

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity | St. John 10:23-38
September 25, 2016 | Saude & Jerico Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord God, heavenly Father: We are poor, miserable sinners; we know Your will, but cannot fulfill it because of the weakness of our flesh and blood, and because our enemy, the devil, will not leave us in peace. Therefore we beseech You, pour Your Holy Spirit in our hearts, that in steadfast faith we may cling to Your Son Jesus Christ, find comfort in His Passion and death, believe the forgiveness of sins through Him, and in willing obedience to Your will lead holy lives on earth, until by Your grace, through a blessed death, we depart from this world of sorrow, and obtain eternal life; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (ELH, p. 162)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the tenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, beginning with the twenty-third verse. We read as follows in Jesus' name:

And Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one." / The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?" The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God." Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your Law, 'I said, you are gods'? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken—do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, sent by God the Father to gather His flock and lead it to the safe haven above, dear fellow redeemed:

Many of you here have learned the Ten Commandments along with Martin Luther's explanation to each one. With the exception of the First Commandment, each explanation starts out the same way, "We should fear and love God, so that we...." Luther did this to emphasize that each Commandment points back to the first one, "You shall have no other gods," which means that we should "Fear, love, and trust in God above all things" (Luther's explanation). Why should I

honor my father and mother? Because God put those authorities over me. Why shouldn't I harm someone? Because God gives life and wants it protected. Why shouldn't I steal? Because God gives food and possessions even to the wicked. The reason that I speak well of others, help them keep what they have, honor marriage, and so on, is out of fear and love for God.

You can imagine what happens when people do not fear and love God. They abuse God's name. They ignore His Word. They disrespect the authorities. They fail to defend life. They despise marriage. They take what is not theirs. They attack the reputation of others. They plot and scheme to get what is someone else's. And what does all this gain for them? They may experience moments of empowerment and happiness, but their lives are full of emptiness and brokenness, and death moves closer and closer by the day. There is no hope for them apart from the true God. Only He can rescue from death. **We Fear and Love Him Who Gives Us Eternal Life.**

I

What does it mean to fear God? It means to have a healthy respect for who He is and what He is capable of. To say that fear and respect for God are lacking today is an understatement. People are quick to blame Him in bad times and quick to praise themselves when times are good. They treat the Bible like a toy that can be twisted, stretched, and spun however they like. They say things like, "The God I know would never criticize my lifestyle choices. The God I know loves and accepts me just the way I am." But the god they know is a god of their own making and not the true God. Others deny that God even exists. They freely take His name in vain and blaspheme Him and His Word. What should God do about this?

When we are disrespected by someone, we are tempted to lash out against that person and to seek revenge. We might even resort to intimidation or physical harm. Surely the Lord would be just in doing the same. He is God Almighty, the Creator. He made all things and deserves the honor and praise of all. But it was not for revenge that God came down to earth in the flesh. Jesus said, "*For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him*" (Jn. 3:17). That is good news for us, because we are among those who have dishonored the true God by devoting ourselves to other gods.

This temptation to chase after false gods is ever-present in our lives. It might be the god of money, the god of worldly success and honor, the god of pleasure, the god of work, the god of family, the god of sport and leisure, the god of beauty, the god of political activism. These things are not sinful in and of themselves, but they become sinful when they take the place of our trust in God. In the Holy Gospel reading from Matthew 22, Jesus said that this is the great commandment of the Law, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*" Where has your heart been focused – have you let it lead you into sin? How about your soul – would you sell it for the riches and glory of the world? And your mind – do you apply it toward good and holy pursuits or evil ones?

There is no part of you that is unstained by sin. You have joined the devil and the world in opposition to God every time you have done what God says you should not and failed to do what you should. Our Lord does not go with averages. Mostly good is not good enough. Scripture says that "*whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it*" (Jam. 2:10). So why is it that God still counts you as one of His children? Jesus explains, "*My*

sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

You have heard the voice of Jesus in His Word, and you believe what He says. You believe that there is only one God but three Persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You believe that you are a lost and condemned sinner, who has been purchased and won back by the blood of God's Son. You believe these things because the Holy Spirit has brought you to faith through His Word. You believe that God chose you from eternity to receive His gifts and to live with Him forever in heaven. These are articles of faith. They cannot be understood by human reason or captured by human strength. If God did not give you this faith, you would not have it.

II

The Jews who surrounded Jesus in the temple courts did not have this faith. They saw the amazing works Jesus did. They heard His words. But they had a different Messiah in mind, one who would pat them on the back and praise them for their holy living. They trusted in the god of self. They denied the true God and wanted Jesus dead. Not much has changed. Today's unbelievers want the same thing. This is because the old Adam is still the old Adam, the devil is still the devil, and the world is still the world. The enemies we face are the same enemies that the apostles and David and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob faced. But the God who defends us is the same God too, and He is almighty.

Psalm 2 says, *"Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 'Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.' He who sits in the heavens laughs" (vv. 1-4).* Psalm 115 describes the idols of men which are nothing but *"the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat" (vv. 4-7).* But the true God *"is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases" (v. 3).* There is no God like the LORD. He is *"God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God" (Deu. 10:17).*

Despite God's promise to protect us and keep us safe in His hands, we often let fear overcome us—and it isn't the proper fear of God. We fear having to defend what we believe and being made fun of for it. We fear those who want Christians silenced or worse. We fear that we might miss out on really living if we deny ourselves and have to take up our cross. Such fears are sinful and are contrary to the First Commandment. We cannot serve two Lords or two Gods. We cannot live according to God's will while indulging our sinful desires. If you do fear and love God, you must serve Him with every inch, every part of your being, body and soul.

If you fail to do this, do you know what God will do to you? Will He punish you? Disown you? No, He will forgive you. In fact, He already has. We have failed to do what God demands. We have not loved Him with our heart, mind, and soul, or our neighbor as ourselves. But Jesus did. He loved God and His neighbor with a perfect love. How could He love God? Does that mean He loved Himself? It means that He obeyed the will of His Father and carried out the work His Father gave Him to do, which was to die for sin. And how can we know that He perfectly loved

His neighbors? He was willing to suffer and die even for His enemies, which includes you and me. St. Paul writes that *“one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Rom. 5:7-8).

Jesus died for your sins, even your sins of denying Him, ignoring Him, and willingly doing what you should not have done. Jesus willingly suffered for these sins. They do not stick to you anymore. You are clean. And because you are clean in God’s sight, you are also in line to inherit eternal life. No other God can do this, because there is no other God. There is only one Creator, one Lord, one King. He will not lead you astray, and as long as you listen to His Word, He will keep you from being enticed by any wolf or endangered by any hireling. No one will snatch you, His precious lamb, out of His hand. So with the psalmist we say, *“This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”* (Ps. 56:9-11).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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