

Sermon for July 5th. 2026
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 Gospel reading.

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

Introduction

There are many kinds of fish, and they are all different one from another. Some are large, some are small, some eat only algae while some eat other fish. There are fish with beautiful coloring and graceful movement, while there are others like the deep sea angler or the barracuda that we would rather not look at. Not only this, but the *behavior* is different from species to species. Tuna tend to swim in schools, or groups, for safety. The mighty shark is a more solitary creature.

A fisherman in the first century A.D. cannot see into the water when he casts his net inside. He does not know whether he will catch salmon, pollock, tuna, eels, spelt, or some mix of different

creatures, but he throws his net in anyway. He knows that he cannot be picky, or else he will waste precious time and resources trying to find the perfect fish. If he decides to wait for exactly the right fish at the right time, or if he throws out what he doesn't want, then he will starve. So what does he do? He uses his net, catches everything he can, and brings it all into the storehouse for dividing and processing.

Christ's Evangelism

Jesus tells Simon (later called Peter) that he and James and John will be “catching men.” We understand this to mean that Christ called them to be among the twelve chief evangelists of the early Church, whom we call Apostles. He inducts them into the membership with a great miracle, bringing forth many fish into their nets – near to bursting. With this act, He shows them that He is Lord of creation, able to guide the fish right where He wants them. But this miracle comes *after* our Lord does something far more magnificent.

Before Jesus calls Simon and James and John to be evangelists, He shows them what evangelism looks like. St. Luke records that Jesus got into Simon's boat and had him put it out a bit from the land. He did this so that He could preach to the crowd that followed Him, a great mass of people whose number easily surpasses the number of fishes that would enter Simon's net just a while later. The message is clear my friends: evangelism is like fishing, because men are like fish and the Word is like a net.

There are many kinds of men, and they are all different one from another. Some are large, some are small, some are from one culture, and others have a different origin point. There are men with good apparel and riches, while there are others are poor and appear debased. Some are strong, others are weak. Not only this, but the *behavior* is different from man to man. Some men tend to stay in groups for safety. Other men are more solitary creatures.

An evangelist cannot see into the souls of men when he preaches. He does not know whether he will reach the poor, the skeptical, the pagan, the backslider, or the cynic, but he proclaims the Gospel anyway. He knows that he cannot be picky, or else he will waste precious time and resources trying to find the perfect candidate for conversion. If he decides to wait for exactly the right man at the right time, or if he rejects people he doesn't want, then his ministry will be fruitless. So what does he do? He preaches the Word, helps whoever he can, and brings as many as possible into the Church for Baptism and discipleship.

Conclusion

Jesus tells Simon (later called Peter) that he and James and John will be “catching men.” As St. Peter would later lead the early Church, this means he represents us in that moment – men and women who will witness to others and bring them into the faith. He inducts us into the membership by that same Word which brings every believer into eternal life. When He ordains St. Peter, He shows us that He is Lord of all men, able to draw all humanity with the Gospel. But this miracle is predicated on something far more magnificent than the power of proclamation.

Before Jesus calls all of us to be evangelists, He shows us the salvation that He provides. By going to the Cross for us, He brings about the Atonement by which our sins are forgiven and all who believe shall be saved. The message is clear my friends: evangelism is predicated on there being one *crucial* difference to fishing: having good news to preach. A fisherman catches fish so he can kill, sell and eat them. The Church is called to evangelize so that people may believe, and in believing have eternal life. May we thus bring others in, for while the fish might die the men shall live.

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

Sermon for July 12th. 2026
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.”

Psalm 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 Psalm.

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

Introduction

The human heart is mostly wicked. Our Savior comments on it, saying “out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.”¹ Jeremiah the prophet tells us “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”² It is the heart which is the dwelling place and seat of original sin – that is, our sinful nature. Sin dwelling in our hearts causes all sorts of horrible, evil desires that make us selfish, mean-spirited, and cruel.

Yet the Bible also has nice things to say about the human heart. Solomon writes, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”³ The Psalmists speak of men who are upright in heart despite the presence of sin.⁴ While sin dwelling in us causes all sorts of problems springing up from the heart, there is something about human nature which connects us to God and beckons us to do better. So the Bible says that the human heart is bad...but then appears to say that it is good as well. What is going on here? Is this a contradiction? Thankfully it is no contradiction, and our Psalm for today helps us to understand it.

Two Things given to the human heart

You see my friends, sin saturates our natures and our hearts are corrupt on account of that, but God grants us two things to help us see what we *ought* to be. He has given us two advantages which point us to the original good that was with us when humanity was first created.

First, as the Psalmist says, the heavens declare the glory of God. It is so evident that there is a Divine Creator that no one can deny His existence honestly. We see it with the beauty of the natural world and our capacity to enjoy it: a beautiful sunset and a delicious meal both tell you that there is a God. In addition to this, the entire universe operates on *rules* that govern the motion of objects. Gravity pulls objects to the earth in predictable ways, the movement of planets and stars in space is predictable. Nature operates on observable laws, and if there are laws to nature then there must be a Legislator above nature who establishes them. The Psalmist even goes so far as to say that nature teaches us some things about God, and St. Paul concurs, saying “His invisible attributes, namely, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.”⁵ The laws of nature demand a supernatural monarch who is above nature itself, and if that is the case then the God who made the universe is infinitely powerful. God has enabled our hearts to perceive Him as He reveals Himself through the proclamations of the universe; despite our sins, He has

1 Matthew 15:19

2 Jeremiah 17:9

3 Proverbs 4:23

4 Psalm 7:10, 11:2, 32:11, 97:11

5 Romans 1:20

ensured that everyone knows about Him.

Secondly we have a conscience, and this too is from God. The Law is written on our hearts, so that every one of us is made aware that there is such thing as right and wrong.⁶ The same recognition that we have deep down that there is an all-powerful God *also* tells us that this God *wants* something from us. Every culture all over the world has developed complex systems of morality and civil law, reflecting that inside every one of us is an intuitive feeling that *someone* is demanding our good behavior. Though this can certainly be suppressed for people who want to live in sin (the same way people can suppress the message of nature),⁷ even the most depraved degenerate still has an *instinct* for right and wrong.

Solving the Heart's Problems

So God has shown us that He exists, and He has brought us to an awareness of morality. There remains just one terrible problem: we are born in the dark when it comes to the details. So you know there is a God: which divinity should you believe in? So you know that morality exists: what are its precepts? One group of people worships the moon, another worships constellations, a third worships their ancestors. One group says stealing is always wrong, another says that stealing is only wrong under certain circumstances; one group enforces monogamy, another permits polygamy; one religion promotes peace, the other is warlike. These things that God has given our hearts, both awareness of His existence and rule, end up clouded by ignorance and sin until they give us no advantages. Mankind finds itself in a sorry state on account of such darkness.

Thankfully, God has given us the Word. Not only that, His Word has the Law, the topic that our Psalmist focuses on. The Commandments of God, especially the Ten Commandments, teach us what the moral instinct in our hearts is actually saying. To study them revives our soul by taking us out of the mind-fogging effects of sin. This Law takes us out of our foolishness and teaches us wisdom, for living by God's precepts gives us better lives than we would have if we let ourselves sin freely. The Psalmist says that the commandments *enlighten* our eyes, teaching us about God Himself. Think about it my friends! When the Law says “you shall have no other gods before Me,” this teaches us that our God is a jealous God, one who earnestly desires our worship exclusively: this tells us in no uncertain terms that He demands it because He loves us. By giving us the Word to read and the Ten Commandments to studiously obey, our Lord solves the problem of sin's effects on our minds, gives us tools to combat our own wickedness, and promises us great reward. No wonder the Psalmist says the Law is worth more than gold. Gold can make a man rich, but it cannot make him wise, or teach him anything about the true God: the Word does all this and more.

Conclusion: The Greatest Part of the Law

Yet for all of its benefits, the best thing the Law of God does is point us to something even greater: the Gospel. As the Psalmist praises the goodness of our Lord's Commands, he is made aware of his sins. The errors of his iniquities are before him, the shameful sins he cannot speak up are in the forefront of his mind. When he thinks of how many sins he *accidentally* commits, as the Mosaic code instructs us happens all the time, then he realizes his guilt. He asks our Lord for mercy and cleansing, that he may look upon the Word with joy again instead of shame. Though he may not have known the name “Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” the Law points our author to redemption from God Himself. “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” He knows that his heart, and everything that flows from it, must first be made acceptable by our Lord Himself – and where did he get this information? By the Law, which taught him

⁶ Romans 2:14-15

⁷ Romans 1:18-32

that he cannot save his own soul.

The Word does the same for us my friends. We have broken every one of God's Commandments; even if a man were to sin only once in his life, this makes him a transgressor of all precepts.⁸ Though we may rejoice in the wisdom they bring us and the way they teach us to live, they reveal our guilt as well, and point us to the only way to forgiveness. We must entrust ourselves to our Lord, who gave His only begotten Son to die upon the Cross for all the punishment those sins merited. When we believe and place our destiny in the hands of Jesus, *then* we rejoice in our Rock and Redeemer. *Then* the other benefits of the Law come in full view. If we wish to sing as the Psalmist does with the same exultation, let us go to our Savior as he did, and rejoice in the free offer of forgiveness that we have in Christ. Then our hearts shall begin to be good as our Lord always intended them to be.

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

Sermon for July 19th 2026
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 Old Testament reading.

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

Introduction

While there is much joy to be had here on earth, there are two things in the back of our minds that we can never quite get over; death and the condition of creation.

We were never meant to die. Adam was created from the dust of the earth and the breath of life from God Himself, intended to be an eternal steward and manager of material reality. But now, no matter how good a man's life may be, the ticking timer of age and the aches and the pains and the sicknesses and the heartbreaks we all go through tell us that we are dreadfully *temporary*. To be certain, a Christian can escape this feeling by holding on to the promise of Christ: “everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die.”¹ But while *we* hold on to this promise of eternal life, we are still surrounded by death. We still have to say goodbye to our loved ones, our friends, our pets, flowers, trees, and more. While you and I will not go through the experience of death – even if we shed this mortal coil – we are still afflicted by its very presence.

The condition of the world is also something that sticks with us. Having to work hard for our food, enduring terrible weather, fearing for our safety when it is dark outside, risking drowning or burning or electrocution at various times, and more. Mankind has been saddled with a schizophrenic love/hate relationship with the universe that both kills him and provides for his needs. The same clouds that water our crops send lightning on the earth, starting the forest fires that destroy our homes. Our apologetics professors point to the elements of design in the earth as proof of a Creator, like a watch proving that there is a watchmaker. They are correct in this assertion, but the chaotic, destructive way that the world operates shows us that the watch is *broken*. We see creation going haywire whenever a child is born with cancer or a dog goes feral and attacks its owner.

With the Law written on our heart, and sin competing with it for the decisions we make, we also have an ingrained sense that these afflictions are *our fault*. Indeed, Scripture attests that our forefathers

1 John 11:25

ruined the world through their sins, and we contribute to making things harder every day. Adam and his wife ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden, and so mankind is saddled with death and pain and labor;² then men decided they would try to create mighty ones who could fix the world, and their wickedness was so great that God drowned most of humanity in a great flood;³ then, with the earth shattered and desolate, men attempted to rebel against God and declare independence with a tower, leading to the confusion of languages – permanent alienation from one people group to another.⁴ From there, the rest is history. Nations kill millions in war, women kill their infants, men rob and steal and rape, lies proliferate everywhere. As if it were not *bad enough* to live in this broken world, we find ourselves to be the greatest plague that humanity has ever faced... until we see the way the devil and his angels constantly harass and harm us.

The Place of Eden in the Scriptures

On account of these evil circumstances, many people have come to dour conclusions. Some believe that God has abandoned us, while others refuse to believe He exists – solely out of despair for all the evil they see. Sadly, they miss the point of hearing about Eden entirely. My friends, our hearts tell us that the world should be better than it is. We yearn for a paradise that *should* be, but is not. In His compassion, our Lord reveals to us that there indeed was such a place. He gave mankind life in a place with no disease, no problems, with plenty of food and treasure as far as the eye could see. Clean, crisp water flowing all around, and Adam being able to drink and swim in it without mosquitoes, diseases, or deadly animals. As if that wasn't enough, He then proceeded to create Eve, so that Adam could be accompanied by a gorgeous and delightful woman with whom he could enjoy a perfect world. He did not tell us this for no reason my friends.

When our hearts tell us that death should not happen, God replies to us in the Word saying “Correct! And there was a place once with no death.” When we hear about grave tragedies like a child drowning in a flash flood or a terrorist attack wiping out a church, we think to ourselves about how the world should not be this way and God replies in this passage: “Yes! And it was not always this way.” He *confirms* to us that there once was this perfection, and with that our consciences are pricked by the knowledge that Adam messed it up – and we would fare no better.

The good news is, God did not show us this passage just to condemn us or let us know that our instincts are right. To the contrary, He asserts a *return* to the Edenic ideal throughout the pages of Scripture. The Promised Land of Israel was said to be “flowing with milk and honey,”⁵ showing the people that they could have plenty to eat and drink. The Mosaic Law requires that the entrance to the Tabernacle be on the west side, so that any sacrifice performed had the priest facing *east* toward the Tabernacle opening – where God just so happened to have planted Eden.⁶ The Israelite diet consisted of animals that lived on plants alone and were unstained by the curse of death in their bodies and lives.⁷ The Law's commandments for peoples' actions tell them to *not* do things that *would not* have happened before the Fall. Solomon's Temple was inspired by the Garden.⁸ To the Old Covenant saints, God says “though you are not in Paradise now, I can give you the closest thing to it before Messiah comes.”

Eden is not just the place humanity was before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Eden was the original *home* for us. It is the one place that mankind truly yearns for, whether we can express it or not. Wars have been fought by men who thought they could establish some sort of utopia if only they killed enough people. Societies have been established on the basis of trying to ape the problem-free plenty and peace of Paradise. All of our quarreling, thefts, and arguments have this underlying

2 Genesis 3

3 Genesis 6-9

4 Genesis 11:1-9

5 Exodus 3:8

6 Exodus 38:12-14

7 Leviticus 11

8 <https://biblediscoverytv.com/history/2023/temple-as-eden/>

predicate of not being where we ought to be, but desperately wanting to be there. And the entire time, the only ones who are saved are those who believe God when He says to us, “you are not there indeed, but I am the only One who can bring you back.”

Conclusion

And bring us back He will, if only we shall entrust ourselves to His care. But He shall do even more. Jesus came to earth to die for our sins – all of them, from the first sin in the Garden of Eden to the very last sin that shall ever be committed. He rose again and ascended to Heaven so that we may be justified before Him by faith and be *saved*.⁹ But what does it mean to be saved, my friends? What does that entail? Of course we know that it means being saved *from* something bad, namely sin and death and the devil and eternal damnation. But it also means being saved *towards* something, saved *for* something, and by that I mean being brought back to Eden – brought back *home* my friends, to the place that Christ prepares for us.¹⁰ It is not the old Eden though, that former Paradise. It is something greater, a city with its top in the heavens and a grand throne, a paradise that goes beyond the joys that Adam had in the garden. And He promises that we shall dwell there with Him *forever* in blessedness. Today, our Lord speaks to the longing of your heart, recognizing that you and I both pine for that perfect place where nothing bad happens; He says to us that if we shall but trust in Him, then He will not only bring us there, but bring us to something far more superior. Let us hear, trust, and rejoice.

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

9 Romans 3:28, 4:25

10 John 14:1-3

Sermon for July 26th 2026
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 7:21-23

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 Gospel reading.

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

Introduction

My friends, have you ever read these words from our Lord and felt afraid? After all, with the way our Lord describes this Judgment Day interaction, one is left with the impression that the false believers *didn't know* they were false believers. They thought that they were Christians who would enter eternal life at the Resurrection. They did what they thought were Christian things, like prophecies and exorcisms and even acts of charity. They were *so sure* that they were Heaven-bound that they even *argue with Christ Himself* when He first rejects them. We are tempted to shudder in fear, for inevitably we think of this passage and ask ourselves “is this me? Am I one of these people?”

Making matters worse, there are droves of people out there who misuse our reading. I don't know if you have seen this before, but I have interacted with Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox polemicists who cite Christ's words as proof that all of us Protestants are going to hell. “See? Jesus says you have to do the will of our Father to get to heaven!!!” or “See? You say 'Lord, Lord,' but you don't belong to the right Church so He will reject you on Judgment Day!” For them, the passage isn't so much a solemn warning as it is a *weapon* by which they can bludgeon and manipulate people. Frankly I find the irony there to be tragic, since so many of those polemics guys will be among the damned when Christ returns, saying the same thing He shows them uttering in our reading.

No one is damned by accident

The truth of the matter is that no one is damned by accident. You will not find yourself on Judgment Day being told that an accounting error keeps you from entering Paradise. The notion that a little old lady will be thrown into hell for belonging to the wrong denomination is noxiously erroneous, and how do we know? Because nowhere, not one single verse in all of the Scriptures, tells us that we are saved by the Church. We are told that we are saved by the Name of Christ,¹ by the message of the Gospel for the forgiveness of sins,² by the life of Jesus,³ by Grace,⁴ by sanctification from the Spirit's work,⁵ and by Baptism.⁶ *Nowhere* does it say that membership in a particular visible Church body is required, and not one *word* suggests that you have to be lucky.

For that matter, nowhere does Scripture say that insufficiency damns us. Think about the absurdity of such an idea! If you or I could earn our place in the Kingdom of Heaven by our works, then Jesus would not have come down to save us. There would be no need for Him to die on a Cross if we could just *behave* ourselves into salvation. Though Jesus says in our reading that whoever does the will of our Heavenly Father may enter the Kingdom, see how He distinguishes that from our good works; the men who go into perdition *appeal* to their good works and yet are not saved! They say “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” But these great deeds were not what Jesus is looking for my friends. They are doomed by their insistence that they be let into Heaven on their terms, by what they believed should get a man there, as opposed to what God says brings a man to eternal life.

1 Acts 4:12

2 Acts 11:13-14, the message in particular being found in Acts 10:34-43

3 Romans 5:9-10

4 Ephesians 2:5, 2:8

5 2 Thessalonians 2:12-14

6 1 Peter 3:21

The Will of God for Faith

Our Savior's words are clear. You do not enter salvation by being some prophet. You are not saved by virtue of having performed exorcisms. And no amount of works, whether mighty or humble, will get you into Heaven. Anyone who relies on any of these things for salvation, adding the name of Jesus to them like some magic talisman or spell, is named a worker of lawlessness and cast into the lake of fire at Judgment Day. The people out there who think their great deeds will save them show our Lord that they care more about those deeds than they care about Jesus Himself. Jesus gives us this stark warning precisely because He will not tolerate such man deciding that they are “co-saviors” with the Son of God.

This leaves us with the question: why then does Jesus say that we must do the will of His Father for entering the Kingdom? This is a question which, thankfully others asked our Lord directly. In the sixth chapter of John, people ask Him “What must we do, to be doing the works of God?” Christ's answer is simple: “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”⁷ That is it. The essence of Christian justification is found in seeing the absolute disaster that is our own worthless righteousness, and turning to the Lord's righteousness instead. The men that Jesus says will be turned away said “did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?” and they go off to perdition. If they were to say “Lord I am yours, save me!”⁸ they would go on to eternal life, for in such an appeal is doing the will of our Heavenly Father.

Someone may reply, “but all the men who are judged say they believe in Jesus, or else they would not call Him Lord. How can you say that faith would have saved them?” My friends, these men do not believe in Jesus, or else Christ would not tell them “I never knew you.” Jesus knows who believes in Him. But these men who go to damnation, they have all constructed a *false Christ* in their minds. Joseph Smith invented a polygamist space-alien Jesus. Mohammad invented a merely-human prophet Jesus. Time prohibits us from going into detail about the Docetist “Illusion” Jesus, the Apollinarian “Meat Puppet” Jesus, the Jehovah's witnesses' “angel Jesus,” and so many more. But do you know what all of these false Christs have in common? They all accept good works as currency for entering the Kingdom of Heaven, something Jesus is *explicitly* denying in our reading. When it comes to all those men who go off into perdition after telling the *real* Christ that they earned eternal life, they held to a belief in a different Jesus that they invented whole-cloth in their minds. They would *prefer* worshiping the fake Christ to the real one. They *want* a fake Jesus who scoots over to make room on his throne so they can sit beside him, proclaiming themselves to be their own salvation.

But the real Jesus of Nazareth, shown and taught in our Bibles, He wants something better for you and I than such powerless false saviors. What does it mean to do the will of our Heavenly Father? This is what God wants from you my friends, to believe in His only Son. But not the kind of belief that merely says “I am of the opinion that God exists and Jesus is His son.” Oh no, Christian faith is a stronger conviction than that. A Christian on his way to heaven does not just say “Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, the Son of the Living God;” he goes a step further and says “Jesus of Nazareth is *my* Christ, *my* Savior, the Son of the Living God who died for my sins and rose again to bring me to eternal life.” Our faith is an abiding trust that holds dearly to Jesus and looks to Him instead of the self when considering eternal life. It is for this reason Jesus says whoever believes and is Baptized will be saved.⁹

Conclusion

My friend, is that you? Can you say to yourself that Jesus is *your* Savior that died for *your* sins and rose for *your* justification?¹⁰ Do you believe that Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, fully God

⁷ John 6:28-29

⁸ Psalm 119:94

⁹ Mark 16:16

¹⁰ Romans 4:16-25

and fully man, cares for you and freely offers salvation to you? If your answer is “yes,” then our reading should not bother you in the slightest. Let no one beat you over the head with it, trying to rob you of your joy and substitute it with fear. Instead, if they *try* to do it, you can simply smile and say “thank you for the warning, but I worship the *real* Jesus, not the made up one you're pushing.”

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