

Sermon for September 7th, 2025
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Isaiah 29:17-24

17 Is it not yet a very little while
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?

18 In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.

19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the ruthless shall come to nothing
and the scoffer cease,
and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,

21 who by a word make a man out to be an offender,
and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall no more be ashamed,
no more shall his face grow pale.

23 For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who murmur will accept instruction.”

Psalms 146

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

3 Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;

7 who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Romans 10:9-17

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. **10** For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. **11** For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” **12** For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. **13** For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? **15** And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” **16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” **17** So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Mark 7:31-37

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. **32** And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. **33** And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. **34** And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” **35** And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. **36** And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. **37** And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

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

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

Introduction

Just before our reading took place, our Lord was in Tyre to deliver a Syrophoenician woman's daughter from demon possession. Just before He exorcised the demon, He proclaimed that He was sent only to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.”¹ He also called Gentiles *dogs*, explaining to the woman that it was not right to use His ministry in service of Gentiles. Jesus Christ was born a Jew according to His human nature, and so He reserved His earthly ministry for witnessing to and teaching His kin. This was done to fulfill what the Old Testament prophets had spoken concerning the Messiah; if He did not go first to the Jews, then He would not have been the true Christ.

But is that the whole story, or is there more to it than that? While it is true that He was born a Jew, did Christ *truly* refuse to go to Gentiles? Before we make the mistake of thinking that our Savior is

¹ Matthew 15:24

a Jewish supremacist, our passage shows Him going immediately from Tyre to the Decapolis. The Decapolis, which means “ten cities,” was a group of Gentile-populated towns near Galilee. Famous pagan poets were born in this loose confederation of autonomous Greek towns. Their populations were infamous among the Jews for being part of Alexander the Great's program of *Hellenization*, or trying to make the world adopt Greek culture, Greek customs, the Greek language, and even Greek paganism. Alexander's successors built these ten cities as a monument to the Hellenization project, like a certain “home base” for Gentiles so that Judea would slowly be remade in Alexander's image. This is one of the core reasons our very own New Testament was written in Greek in the first place. Alexander planted the seed of Hellenization some centuries prior, and it was in full bloom by the time our Savior walked in His ministry.

From the very beginning we can tell that Christ is doing something very controversial to the Jews at the time – who *hated* the Decapolis and everything it stood for. He went to a city of Gentiles to heal a Gentile and start teaching. Make no mistake; in our reading, Jesus intentionally goes to the Decapolis with the intent of healing a *Greek* man. Someone might tell you that, since He uses the Aramaic phrase “Ephphatha,” surely he must be speaking to a Jew; after all, that was one of the three languages Jews spoke in that day, and the Greeks in those cities would not understand it. But if that were the case, it would make no sense for Him to perform the healing in secret. If the deaf man was Jewish, He would have stood as a witness to all the Greeks there that He, the Jewish Messiah, was there healing Jews so they should convert in order to receive the same blessing. But Jesus isn't there for that; He has no desire to reverse Hellenization or strip the Gentiles of their Greek identity; He came to heal this man for his own sake. Furthermore, Jesus charges the men who were with their deaf friend to not tell anyone, but they disobey Him and tell everyone in the Decapolis: in the first century, Jews had no dealings with Gentiles so long as they could help it, so they would not have disobeyed Jesus and proclaimed it to the surrounding Greeks!

The Healing of Gentiles

So Jesus heals a Gentile man, right after telling a Gentile woman in Tyre that He was sent only to the Jews. Why would He act this way? Why say one thing and appear to be harsh, but then go around healing people that He *seemed* to reject? Ah, here with our reading we have our answer. First, by healing this deaf man our Lord is showing His disciples that He really does care about us Gentiles. By curing his deafness using an Aramaic term, he keeps anyone from thinking that it was some false god like zeus or apollo behind the miracle. And it is not in any god's name that Christ performs the miracle; being truly Divine, He merely tells the man's ears to open and they are opened. He shows that He is the Lord of all things by opening the ears and mouth.

The deaf man receives this message without needing any extensive catechism or a lesson plan or anything of the sort. He quickly understands that Jesus Christ is the Lord over his well-being, and that no pagan deity can match up. So he and his fellow Gentiles were converted, and they proclaimed His marvelous deed to everyone who could hear. Imagine the refreshing message they spread! This Man, this Jesus of Nazareth, was the only One who actually cared about them; He was *different* then all the hucksters, con artists, black magicians, sorcerers, and pagan priests they were used to seeing. Christ did not ask for money, did not demand his followers become slaves, He did not try to take their women into a harem and He did not instruct him to convert to judaism. He simply came to the man, healed him, and charged him with not saying anything about what happened.

There is a splendid simplicity in their message. The formerly deaf man and his friends go about saying “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.” What does that amount to? To put it simply, people in the Decapolis heard “Look at what this man Jesus did for me! So I believe Him, because He has done wonderful things, and you should too.” I can tell you right now that this was an effective message: immediately after our reading, over four thousand from the Decapolis show up *just to hear Christ speak*, and He feeds them all before going back to His mission to

the Jews.²

Why the Healing?

So why would our Savior do this? Clearly He has a specific mission to the Jews, and He goes about it for the bulk of His ministry before going to the Cross. But He takes this detour into Gentile lands, a journey from Tyre and Sidon all the way to the Decapolis, to show us that He has bigger things in mind than just declaring His Messianic status to His earthly kin. In fact, by taking this time to teach these Gentile multitudes and healing their sick, He was planting the seeds for their entrance into a kingdom that would give them eternal life.

The Greeks planted the seeds of Hellenization by establishing the Decapolis, with the intent of making everyone Greek. Instead of reversing that, or trying to do the opposite and turn a bunch of Greeks into Jews, Jesus Christ was planting the seeds for *Christianization*. He has no problem with them keeping the Greek language, or their culture, and their way of doing business. They can keep their heritage – after all, God gave it to them and they should treasure it and protect it. But because He cares for them, because He wants *all* men of every race to be in His Kingdom, He sets out to bring them to Himself by showing His mercy. This worked too – the Decapolis was entirely Christian within a couple of centuries.

Our reading is a foreshadowing of what He has done for everyone. He cared about the men and women of the Decapolis for their own sake, healing and feeding them without asking for anything in return. With the same motivations, He went to the Cross willingly for all of humanity, paying the price for all of our sins by the shedding of His precious Blood – and rising on the third day so that whoever believes in Him is justified by faith without any payment or works required on their part. The man whom He healed, whose ears had been shut and mouth had been twisted, understood this message loud and clear. He eagerly used those newly opened ears to listen to Christ's teachings and his newly unmuted mouth to proclaim this good news to everyone he could speak to. The question is now, shall we do the same? May we whose ears have always heard listen to our Lord's message, and may our mouths that have never been stopped up be open to proclaim the Gospel – and above all, may our hearts always belong to the Savior who delivered us without any cost to ourselves.

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

Sermon for September 14th, 2025
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Chronicles 28:8-15

8 The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. **9** But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. **10** And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? **11** Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.”

12 Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war **13** and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” **14** So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. **15** And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

Psalms 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

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

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

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

Galatians 3:15-22

15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. **17** This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. **18** For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. **20** Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" **27** And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37** He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

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

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

"Lawyering" with Jesus

Today I'd like to focus on the lawyer's question, one which our Savior does not answer. Not his first question regarding eternal life. Christ answers that very easily; if you would live, obey the Law perfectly. Love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself. Simply do all this perfectly from the moment of your birth up to the point where you shed your mortal coil, and then eternal life is yours. The judaizers among us love Christ's answer to this first question – "what shall I do to inherit eternal

life” – because they are deluded, thinking that Christ gives means it is possible for a normal person to truly love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves.

The second question the lawyer asks shows us why we cannot hope to get to Heaven this way. He asks “And who is my neighbor?” This is the question asked by every man who does not want to love his neighbor. It is the question asked by those who have not been loving their neighbors. Because they have not loved their neighbors as themselves, and because they do not want to love their neighbors as themselves, these wretched souls do what the lawyer did, lawyering with Jesus to try to find some escape clause in God's contract with mankind – His immutable, eternal Law.¹

You might have someone in mind when I describe this sort of person. Maybe you have interacted with someone who saw the high-profile murders that happened this week, and they excused the killings for one reason or another. To them, these victims did not *count* as a neighbor. Many of the people who expressed antipathy to these victims call themselves Christian. They are exactly like the lawyer trying to excuse his atrophied heart. But it is not just failure to have sympathy for murder victims that makes people ask “who is my neighbor.” We see it happen whenever a Christian passes by a beggar, a homeless person asking for food, whenever they judge others to be beneath their compassion.

It would be easy for me to leave it at that. It would be so easy for us to thumb our noses at people who refuse to treat their neighbors with dignity, respect and compassion wouldn't it? We would feel so, so righteous if we left it there and called it a day. But we should be humble here. If we were honest with ourselves we would admit that we *all* do this. We all play the lawyer with God from time to time, seeking some “out” that would justify our selfish behavior. A mother might have a bad day where she is not attentive to the needs of her children; while they cry and she ignores them, lazily spending her time on the phone, she tells herself and God that she is suffering from burnout and the kids will be fine. An employee at a store might be rude to a customer, but he will justify his dismissive behavior by saying to himself and to God that the customer wasn't a regular anyway. In our reading, the lawyer asking this question seeks to *justify* himself for his refusal to walk the path of charity and compassion for others. We all do the same thing, and just like the lawyer we have no excuse.

How Christ Answers the Lawyer

This is why Christ does not answer him directly. Make no mistake beloved, Christ does *not* tell the man who his neighbor is. He does not open up a dictionary and read the entry of “neighbor.” He does not open a Greek lexicon and tell the lawyer “well you see, the very word πλησίον, transliterated 'Plesion' is properly defined as countryman, friend, or person in close proximity to yourself. Dear lawyer you answered your own question.”² He does not limit neighbors to ethnic kin, or else His own parable would make no sense. Nor does he expand the word “neighbor” to mean every human being on earth – to say *that* would make the word meaningless. If everyone is my neighbor, no one is. Telling me to love everyone equally means telling me that love is a meaningless idea.

So Christ does not tell him who his neighbors are. But He *does* answer the lawyer with a message that the lawyer – and all of *us* need to hear. You see, *who* is your neighbor does not matter. Christ did not define the term, so neither will I. What is more important is, who are you a neighbor to? The Samaritan in His parable went out of his way to help someone in need. The Samaritan saw someone in need who wasn't receiving help, and so he bound his wounds up. The priest and the Levite could not touch a possibly-dead body or else they would be unclean and could not do their God-given duty. But the Samaritan, like the lawyer, was no priest nor Levite – and if he is neither of those things, he has no excuse to avoid doing the neighborly thing.

That is Christ's message to *you* beloved. Who is your neighbor? Who cares! What we should be asking is, how can *we* be neighbors to others? Do you have a duty to God or to closer neighbors that

1 If any lawyers are reading this homily, I don't assume that all of you do this.

2 <https://biblehub.com/greek/4139.htm>

keeps you from helping that poor man? No? Then help him! Are you putting yourself in immanent danger if you express condolences to that poor family whose father was murdered? No? Then show your compassion! In a world where so many people are making excuses and justifying themselves before God, our Lord Christ tells the lawyer and all of us to *be* the neighbor instead of asking “who is my neighbor.”

The Core Message

To be a neighbor to someone, as our Savior puts it, is to be like Christ. The parable of the Good Samaritan is clearly an allegory for what our Lord Jesus did for us. He saw us paralyzed in trespasses and sins, victimized by the world and the flesh and the devil, on our way to eternal death. He had compassion on us, and took us when no one else would – especially not the Law, symbolized here by the priest and Levite. Just as the Samaritan pours out wine to treat the man's wounds, so too did Christ pour out His precious Blood upon us that we may be healed. And just as the Samaritan promises to return, presumably to take the poor victim back home, so too does Christ promise His Return someday to take us to Paradise. And the victimized man was unable to save himself; Christ is our Savior, knowing full well that we shall never, so long as we live on this earth, love God and neighbor as we ought.

Jesus did this all for us without asking which of us was His neighbor. In fact, He went to the Cross willingly, knowing that all of us were His enemies before we became Christians. He tells us with this parable, saying “go and do likewise,” to say that we too must be willing to show neighborly, Agape love towards everyone we meet and know so long as it is within our power to do it. Not that we must *die* for our neighbors necessarily, and not that we are barred from defending ourselves when attacked, but rather the Golden Rule – to do unto others as you would have others do unto you – is established here as a means of being like Christ. Let us do so beloved, for Christ first showed this love to us.

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

Sermon for September 21st, 2025
FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Proverbs 4:10-23

- 10** Hear, my son, and accept my words,
that the years of your life may be many.
11 I have taught you the way of wisdom;
I have led you in the paths of uprightness.
12 When you walk, your step will not be hampered,
and if you run, you will not stumble.
13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go;
guard her, for she is your life.
14 Do not enter the path of the wicked,
and do not walk in the way of the evil.
15 Avoid it; do not go on it;
turn away from it and pass on.
16 For they cannot sleep unless they have done wrong;
they are robbed of sleep unless they have made someone stumble.
17 For they eat the bread of wickedness
and drink the wine of violence.
18 But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn,
which shines brighter and brighter until full day.
19 The way of the wicked is like deep darkness;
they do not know over what they stumble.
20 My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.
21 Let them not escape from your sight;
keep them within your heart.
22 For they are life to those who find them,
and healing to all their flesh.
23 Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life.

Psalm 119:9-16

[Collect text in Bold]

- 9** How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to your word.
10 With my whole heart I seek you;
let me not wander from your commandments!
11 I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.
12 Blessed are you, O LORD;
teach me your statutes!
13 With my lips I declare
all the rules of your mouth.
14 In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

**15 I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.
16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.**

Galatians 5:16-24

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **17** For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. **19** Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, **20** idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, **21** envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. **24** And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

Luke 17:11-19

11 On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. **12** And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance **13** and lifted up their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” **14** When he saw them he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went they were cleansed. **15** Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; **16** and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. **17** Then Jesus answered, “Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? **18** Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” **19** And he said to him, “Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well.”

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

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

Introduction

St. Paul begins this passage by exhorting us to walk by the Spirit. What does he mean by that? The answer is simple, really. Our bodies are not yet redeemed. Our “flesh,” as the Apostle calls it, is fallen and still has the stain of sin in it. The Holy Spirit, however, having brought us to the new birth from the moment of our Baptism onward, is *not* fallen. In fact, He is God who dwells within us, walking with us at every moment. How do we walk by the Spirit then? By listening to His Word and receiving it. But as we shall see, this is not something which should cause us to worry that we must be saved by how much we sanctify ourselves.

The Corruption of the Flesh

By the flesh, St. Paul means that sinful part of us, the distortion of our human nature which constantly wants to sin. The Apostle is *not* telling us that our bodies are wicked just for existing, and nor is he telling us that enjoying things is sinful! Otherwise he would not include sins like jealousy or strife, sins which have nothing to do with the human body. But for too long, the Church has had a problem with monks and nuns and all other sorts of ascetics who believe that enjoying anything earthly is bad. They go on long fasts, deny themselves sleep, and endlessly mouth the same phrases trying to empty their minds, thinking that all this earns Heaven for them. Certain monastics even favor whipping

themselves, wearing itchy hairshirts, and even subjecting themselves to intolerable isolation, believing that in this way they can “mortify” the flesh and thus be perfect. Such people, whether they be Catholic or Orthodox, are terribly misguided – St. Paul says so himself! In Colossians 2:23, he says “These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are *of no value* in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” Self-inflicted pain and hunger do not take away the problem!

You see, St. Paul uses the word “flesh” as a catch-all term for the sinful part of our nature because that sin is what is *wrong with it*. We were created *good*, but sin rises up to twist that good nature into something bad. The Scriptures are replete with descriptions of God blessing people and rejoicing to see them enjoying earthly matters, from food to alcohol to sex to sleep.¹ These are good things! But sin within our flesh rejects marital fidelity and prefers fornication, orgies and other sexual sins. Sin dwelling in our flesh rejects the joy of having our needs met and turns it into oppressive greed. It misdirects what should be proper worship and devotion, turning it towards witchcraft and idolatry. Enjoying a mild buzz from a couple of beers gets warped into a week-long drunken *bender*. Loving justice gets turned into abject hatred.

The Apostle warns us that whoever makes a practice of these sins is damned. By practice, what I mean is that those who do not have true faith in Christ will not *struggle* against this sinful part of their flesh. The man who is comfortable with his fornication, who loves it and continues in it, doesn't even think it is a sin – such a man does not believe in Jesus. Otherwise he would agree with Jesus that fornication is wicked. The man who loves his fits of rage, who loves causing strife, who thinks that enmity and schisms are good, such a man does not believe in Jesus. When St. Paul tells people that such people do not inherit the Kingdom of God, he is talking about *faith* and life practices more than individual deeds. Everyone messes up out of moments of weakness, no matter how long he has been a believer; the man who makes a life out of them though is not stumbling, but rather committing spiritual suicide.

The Work of the Spirit

Let no man fool you beloved. Take careful note of the language here. St. Paul lists **works** of the flesh, but he does not then list “works which we do to walk alongside the Spirit.” He lists **fruit** of the Spirit, as though we are plants and He is watering us. When it comes to the wickedness of our sinful nature, he says “those who **do** such things will not inherit the kingdom of God;” sin, especially living in sin, is a choice. But when it comes to the Spirit, he says “if you are **led** by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.” The virtues that St. Paul lists – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control – these things are the result of what the Holy Spirit does *for us*. He is the One who takes believers, those who are already Baptized, already justified by faith, and sanctifies them as they continue onward.

The believer is not under the Law, particularly under its sentence of damnation, because the Holy Spirit is there to lead the believer in the proper paths which avoid that sentence. If we stray (which we all do from time to time) and find the Law accusing us of our sins, the Holy Spirit leads us back to His Word, where we are brought safely back to the saving message of the forgiveness of our sins by Christ Jesus. This makes the Holy Spirit crucial to our salvation; He leads us in penitent faith through this life, making sure we are not shipwrecked.

St. Paul ends this passage by saying that believers “have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” What does that mean? It means that the flesh is crucified by your reception of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit offered salvation to you when you first heard the Gospel, and you did not resist; then you were Baptized, and you received the forgiveness of your sins that Christ won on the Cross; from that moment on your sinful nature was crucified. Crucifixion is typically a *slow* death, a kind of

1 Psalm 104:27, 145:15, the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes 5:12, Deuteronomy 28:11-12, 1 Kings 3:13, and much more.

asphyxiation that occurs as the human body, hanging on the wood, cannot maintain the posture necessary to take a fresh breath of air. Eventually, the expansion of the chest makes inhaling nearly impossible, and the victim has to push their whole body upward to breathe. That is happening to the corruption of our nature, our old Adam; our sins and sinful nature are not *dead* yet, but they still keep coming up for air trying to survive the sanctification that the Holy Spirit is working. Eventually, as our sinful nature gets exhausted, those breaths it takes – the times when we stumble and sin – get less frequent. Eventually it dies, and we await the Resurrection, where the Holy Spirit will rise us from whatever grave our body is in, and ensure that we are completely perfected.

Walking by the Spirit

Our flesh is a stubborn thing. A 90 year old man who has been a devout Christian his whole life will still sin on occasion, because the corruption of his nature *clings* to him and aches to breathe, to preserve itself. But that devout man knows better than to let sin reign over him, for he walks by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired the Word, the Scriptures, the Gospel proclaimed to us all. To walk by Him is to hear His Word gladly, to receive the forgiveness of our sins at the Divine Service, and to have our faith strengthened through these means that He has provided. After all, it is that faith which justified us before our Lord, and by faith we receive the gifts He gives us – especially that gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us in every step we take.

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

Sermon for September 28th, 2025
FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

1 Kings 17:8-16

8 Then the word of the LORD came to him, **9** “Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold, I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” **10** So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.” **11** And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” **12** And she said, “As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. And now I am gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.” **13** And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. **14** For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’” **15** And she went and did as Elijah said. And she and he and her household ate for many days. **16** The jar of flour was not spent, neither did the jug of oil become empty, according to the word of the LORD that he spoke by Elijah.

Psalm 146

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

3 Put not your trust in princes,

in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.

4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;

on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,

whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6 who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,

who keeps faith forever;

7 who executes justice for the oppressed,

who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD sets the prisoners free;

8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.

The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;

the LORD loves the righteous.

9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;

he upholds the widow and the fatherless,

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

10 The LORD will reign forever,

your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD!

Galatians 6:1-10

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. 5 For each will have to bear his own load. 6 Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches. 7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. 9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

Matthew 6:24-34

24 “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

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

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

Introduction

Our reading begins with God speaking directly to Elijah the prophet, telling him to go to the Gentile territory of Zarephath and live with a poor widow. While many a sermon has been preached on the widow, on the faith she received from the Word of the Lord spoken, and the way that God provides for the needy, today I want to look just a bit deeper at Elijah himself and ask some questions about the office of prophet.

This is all the more necessary, since this very week a prediction regarding the “rapture” was proven to be false.¹ Some South African minister declared himself a prophet, declared he had a vision of Christ, and that the “Rapture” would happen on the 24th of September; no such thing happened. But men and women are doing this more often, having caught the prophet-envy bug. It seems that some people are feeling *envious* of the prophets, thinking of them as wizard-like figures who changed the world, the *top dogs* of the faith who deserve all this acclamation and praise. Having imbibed this idea that the prophetic experience is somehow more legitimate, mystical, or “spiritual” than the experience of any other believer, they say “I want that for me,” and rile themselves up. Sadly, they fall into all sorts

1 <https://apnews.com/article/rapture-end-times-evangelical-christians-tiktok-e7d065520186503a6223ee12df1f02dd>

of delusions, thinking that being a prophet makes someone more special to God. Let us discuss why that isn't exactly the case.

The Prophetic Experience

Before we begin, beloved is that you? Have you thought about the prophets wondered what it would be like to be one, or thought it must be nice to be in their shoes? We normal Christians can sometimes feel a burden when we consider how we trust in a God that we can't see with our eyes, while the prophets got to have all these big visions. We have to engage in apologetics and arguments to shore up our faith with evidence and reason, while the prophets got to work miracles. We operate on faith; the prophets operated on total certainty. We are cast down in the drudgery of having daily jobs and bearing contempt from nonbelievers every day, but the prophets are respected by billions of people. I believe that it is this sort of feeling of jealousy, if not resentment, that leads to so many deciding they have magical powers or mystic visions.

But the prophetic experience was not glamorous nor magical, beloved. They were not wizards – if anything, being a prophet was *painfully* mundane. The first verse in our passage says “Then the word of the LORD came to him.” How exactly did the Word come to him? Was it an audible voice ringing in his ear? Did an angel visit him? Did he just get a *funny feeling* like he was supposed to go to Zarephath, and he interpreted the physical-emotional stimulus, something normal people do not feel, so as to head to that Gentile territory?

Before dwelling further on such a question, we must recognize that the prophets already had the Word in the normal sense. The prophets of old were stewards of the Scriptures, at least the ones who arrived after Moses. Elijah heads to Zarephath after he predicts a drought in front of the wicked king Ahab. He says “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”² That is not *just* a prophecy, beloved. Elijah was citing one of the covenant curses, which states that if the children of Israel are disobedient to His Law, then:

“ 22 The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with **drought** and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. 23 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. 24 **The LORD will make the rain of your land powder.** From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”³

You see beloved, in that moment Elijah was referring to that passage. Moses had made the previous prophecy, and the prophets who came after him were like attorneys for God. You can almost imagine Elijah if he were born today, wearing a cheap suit and reading glasses, declaring to the leaders of the nation: “Here, Israel, this is the stipulation which was in the contract, and you violated it. So in accordance with *this* stipulated consequence, drought shall be an affliction which you will bear until your nation is no longer able to take it. If at any time you should repent *during* this drought however, and return to covenant faithfulness under our Lord's Commandments, then this drought shall cease and rain will return promptly.”

Over and over again, the Old Testament prophets were these Covenant prosecutors, calling the people to task over their disobedience to the Law. In painstaking detail the prophetic author of the books of Kings details the prosperity of Israel under Solomon when he was faithful, and the way that he bankrupted Israel when he turned away from the Lord;⁴ these were *both* foretold as conditions of obedience or disobedience to the Covenant.⁵ Elisha the prophet does not bat an eye when the conditions of apostate Israel are so bad that they devolve into cannibalism of children,⁶ for this too was a curse

2 1 Kings 17:1

3 Deuteronomy 28:22-24

4 1 Kings 10:14-22, 9:10-14

5 Deuteronomy 28:12-14, 43-44

6 2 Kings 6:24-33

that God has spoken through the mouth of Moses should the Israelites continue to rebel.⁷ This isn't just relegated to the books of the Kings, the same dynamic shows up in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and so so many more. The prophets were the Biblical scholars of their day, and Elijah was no different; much of their time was spent in study.

The Provision for Prophets

So how did the Word of the Lord come to Elijah to tell him he must go to Zarephath? I can only conclude this: the man knew the Word by virtue of studying the Scriptures that he had available, and when God desired that he should have immediate direction, He brought about that the prophet *knew* what he must do. Certainly there were times when God spoke to him with an audible voice, just as our Lord did on the mountain as Elijah covered his face out of reverence.⁸ We know that angels interacted with Elijah, as they did on the day he was taken up to Heaven.⁹ But here, since Scripture does not mention voice nor angel, all we have left is the prophet suddenly *knowing*.

You see, most of the time God prefers to work through *means*. We receive the forgiveness of our sins through Baptism, Absolution, and through Communion. God provides us with our daily bread through our neighbors who grow food for us, and He makes us safe by providing us with police and our own means of protecting our lives. He extends our lifespan by raising up men to be doctors. And the Holy Spirit gives us the Word by means of the Scriptures. He speaks through every page of the Bible to us, using the plain meaning of the text to reach the souls of those who read it. He speaks through those who proclaim the message of the Scriptures to others. But with the prophets, He spoke to them *without* means of the Word, but having the same effect as when they studied the inspired books they had. Elijah knew that he had to go to Zarephath the same way he knew the contents of Deuteronomy. He could cite what God had put into his very soul and mind the same way he could cite the Scriptures to king Ahab and proclaim a drought.

Do you want to feel what it felt like for the prophets to receive a message from the Lord? Then read your Bible every day. Study it, cherish it, learn it like the back of your very hand, and you will have an internal knowledge of the Scriptures the way that the prophets had knowledge of God's messages. When you remember a Bible verse that is applicable to your life, that is how it felt for the prophet to receive a message from God most of the time. It was a much more mundane vocation than the modern would-be prophets would have you believe, and they often had day-jobs to provide for themselves. Amos the prophet spent most of his time farming,¹⁰ Isaiah and Jeremiah were priests, and so forth. As it stands, visions were mostly a once-in-a-lifetime event for them.

The Purpose with Prophets

Now, this is not me saying we should all act like the prophets, or that whenever we some funny feeling from a bit of bad food we should put on sackcloth and start condemning our leaders. Heaven forbid! Not every thought that comes into our heads is from the Holy Spirit. Beloved, you must realize that God's messages came with a *purpose*, something that accomplishes His *goals*. He told Elijah to go to Zarephath, because this accomplished the preservation of the widow and her son's lives with the flour and oil being extended. He told Elijah to go there knowing that he would convert souls to the true faith, and by the miracle of the flour the prophet would foretell a much greater miracle: when our Lord Christ multiplied bread and fish, feeding *thousands*. Elijah and men like him did not wait around for a funny feeling or a spontaneous thought; almost universally they simply related what the Scriptures meant for the people in the times they lived, and only performed their prophetic office, effectively, when God made them do so.

7 Deuteronomy 28:52-57

8 1 Kings 19: 9-18

9 2 Kings 2

10 Amos 7:14-15

We are under no command to be Old Testament styled prophets today, for God accomplishes His purposes through us in a much more clear, much more advantageous way. Did not know beloved that by listening to and heeding the Word of God you *also* do great things? Did you know that you accomplish God's purposes when you trust in Christ for salvation, when you obey the Ten Commandments, when you pray? All these are taught to us in Scripture, and they are all great things which put us on the same level as the prophets when we do them.

I mean this. Here on earth there may be hierarchy between persons, but every one of us is justified by faith alone in Christ alone whether we are a plumber or a prophet. Yes, the prophets did a good work before God; so do Christian mothers when they raise their children well; so do Christian janitors when they do a good job at work. Elijah might have a distinct calling to do what he did, but he is not *special* in himself for having done it, he is not *superior* to a faithful believer who simply listens to the Word at Church and lives the Christian life. Let me put it more succinctly; you are not a second-class citizen in the Kingdom of God. God values you for who you are and your good works in your vocation no matter how mundane it is, just as much as He values a Hosea or a Zechariah.

How do I know this? Because with our reading it is clear that God valued a poor widow of Zarephath just as much as He valued Elijah. He preserved both of them through that famine, effectively sending Elijah to *serve* that widow and her son. Elijah does not demand that the widow bow down to him or call him “sir,” nor does he start barking orders at her that she respect and honor everything about him. Instead, because God sees her faithfulness and obedience as valuable, the prophet treats her honorably. May we then, instead of having “prophet envy” as so many have today, focus on humble faithfulness as well.

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