

Sermon for July 6th, 2025
THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Micah 7:18-20

- 18** Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever,
because he delights in steadfast love.
- 19** He will again have compassion on us;
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.
- 20** You will show faithfulness to Jacob
and steadfast love to Abraham,
as you have sworn to our fathers
from the days of old.

Psalm 103:1-13

- 1** Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!
- 2** Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits,
- 3** who forgives all your iniquity,
who heals all your diseases,
- 4** who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
- 5** who satisfies you with good
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
- 6** The LORD works righteousness
and justice for all who are oppressed.
- 7** He made known his ways to Moses,
his acts to the people of Israel.
- 8** The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
- 9** He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
- 10** He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11** For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
- 12** as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, **13** though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, **14** and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. **15** The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. **16** But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. **17** To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Luke 15:1-10

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. **2** And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” **3** So he told them this parable: **4** “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. **8** “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? **9** And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ **10** Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Our text for meditation this Third Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

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

Introduction

Today's reading sounds very pleasant until you recognize when (and to whom) it was written. The prophet Micah wrote to the children of Israel and Judah around the same time as Isaiah. Much of his writing is full of wrath and condemnation for the wicked social practices that he saw: oppression of the poor,¹ crass idolatry, and refusal to hear the Word of the Lord. There were false prophets in his day too, who gave false oracles for money,² and the political rulers cared little what God had to say to them. Thus Micah pronounces a terrible judgment against both countries, culminating in only a small remnant of the descendants of Jacob being permitted to live as a coherent people group.³

Since the Word of the Lord accomplishes what God says, this judgment came for both Israel and Judah with a harsh fulfillment. Israel was wiped out, taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and only a tiny remnant remained in Samaria. A hundred and fifty years after that, Judah itself was taken into the Babylonian Exile, and only a small group returned after seventy years. When all this happened and the Exiles remembered the prophet's words in our reading, promising forgiveness and compassion from the Lord, there must have been a temptation to believe that these words were hollow.

1 Esp. chapter 2

2 Micah 3:5-8

3 Micah 5:7-8

For a moment, let us put ourselves in the shoes of one of these Exiles. After all, the Assyrian captivity was accomplished in Micah's lifetime. It is easy to believe in Divine pardon when things are going good, to grasp the forgiveness God offers when your belly is full and you sleep well at night. But imagine being a man among the tribe of Issachar, being led away with a fish hook in your mouth, to brutal slavery in some remote corner of the Assyrian Empire. Chained to a wall and forced to sift grain for hours and hours, only being let go to drag heavy carts from one farm to the next. The woman you once called your wife is now part of a harem of slave women to an officer in the Assyrian army. Being beaten regularly, perhaps tortured to inflict cruel deformities on your flesh, all the while knowing that you were told by this prophet Micah that you *deserve it*. Perhaps you dream every night of the prophet you once laughed at, now dancing and mocking you as he sings "I told you so! I told you so!" And so the torment goes on until you are too weak to work, and so they put you down like an old dog.

The reality of God's Judgment being fulfilled did not wake the Northern Israelites out of their idolatrous stupor. In fact, idolatry persisted in Samaria, both among the remnant that remained and the foreigners brought in by the Assyrians.⁴ Even though the prophets had foretold that this would happen, predicting it for *centuries*, the Captivity did not bring many of them to repentance. The most we could say about any improvement in their character is that they were more afraid of God than they were previously – but they did not *fear* God in the sense of true faith and reverence.

Holding On

So then, we come to our reading today and feel even more puzzled. An Israelite living under Exile lived with the constant reminder that the prophets were right (especially Micah), and that it was wrong to ignore and persecute them for their oracles. Why then, did they not also rejoice in the promise of pardon? Why did the majority of them turn to idols even more? Surely, if the promises of judgment were proven true, then the promises of forgiveness and restoration must also be true! And yet, sadly they did not see it that way. Why is this the case?

The reason is very simple. In our reading, Micah writes that God pardons iniquity and passes over transgression "for the remnant of His inheritance." This is not referring to a remnant of *survivors*, but of *believers*, for precious few receive the forgiveness offered. To receive forgiveness requires faith in the One who forgives. It is an active faith, not the kind of belief that says "God exists and He punished us," but the kind which says "against all appearances, God shall be merciful." It is the kind of faith which *holds on* for dear life to the promises of God, even if it looks like He has abandoned you. Luther says in the *Bondage of the Will*, that God "conceals His eternal mercy and loving-kindness behind His eternal wrath." Thus he also says, "This is the highest degree of faith—to believe that He is merciful, who saves so few and damns so many."⁵⁶

Only a tiny, miniscule remnant of Northern Israel was given mercy, because only a tiny and miniscule remnant of them believed what God said about it. For the rest of them, they relied on their reason, their senses, and their pain to come to the conclusion that our Lord just hated them forever. These Exiles would say something like this: "Oh, Micah, you say that He does not retain His anger forever? But I am chained to this wall. My legs were broken by the Assyrians so that I do not run away. They killed my children, and I am rotting away in my pain. It seems to me, Micah, that He has made His eternal hatred very plain." And so, resisting the Gospel offer of pardon, they choose to stay in their punishment.

The Difference

What about the modern day though? Are things really so different when it comes to the Church? Absolutely. The words Micah wrote ring so true in our hearts that we cannot do otherwise but rejoice.

4 2 Kings 17

5 *Bondage of the Will*, section XXIV

6 <https://www.covenanter.org/reformed/2015/7/8/the-sovereignty-of-god-sections-9-27>

Today, there are countless believers who live in dire conditions. They live in their own personal versions of the Exile, whether their pain is merited or not. We have brothers and sisters in Christ who are afflicted with diseases and cancer, some being a consequence of their actions and others being simple tragedy. Men who were brought to the faith after years of being drug addicts, now living under the burden of HIV from a shared heroin needle, children born with severe fetal alcohol syndrome, and more. There are criminals on death row, awaiting execution, that are now Christians. And all of them, despite these horrible things that none of us would ever want to experience, rejoice in the Lord. They all *hold on* to the promises the Gospel gives us of forgiveness and eternal life. They sing hymns of praise even though their existence might involve – for now – constant unending pain.

This is the difference between the nonbeliever and the saint when it comes to suffering. Whether the pain is something we deserve or not, you and I can remember the Gospel and then sing with the Psalmist, “His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”⁷ Like Job we can hold on for dear life to the mercies of God and proclaim that, whether this pain is our fault or not, He shall deliver us. It is not so with those who lack the capacity to exercise their faith. Believers may be sanctified by God's discipline,⁸ but hardly ever will an apostate be brought back by His wrath, let alone a nonbeliever. The damned look at the punishments inflicted on them, and they conclude that it means God's love is impossible.

Conclusion

Beloved, take a moment to think about your life today. What are your struggles? Are you having difficulty paying the bills, finding a spouse, or dealing with injuries and sickness? Does it get hard to wake up every morning and get out of bed, knowing that there is pain and frustration to confront? Do you wonder if what you are going through is a punishment from our Lord for your past sins? Then whatever the answer, now is the time to *hold on* to the promises of our Lord, for in so doing you shall receive a mighty restoration by His Right Hand. He has granted us faith in our Baptism, and now we are called to actively exercise that faith by trusting in His promises. For just as He promised mercy to the remnant of Israel who believed, so too does He promise mercy and blessing upon the remnant of humanity who will believe. Christ proved this love and forgiveness by dying on a Cross for our sins, and guaranteeing an eternal inheritance for those who trust in Him; let us then hold on no matter what the difficulties, and rejoice.

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

7 Psalm 30:5

8 Hebrews 12:3-17

Sermon for July 13th, 2025
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 50:15-21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." **16** So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: **17** 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. **18** His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." **19** But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? **20** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. **21** So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Psalm 138

1 I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
2 I bow down toward your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,
for you have exalted above all things
your name and your word.
3 On the day I called, you answered me;
my strength of soul you increased.
4 All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,
for they have heard the words of your mouth,
5 and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,
for great is the glory of the LORD.
6 For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,
but the haughty he knows from afar.
7 Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve my life;
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,
and your right hand delivers me.
8 The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Romans 8:18-25

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19** For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.
20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope
21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22** For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23** And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of

the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. **24** For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? **25** But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Luke 6:36-42

32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. **33** And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. **34** And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. **35** But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. **36** Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. **37** “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; **38** give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.” **39** He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? **40** A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. **41** Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? **42** How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

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

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

Introduction

St. Paul says that we are heirs with our Lord Jesus, meaning that we shall enjoy everything in eternity with Him. But what is it exactly that we shall inherit? Eternal life, we can mostly understand. Not being beset by disease or sorrow, these we can understand as well. But these all refer to a certain state of being, and it would be odd for us to inherit a state of being and not inherit any *stuff*. Can you imagine receiving such an inheritance? The executor of the will gets you in a room and lets you know that your dear departed relative has bequeathed upon you...a back massage, a health club visit and some time in a sauna – how would you respond? While of course our eternal life is of infinite value to us, far more than any massage or spa, what I'm getting at is that eternal life as a state of being is *part* of an inheritance, not the whole. God plans on giving us much more.

Christ tells the Apostles that He goes to prepare a place for them – and for us.¹ There remains an *inheritance* for us, something that goes *along with* death being abolished and sin being no more. Christ receives something in His inheritance, and He shares it with us! What is that inheritance though? What is that place? Thankfully St. Paul tells us in our passage today: we shall receive an unblemished, uncursed world. We are to inherit this world in a way that shall bring us joy beyond measure.

The Earth is Cursed

When Adam and Eve sinned in Eden, God made this pronouncement to the man: “cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.”² The way things are now is *not* how they were supposed to be. Nature, designed to

¹ John 14:2-3

² Genesis 3:17-18

be man's friend and loyal servant, is often for his enemy and competitor as a result of this curse. We live in a world where our beloved pets die, where plants harm us with allergic reactions, where massive ocean waves destroy homes and locusts eat up our crops – the crops that man had to work *very hard* to grow.

Man has to struggle to receive blessings from nature, but even when we *can* use something it still bears the weight of the curse. To eat our food we have to work, or put animals to work for us, which itself requires work. We have to use bait to catch fish, but the bait is often found in worms that look like they should not exist; the bloodworm, for example, has venomous *copper fangs*, the only species that has it. Imagine getting a bite from one of those while trying to catch fish to feed your family! From the difficulties of life to the bizarre mutations all around us, everywhere in our world there is a feeling that something just isn't right. Haven't you ever walked outside and gotten that sense? Beautiful creation all around us, from the fragile butterfly to the majestic mountain, yet there is this daunting sensation that something heavy is hanging around the world's neck. I can name that feeling – it is *guilt*. Guilt over the fact that our sins are what caused this grave corruption.

Everything in nature feels the same way. St. Paul writes that creation “waits with eager longing,” and that it is “groaning” under the futility it was subjected to in the curse. I dare say, animals don't *want* to die. They don't *want* to fight each other. Parasites do not *want* to victimize other living creatures. Though their minds are far less intelligent than ours, creatures are aware that they are yoked to this curse despite never having fallen in the same way that mankind did in Eden.

Why then this curse? St. Paul says that creation was subjected to futility and corruption for the sake of hope. Let us imagine for a moment what life would be like without that creation being cursed. If fallen man lived without disease, discomfort, endless labors and hostility from nature itself, then we would all go about happily waiting for death. We would simply conclude that death is a part of life, but everything being so *perfect* around us that we would never be confronted with our need for repentance. Humans would simply wait around in bliss, sinning for 80 or so years until old age takes us out and then we get sent to hell. To put it simply, the curse placed on creation is the way God tells us that *we* are bad, not creation. But both need a Savior.

Christ Inherits a Purified Earth

So all of creation *longs* for this curse to be undone, so that it can finally be what it was created to be. God's promise is that when the sons of God are revealed, when believers are given the crown of eternal life in Christ Jesus, then creation “will be set free from its bondage to corruption.” Our sin led to the world being cursed, lest sinners never feel any need for repentance. But Christ, having died for our sin, shall receive a world where this curse is *removed*, and it shall be perfect in every way.

You might wonder at this message. Haven't we heard that the earth is to perish by fire? Indeed there is fire, as the Apostle St. Peter tells us that “the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.”³ But while the heavens are to be dissolved, the earth will be burned in such a way as to “expose” it.⁴ Oh there will be burning, but the burning that refines and purifies as the last vestiges of the curse are incinerated away from the world that God loved when He first created it.

Christ rose from the dead so as to be the firstfruits of the Resurrection. Upon His Return, He shall receive His inheritance. St. Paul writes elsewhere that there is a proper order observed here. First, He arose from the dead, and the first thing He shall receive is His Church, as we meet Him in the clouds with the rest of the risen saints.⁵ Then, the world shall be purified and freed from the curse as He slays death itself once and for all.⁶

3 2 Peter 3:7

4 2 Peter 3:10

5 1 Thessalonians 4:17

6 1 Corinthians 15:20-26

Conclusion

This purified world is what God promises as an inheritance. If you are a Baptized believer in Christ Jesus, then you shall be saved along with every other believer and all of creation. For the moment that involves suffering; the devil and all nonbelievers hate us for the message of hope that we proclaim. They hate Christ because they love evil, and they hate us because the Church represents Him here on earth. Thus we have even more difficulties in this life than *just* the curse placed on the ground; unlike the nonbeliever, we have to contend with terrors and persecutions on every side.

But beloved, it shall be *worth* it when we receive the eternal life and the new earth. Exploring the world without getting tired, swimming as long or deep as we like without fear of drowning, and delighting in animal companions without having to shed a tearful goodbye to them. We shall enjoy a newfound relationship with nature that retains everything we love about it in our current sojourn, but without any of the things that we hate about it. And after billions of years, it will be just as good – if not better – than when our ultimate deliverance began.

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

Sermon for July 20th, 2025
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 19:9-21

9 There he came to a cave and lodged in it. And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” **10** He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” **11** And he said, “Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. **12** And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. **13** And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” **14** He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.” **15** And the LORD said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. **16** And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. **17** And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. **18** Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” **19** So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. **20** And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, “Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” **21** And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

Psalm 16

- 1** Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
2 I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord;
I have no good apart from you.”
3 As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.
4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.
5 The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.
6 The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.
7 I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.

8 I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.
9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.
10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.
11 You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written,
“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”
20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Luke 5:1-11

1 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, **2** and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. **3** Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. **4** And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” **5** And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” **6** And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. **7** They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. **8** But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” **9** For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, **10** and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” **11** And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

Our text for meditation this Fifth Sunday after Trinity is on our Psalm.

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

The Misery of the Non-believers

Anton LaVey, founder of the so-called “church of satan,” had these last words: "Oh my, oh my, what have I done, there is something very wrong. . . there is something very wrong."¹ Sigmund Freud, infamous atheistic psychiatrist, here are his last words: “Now it is nothing but torture and makes no

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nWt_U2gEEI

sense anymore.”² How about the infamous hedonistic journalist Hunter S. Thompson? He wrote in his suicide note, “Football Season Is Over. No More Games. No More Bombs. No More Walking. No More Fun. No More Swimming. 67. That is 17 years past 50. 17 more than I needed or wanted. Boring. I am always [expletive removed]. No Fun – for anybody. 67. You are getting Greedy. Act your old age. Relax – This won't hurt.”³

Of course, there are other nonbelievers who gave final words before their deaths, and not all of them were so dour and painful. Some of them go out with no other expression than screaming in pain as they die from some catastrophic injury. Others go out suddenly, for they were not expecting their deaths: John Entwistle, a musician for a band called The Who, was found dead by the stripper he was shacking up with after he fell asleep and had a cocaine-induced heart attack.⁴ Clearly, we cannot judge a man's emotional state just by how he passes away.

But one thing is for certain. As the Psalmist proclaims, their sorrows multiply. Anyone who runs after another god, whether it is a false religion or a more personal idol like money or sexual perversion, shall find himself absolutely *miserable* both in this life and in the next. There is simply no getting around it, their lives and their eternal fates are not good; so long as they continue resisting faith in Christ, they forfeit any chance of having a happily ever after.

Beloved, be not tempted by the nonbelievers and the apostates. Do not listen to them when they say they are “happier without religion” or trumpeting whatever cult they joined. Even if you see these people partying, having fun, enjoying worldly means like money or fame, the Psalmist tells us plainly that they have their own miseries which will only get worse over time – especially on Judgment Day.

The Joy of the Believer

Truth be told, you have no *reason* to go off into the temptations presented by the wicked. Things may be hard for us here on earth, but they can be for the atheist, the hindu, the muslim, or any other path to hell that people take. The difference is, God has made promises to us which make it all *worth it*. David writes that the Lord is his portion – and belonging to God means having a beautiful inheritance. Don't let the apostate tell you that he or she has “more fun” when trying to get you to slip away from your faith; God promises that at His Right Hand are pleasures *forevermore*. The nonbeliever's fun ends; yours will not, even into eternity.

The joy of the believer is an ever-present facet in life that we should always return to, as the Apostle tells us directly to rejoice always.⁵ But let us remember that this joy is not on account of ourselves. King David writes “you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.” He does not write this about himself, but he writes from the perspective of Christ, seeing as a prophet that our Lord would rise from the dead.⁶ David saw corruption as he slept with his fathers; Jesus Christ rose from the dead before bodily decay could set in.

We might wonder, how does this Psalm preach the hope and joy of the believer if the tenth verse is about Jesus? Sure, Christ rose from the dead and shall never die again – but how does that benefit the believer? Ah, but there is where the Psalmist writes “You make known to me the path of life.” He knew that faith in Christ justifies us; union with Christ means rising with Christ;⁷ He rose from the dead precisely to ensure that whoever trusts in Him for salvation shall be counted worthy to rise again as

2 <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/understanding-grief/201704/a-collection-of-last-words>

3 <https://www.gdargaud.net/Humor/FamousLastWords.html>

4 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/strip-er-found-entwistle-dead-after-heart-attack-triggered-by-cocaine-135736.html>

5 1 Thessalonians 5:16

6 Acts 2:27, 13:35-39

7 Romans 6:4

well.⁸ And what's more, our flesh dwells secure as the Psalmist says, because Jesus promises that whoever believed in Him *shall never die*.⁹ Even if you shed this mortal coil, death has no power over you; what happens to you is *not* the same as what happens to the nonbeliever, for you are accepted into the arms of our Lord in His Heaven while the believer goes into darkness.

Conclusion

The promises of our Lord were enough for King David to proclaim his diligent allegiance to God forever. No other being in the entire universe could do such wonderful things for a man, to promise that he shall not only live forever, but that he shall live forever with pleasures forevermore. So he declares his loyalty, and so must we. Today beloved, say with the Psalmist that you shall never run after another god; say in your heart that you shall not partake in the infernal rites of the damned; declare to our Lord that you will use His Name rightly and not in vain. And let us then walk in His mercy, in the forgiveness of all our sins, full of joy at both His present blessings and the eternal life to come.

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

8 Romans 4:24-25

9 John 11:25-26

Sermon for July 27th, 2025
SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Exodus 20:1-17

1 And God spoke all these words, saying,

2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

8 “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

Psalms 19

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

2 Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.

3 There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.

4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In them he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.

6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
12 Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Romans 6:1-11

1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.

Matthew 5:21-26

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will

be liable to the hell of fire. **23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. **26** Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

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

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

Introduction: Sticks and Stones

There is an old saying that goes like this: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” The idea behind it is that words are simply words, sounds or markings on paper (or these days a screen), so they cannot inflict physical damage. A father might repeat this tired old line to his son after hearing that some mean children teased him at school. A mother might reassure her teenage daughter that the rumors spread about her are “just words,” and encourage her that she should move on. So the saying spreads in the hopes that people get “thicker skin.”

In recent years, anti-bullying campaigns have seen exponential growth because it turns out nobody really believes that old saying. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the people who live under constant criticism from their unpleasable spouses. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” Tell that to the victims of false accusations as they sit in prison. “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words shall never hurt me.” If you ever decide to tell a grieving widow that you are glad her husband is dead, get back to me after and tell me whether she was unaffected – assuming she doesn't knock out your teeth. At this point, no one thinks that words are harmless. Even though it is good to raise your children to have “thick skin” so to speak, it does not make them invulnerable to the great fires set by the untameable tongue of mankind.¹ The tongue is an instrument of murder.

Turning the Weapon on the Self

Today's reading introduces this dynamic and expands on it. Our Lord Jesus tells us that the tongue is not just an instrument for killing *others*. It is also the tool by which countless men and women shall be damned, effectively committing spiritual *suicide*. It is not the words themselves which do this, so much as the intent behind them. The words you use make your heart, the very thing which God values the most, suspect. St. John tells us that we must love one another, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows Him. However, “anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”² Your words to another believer – whom you are *supposed* to love – will reveal whether or not your heart really belongs to God.

If you are angry with your brother, you are liable to judgment. This is to say, if your brother or sister in Christ upsets you, then your motives must be examined, and I pray for your sake that you are the first to examine them and correct yourself. Perhaps you are justified in your anger; Christians sin all the time, and unfortunately we sin against *each other* quite frequently, so some momentary anger is expected, it's perfectly natural. But I advise you, judge that anger before God judges you. Does that anger reflect a refusal to forgive? Does that anger turn into boiling hate for a fellow believer, someone

1 James 3:3-12

2 1 John 4:3-4

that our Lord *died* to save? If so then beware, for the unforgiving one and the one who hates his brothers, if they do not repent, are hellbound.³

Our Lord brings up anger first, because it is from anger that the man is inspired to say things he may regret. But from there He mentions insults; in a more literal translation of the text, Christ says “whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!’” Raca is an Aramaic word which roughly means “empty-headed.”⁴ It would be the equivalent of calling a fellow Christian an idiot. Bring this moment to judgment before *you* are brought to judgment. Did you mean those words? Was there real contempt for him behind it when you said it? Harmless teasing is fine. Using insults to cut someone down and wound their soul is deadly to your eternal fate.

Our Lord also brings up calling someone a *fool*. It may sound like He is just repeating Himself here. He just warned us for when we call someone “Raca” - or any other such insult. Why warn us about greater severity for calling someone a fool? Because to Christ's audience, a fool was not just a dunderhead; all throughout the book of Proverbs, the fool is presented as either amoral or immoral.⁵ Our Lord is saying that you risk hell when you *condemn* someone as wicked, apostate, or lacking in character when you *know* that they are a brother or sister in Christ. This is someone who has been justified by faith in Jesus Himself, declared righteous by our Heavenly Father. To call them a “fool” or to revile their character in some other fashion is to effectively accuse God of *lying* or making a mistake. When you pronounce that condemnation on someone, no wonder you are at risk of damnation – you'd better make damned sure you are right, because if you are wrong then God treats it like blasphemy! And we know exactly what happens to blasphemers.

Now, on that topic, maybe you have leveled such an accusation at someone. But when you called that individual Christian an idolater, an apostate, wicked, or whatever else, you reasoned to yourself “well they weren't really a Christian anyway.” Are you sure? Do you know this person? Are you willing to risk eternity in hell for the brief satisfaction of attacking them? Unfortunately, too many people will find out – all too late – that they should never have taken that risk. By their tongues, by which I mean the outpouring of their rotten hearts, they have slain their own souls.

Turning Away from the Ledge

As we speak, there are people who believe they are Christians who are in the process of sealing their damnation by their impenitent words and motivations. With what they say, with how they feel, they demonstrate to our God that they care nothing about Christ and the Cross on which He died for us. Such people deserve hellfire for their careless presumptions and foolhardy anger. Ironically, they feel quite righteous as they stand on the ledge of damnation. I am not alone in this interpretation by the way. Here is Luther's comment on this very passage:

Therefore, it is as if it were said: He who is angry in heart is already deserving of death before God; but he who goes further and says: Raca, or, Thou fool, has already had sentence pronounced upon him, etc. In short, he is already damned to hell fire who is angry with his brother. But he who says Raca, deserves to go still deeper into hell; still deeper, however, he who kills also with words and fist. So the punishment and condemnation is entirely one and the same, and yet the same is heavier and more severe as the sin progresses and breaks out more fiercely.⁶

My friends, turn away from the ledge before you fall off of it. Christ says that before you so much as make an *offering* at Church, before people would see you as a Christian, repent of this sinful anger towards your brethren. Forgive them. Note here that the first thing Christ tells us to do is be reconciled – not necessarily *in person*, for such things may not always be possible. Saying something

3 Matthew 6:14-16, 1 John 3:15

4 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4469.htm>

5 <https://www.gotquestions.org/fool-Proverbs.html>

6 From Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, found here: <https://godrules.net/library/luther/37luther1.htm>

nasty on the internet to a fellow Christian is not easily mended by direct apologies, or perhaps someone we offended shed their mortal coil before we could apologize. But that part of reconciliation is always secondary. More important to our Lord is that we change our *mind* and work on our hearts. Drop the silly anger, let the burning hatred of someone God loves be extinguished. There is a time and a place for righteous anger, but even then it must be brief, never permanent.⁷

Conclusion

We have all been guilty of this errant anger and salty language towards our fellow Christians. If we hold onto it, then our Heavenly Father shall look at our faithlessness, and upon Judgment Day tell us “Ah, you like anger do you? Have as much as you like in the fires prepared for the devil and his angels, there you shall experience all the anger you could ever take – and infinitely more.”

The good news is that such a terrible fate is not *guaranteed*, beloved. Our Lord Jesus took all the Divine wrath which we deserve, paying the price on that Cross which we could never pay on our own. As we go forward, let us meditate on our unfounded hatred, anger, and reviling, and lay it all on the foot of the Cross. Let us request mercy from our Savior, and help from the Holy Spirit to keep us from offending once more.

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

7 Ephesians 4:26-27