

The Second Sunday after Trinity: June 13, 2021

“Totally Radical”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

St. John writes, “*Do not marvel, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.*”¹

Are these not some pretty radical words? Last week I spoke on the word *love* from the Scriptures, and our text today is from the same Epistle. Read in the same context as the Old Testament and Gospel readings for this Sunday, one thing becomes very clear—vocation. What is it that man is to do in this world? How am I supposed to live with my neighbors? June can be a hard month for Christians to hold to the truth and speak in love, but let’s face it—every month is equally as hard. What the Scriptures command us to do is radical.

What does this word mean? The dictionary defines radical as, “1) going to the root or origin; 2) thoroughgoing or extreme, especially as regards change from accepted or traditional forms; 3) favoring drastic political, economic, or social reforms.” This word can even be used as a slang term for something that is “cool”, or “excellent.” This word has been thrown around so much in our political world that it seems to have lost its actual meaning. It seems as though today, anyone who doesn’t agree with me and my choices, is deemed a radical.

How many of you would classify yourself as a radical? Looking at the first two definitions of the word, Christianity is very radical. It is a belief that goes right to the root of humanity, the origin of all creation; it is also an extreme change, from death to life, from sin to grace. Even in slang terms, to be a Christian is a most excellent adventure.

As more and more people turn away from the Bible, or see it as something no different than a book of fairy tales, true Christianity becomes more and more radical. In fact, you and I are products of an inherited philosophy that is actually against the Bible.

¹ 1 John 3:13–15

For the past 300 years or so, there has been a shift in the belief of man. It is taught that man is good within himself, and the best for man is to see this good within yourself and exercise it, make it better, make it grow. Various Christian groups have tried to combine this philosophy with God, and say, “God created us; we owe it to Him to recognize this, and grow this good human potential in all of us.” The basic belief is that there is good in everybody, we just have to bring it out. The schools are built on this, much parenting is based on this, and so of course many will approach the Bible in this way. Instead of understanding it as God’s Word that is built on truth, it is turned into a book that is only there to help my own goodness shine forth, and yours—then using our own truths, they don’t even have to look the same.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you see this trend. Many think of religion, especially the Christian faith, as a personal choice that is of relatively little significance. Just listen to how people talk about God. It is often a confession of my mere person. It is left in the realm of a personal thing, between them and God and no one else has any need to know about it or has anything to say about it. For many, the life lived in the church building is divorced from their life lived in the home, or at school, or at the ballpark, or with friends. Parents have been willing to sacrifice their kids to many other gods, and pacify themselves with, “Well at least they are going somewhere.” Now this doesn’t mean that they are unbelievers. It doesn’t mean that they are going to hell. It does mean that they are in danger. If we believe that we teach the truth, and the truth will set you free; if we believe that good food is needed for life, and strength, and growth, how can we then be ok with less than the best? How can we not want what is eternally best for our children? Is it not dangerous to have the truth of God’s Word that we have worked so hard to teach and instill, slowly eroded by false teaching?

This is not just for parents, is it? The same is true for every one of our neighbors, and every one with whom we come into contact in our vocations. That is one of the points of the text from 1 John this morning. Don’t be surprised when the world hates you. You have passed from death to life. While the world lives in death and is passing away, you have been buried with Christ through baptism and given a new life. You have eternal life and a love from the Father that no darkness can overcome. In this new life, your love is God’s love; God’s definition of love is different than that of the world. People don’t have good inside them that needs to be fostered and realized. They are made in God’s image, but since the Fall into sin, they are completely corrupted by sin. They need forgiveness.

They need salvation. They need life. All of these come from outside of themselves. They are gifts that are given by God through His own appointed means.

The Christian faith is radical. Radical is going to the root, the very origin. The Christian faith is not merely an intellectual opinion that one adopts and then exchanges for something better when it comes along. It is not a simple, feel-good philosophy, or a do-it-yourself betterment project; the Bible is not a moralistic self-help building program. The Christian faith is thorough-going change. Paul says, “***If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.***”² We confess in the Small Catechism, “*What benefits does Baptism give? It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare. What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.*”

John writes, “***Do not marvel, brothers, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.***”³ In this new life of faith, the new creature, the new man living in righteousness and purity, is seen through the love of one another in Christ.

This is one of the radical signs. The world hates us because we are fundamentally different. We love one another, and the world hates us. Since we love what the world hates, we know that we are not of the world, but of God. Just a couple of verses before our text, John takes us radically back to the very origin, “***Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We***

² 2 Corinthians 5:17

³ 1 John 3:13–14

should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.”⁴

The transformation may not always be so obvious to us, because we are the ones transformed. It is like smelling your own breath. If you have onion breath, someone else usually has to tell you, because you are accustomed to it. We don't feel all that righteous, nor do we feel all that loving. The righteousness is Christ's, and we use what we have been given. The love is God's love, and we live it out, pouring out upon others. But the world can see it, and it hates us with a violent hatred. You can see that hatred in the way the world treats Christians and their faith compared with how it deals with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, the spiritual nature of yoga, which focuses on tuning your individual conscience to the Universal Consciousness, or Native American Spirituality – one is good, protected, defended, excuses made for it, even when it is evil, and the other is despised even when it serves the public good. They will take your good deeds for all they are worth and then curse you for being who you are as you walk away.

Read the First Epistle of John, and you will be struck by how black and white John is, and how thoroughgoing the demands of the faith are. There are no half-way measures. Our love is to echo the love of Christ. We are to be like Him, “***By this we know love, that [Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.***”⁵ Love is seen in Jesus - He laid down His life for us. That is our functional definition of love: bear the cross, lay down your life for one another. Our love for one another should look like His love for us. Difficult to do. Difficult to imagine. Frightening to even think about.

Tracing faith back its very origin, radical faith, finds the demands of this passage are absolute and daunting – which should give you a clue. Are these words Law or Gospel? Of course, when John writes about Jesus laying down His life for us, that is Gospel, sweet and pure. When He tells us that we should lay down our lives for one another, that is Law. It is true, and it is valid, but it is only capable of accusing us. We are not capable of keeping it perfectly. That truth doesn't excuse us from trying. It excuses us from despair. Christ has died for us, so when we find ourselves crushed by this law, just as by any other, we must hear the Word of God, the Absolution, telling us that Christ has died for us and we are forgiven. We are set free to love God and love one another, and to

⁴ 1 John 3:7–12

⁵ 1 John 3:16

live out that love to the best of our ability, always calling on God to fill us up with His Spirit and enable us to do more, to do better, to follow in the footsteps of His Son.

Holiness, righteousness, befits the people of God. We may not be able to do it well, but that doesn't stop us from trying – **AND** repenting when we fail, **AND** calling on God to enable us to do more and do better, **AND** then trying again.

Our love in imitation of Christ is part of the reason that the world hates us. We look like Christ to them. We don't let the world shape us, our values and our attitudes – or our actions. We are shaped by Christ and His love for us, and His Word which works in us and on us.

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”⁶ It is a simple formula, but it goes right to the root of who you are. God knows only two conditions here, love and hate. There is no sliding scale, just one thing or the other. Either you either love your brother, or you hate him. The text here refers to brothers in the faith. Our brothers are fellow believers – both male and female. The world has the unbelievers as their brothers, they share a faith too, a common hatred of God, and love of self above all. The grass isn't really greener on the other side here, they hate each other too; they hate us more, but they have no real love for each other.

You can feel the truth of that. Your sinful flesh informs you. You know how easy it is to hate, and how anger is the easiest emotion to summon up. True love, compassion, and genuine concern for one another, is difficult. It is so difficult, it must be inspired, poured out into you by God. Even then, our flesh gets in the way. We have to confess failure and lack of love far too often. Only Jesus loves completely. Your apathy, your lack of true love is a sign of your sin. You can see your lack of love. Jesus took that up to the cross for you; and died for you that you might live. Trust in Jesus, and in His salvation.

Thanks be to God for this Church. In truth and love, we are filled overflowing with the gifts of His Son. Here we don't just talk about love; love is done. Old Adams are drowned, new lives are given. Forgiveness is bestowed.

⁶ 1 John 3:14–15

The body and blood of Christ that was crucified and died for our sin, is present on the altar—love distributed for you to eat and drink for the forgiveness of all your sins.

In loving, simple response, you turn and love one another. This we talked about a bit last week. You are here filled, and then that love outpours towards your neighbor. Love is not just talked about; it is shown, it is lived in word and in deed.

The Christian faith is a gift of God, through Word and Sacrament it is given, fed, and strengthened. As the children of God we seek to live out the reality of who we are and what we have been given, even though we must do so in the face of sinful flesh that does not want to live it out with us. Brothers and sisters, take heart. Don't marvel that the world hates you. This love, this Christ, defines who you are—whose you are. You have passed from death to life.

The Christian faith is not a simple thing. It is not a choice one makes or an option in life. It is who you are right to the core. It is a radical, most-excellent thing. Amen.

Let us pray,

“Though alive, I'm dead in sin, Lost to all good things by nature.
Holy Ghost, change me within, Make of me a new-born creature;
For the flesh works ruination And can never gain salvation.

Faith and hope and charity Graciously, O Father, give me;
Be my Guardian constantly That the devil may not grieve me;
Grant me humbleness and gladness, Peace and patience in my sadness.

Help me speak what's right and good And keep silence on occasion;
Help me pray, Lord, as I should, Help me bear my tribulation;
Help me die and let my spirit Everlasting life inherit.”⁷ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁷ From Eternity, O God TLH 411:2, 6-7

Prayer of the Church**Second Sunday after Trinity: 13 June 2021**

Heavenly Father, we give thanks to You that through Your Holy Word You have called us in radical faith and love to Your great supper. We implore You to enliven our hearts by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not hear Your Word without fruit, but having been prepared rightly for Your kingdom, we may not be hindered by any worldly care. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Send forth Your servants to all corners of the earth, that Your eternal banquet hall may be filled. Keep them steadfast in preaching the blessed invitation of the Gospel, that all hungry and weary sinners may find righteousness and nourishment in Jesus Christ, who has made everything ready by His death and resurrection. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give diligence to all who serve in the high duty of father or mother and to all who guard and rear children. In word and deed, let their lives show forth the blessings of Christ, the certainty of His mercy for sinners and the primacy of the Means of Grace, by which faith is created, strengthened and preserved to life everlasting. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Preserve peace in our land and uphold our nation's leaders, especially Joseph, our president, and Kim, our governor. Enable our leaders, lawmakers and judges to govern according to Your will and not contrary to Your order, knowing that all authority under heaven comes from You. Bless and strengthen those who serve for the common good, those in the military, the police, firefighters, and emergency medical personal; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Give comfort to the sick and lonely, to the shut-in, the oppressed, those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, [*especially Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Vernon, Donna, Floyd Doughty and those we name in our hearts.*]. You are the Lord who feeds and nourishes us with Your wisdom, so help us turn to You in faith and find our every want and need answered in Your gracious favor. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Jan and Terry* celebrate their birthdays. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Zach & Chelsea and Marvin & Carol* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, You have brought Your kingdom near in Your Son, who has entered our flesh for our salvation. Curb our hearts from a miserly attitude that seeks Your gifts at our own pleasure. Give us instead a hunger for what is needful, that we may desire Your supper as often as Your mercy invites us. Grant repentance and faith to all who receive this Sacrament today, that Christ's true body and blood may strengthen us and join us to the Lamb, adored by the whole company of heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, we here remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Praising His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**