportunities for good deeds will present themselves, and our Lord will help us and

---

<sup>1</sup> Frankly, I *still* have these moments on occasion.

motivate us to make the right choices. We are His children, and He raises us right. So relax my friend, and have a Merry Christmas.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for December 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025  
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

READINGS

Isaiah 11:1-5

- 1** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
**2** And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.  
**3** And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
**4** but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
**5** Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

Psalms 89:1-8

- 1** I will sing of the steadfast love of the LORD, forever;  
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.  
**2** For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever;  
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."  
**3** You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn to David my servant:  
**4** 'I will establish your offspring forever,  
and build your throne for all generations.'" *Selah*  
**5** Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD,  
your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones!  
**6** For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD?  
Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD,  
**7** a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones,  
and awesome above all who are around him?  
**8** O LORD God of hosts,  
who is mighty as you are, O LORD,  
with your faithfulness all around you?

Galatians 4:1-7

**1** I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, **2** but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. **3** In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. **4** But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, **5** to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. **6** And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" **7** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Luke 2:22-35

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” 25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, 28 he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

29 “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;

30 for my eyes have seen your salvation

31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel.”

33 And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him. 34 And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed 35 (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Our text for meditation this First Sunday after Christmas is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Christmas as Devotional Season**

First, let me say that I hope you had a wonderful Christmas celebration – and that you are *still* celebrating as we approach the end of the year. Certainly the ornaments get stored in the attic, the carols are no longer heard in the stores and we have received our presents, but Christmas isn't *done*. The devotions must continue. Christ being born ought to be more important to us, not just the subject of a holiday but something we think of often. After all, the Gospel properly begins with the Incarnation, just as St. Paul teaches us here. If Jesus had not been born under the Law, then His perfect obedience to it would not be present and the Law would never have been fulfilled. If the Law had not been fulfilled by His perfect obedience, then He never would have made satisfaction for our sins on the Cross.

I believe this is why Christmas is a twelve say *season*, and not just a single day. We celebrate that God became a man, living under all the requirements that we have had to live under – yet never once falling into sin. So during the Advent season we remember the anticipation of those who awaited His Arrival, and we sympathize with those Old Testament saints, for we too await His Return. But during the season of *Christmas*, we do well to remember His perfect obedience and human life.

### **The Perfect Obedience of Christ**

My friends, we ought to be more impressed that Jesus lived a perfectly sinless life. And not only a sinless life, but a sinless life under the Mosaic code, where far stricter requirements were placed upon men! Imagine the humility necessary to go from the great Throne Room in Heaven into a dirty manger smelling strongly of straw and manure, and then to add getting *circumcised* on top of it! This was in observance of the very Law that Christ Himself delivered to the children of Israel fourteen hundred years prior to His Birth, and here He was now experiencing all the difficulties that came with it.

We must not forget that He grew up in accordance with His human nature. He went through puberty, and the doldrums of learning both at school and the carpentry trade of St. Joseph; yet not once did He yield to the youthful temptation to cause mischief or grieve His parents. Our Lord experienced teething and growing pains, and He probably went through having a cold, getting knicked or scraped when tripping on a rock, yet never once did He harbor a bad attitude or take our Lord's Name in vain in response to it. He submitted Himself for education from the rabbinic nitwits who came up with the distortions of the pharisees, and yet He did not disrupt the class. As any parent can tell you, rebellion is bound up in the heart of our children, so this must have been befuddling to Joseph and Mary as they did their best to raise Him.

Even as He entered manhood, He paid taxes, made the required offerings, and continued His labor in carpentry before beginning His ministry. He never once failed to maintain self-control whenever a customer was being unreasonable. He did not price gouge or con anyone. And though He never took an earthly wife, He never submitted to any lustful temptations. Long before the devil tempted Him in the wilderness,<sup>1</sup> our Savior demonstrated an unshakeable obedience to the Law that none of us can even get close to matching, and He did it *for us*.

We cannot go one day without sinning. For that matter, I doubt that even the strictest, holiest men on earth could even make it one *hour* without sinning. As you are reading or hearing this homily, it is likely that some sinful thought has crossed your mind, and yes even that counts. Christ had no evil thoughts – we do every few minutes. We covet, we lust, we hate, we have sinful imaginations, and that is just considering the sin in our hearts alone. We must be honest with ourselves, and remember how *hard* it is to stay away from temptation. Meanwhile, Jesus did not sin even once for all thirty and three years of His earthly sojourn, even when He had starved in the desert for forty days.

### **Why the Obedience?**

This raises the question: why did He do this? It was possible (at least in theory) for Christ to have descended from the heavens, or just arrive out of the ether to save us. For that matter, He could have saved us by some decree of amnesty without having gone to the Cross. The reason He did not do so was the Law. My friends, God established the Ten Commandments, or what we call the Law, as the expression of His Will for all who live in this earth. It is a tutor for everyone, but as St. Paul says it was also a guardian which treated us all like slaves. It constantly accuses, constantly makes demands, and always threatens us with the destruction that our sins merit.

When St. Paul says we were enslaved to the “elementary principles of the world,” he means the Law:<sup>2</sup> it is elementary because it applies to all humanity whether Jew or Gentile,<sup>3</sup> and it is the standard for our behavior in this world. Though it comes from God Himself, the Law becomes death to us. Though it tells us how we can live eternally, the Commandments which promise that life do nothing to help us get there, and so we are sentenced to die as sinners.<sup>4</sup> Sin takes advantage of our helplessness, making it so that before Christ the Law functioned almost solely as our executioner – after a long and painful life of enslavement.<sup>5</sup>

So the Law tells us that it shall not help us, only make demands and accusations. The only way for a man to live forever despite the curse of death is to follow it fully. No one other than Christ has ever done anything like that. With His life, He satisfied every last demand of every single Commandment, and He did so *perfectly* on our behalf for thirty three years. If any man be found to belong to Christ through faith, then he is counted as having Christ's righteousness; God looks at the

---

1 Matthew 4:1-11

2 Luther discusses this in his *Commentary on Galatians*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1549/1549-h/1549-h.htm#link2HCH0004>

3 Romans 2:14-15

4 Romans 7:10

5 1 Corinthians 15:56

believer and sees only the perfect obedience of our Savior, thus making us justified (that is, declared righteous) by faith in Him.

That is the secret to eternal life. Because of our sins, we die. Because of Christ's sinlessness, whoever believes in Him shall live forever. If you are Baptized into Christ, then you are no longer under the cruel taskmaster that says you deserve hell. This is all because, from birth until His Resurrection, our Savior was perfect in all of His works, words and ways. Where we have sinned in thought, word and deed, He excelled beyond perfection.

### **Slaves and Heirs**

Now you may be wondering, "Why then do we still have to obey these Commandments if Jesus already did for us?" Ah, that is because you have been *adopted*. No longer a slave, but still treated like a servant because you are part of the household. St. Paul contrasts the slave to the heir. The slave has no inheritance and no future; he will be a slave until he perishes. An heir on the other hand has an inheritance, but he must serve like a slave until he is old enough to receive what is promised to him. Before we were Christians, the Law bore heavily on our hearts and accused us while also demanding that we do the right thing at all times. But as believers the Law is no longer an enemy that condemns, but a friend that guides. Moses stops pointing his bony finger at our sins, and begins pointing the way in which we ought to walk while awaiting the fullness of our redemption in Christ.

Because Jesus lives a perfectly sinless life, that is exactly how the Law treated Him. After all, He is the heir of all things, receiving all power and authority for having redeemed us. Being united to Him then, we too find ourselves treated as sons. We have a great inheritance before us, an eternal life without having to worry about requirements, commands, and ethical strictures breathing down our necks all the time. When we have been Resurrected, we shall never hear another threat ever again! But in the meantime, let us rejoice and be cheerful in our Christian service, being zealous for good works the same way our Savior was here on earth.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.