

Sermon for August 3rd, 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 10th, 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,¹ 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 stars² or by observing the sacrifices God required while oppressing the poor around them.³ 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

¹ 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

² Ezekiel 8

³ 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.⁴ 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;⁵ modern evangelicals today are apparently unafraid of such judgment, because a majority of them are perfectly fine with people fornicating in a “cohabitation” relationship.⁶ 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.⁷ Our lands are tolerating *massive pagan statues* being erected,⁸ 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 17th, 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.¹ 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

¹ 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 24th, 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.¹ 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

1 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.²

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,³ 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.

² 1 Timothy 6:17-19

³ 1 Timothy 6:10

Sermon for August 31st, 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.¹

On the one hand, this is perfectly understandable. Scripture declares that death is the final enemy of God and man to be destroyed,² 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.”³ 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

¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.CHEX.GD.ZS>

² 1 Corinthians 15:26

³ 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,⁴ 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.