

18th Sunday after Trinity and LWML Sunday: October 3, 2021.

“Upsetting Mission Work”

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

It's not difficult to understand why the Word of God is fought against, and attempted to cover up by false teaching. The Bible is hard to read. For most part the grammar is easy and the sentences make sense. The history might be a bit obscure at times. So, why is it so hard? The Word of God exposes uncomfortable realities. Things we have “always thought,” or the world says, “we’ve always done it that way,” are often wrong. Our experience and reason lead us to believe and operate in things that are comfortable, things that makes sense, and the Scriptures say our experiences can be deceiving, and our reason can be duped. What we think about God, what we think about man, our expectations from God, from life, from ourselves; these things can all be misguided and just plain wrong according to the Scriptures.

One of the main problems is you are human, and tack on top of that the fact that you were born and raised in America, and you have an under-developed sense of humility coupled with an over-inflated sense of pride. If you want something done, you have to...do it yourself, right? The only one you can really trust is...you, right?

The God who made the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including you, beckons you to a position of weakness and vulnerability. He calls you to faith, enlightens you with His own gift of faith to trust in Him, as we were reminded of last week, this is precisely done in things that you cannot see or control. From the sight of reason, from the outside, Christianity isn't an attractive religion. What do we see? A man hanging on a cross. His followers persecuted and martyred. In the world, we see poverty, and hunger, and general craziness, as we fight and seek to destroy one another; bullying each other to listen and conform to what I want. There are a million reasons for rejecting the Gospel. It requires me to trust in someone other than myself, and to care for others than myself; which goes against the very fabric of society; so, it should be no surprise that it is rejected so often.

Contrary to popular belief, Jesus is not a universalist. In perfect love, He has reconciled all the world to His Father by His death. He has made atonement for the

sins of the whole world, even for those who will never benefit from it; but, some do not believe; some do not have faith. He does not force His forgiveness on anyone. The majority of the Jews at the time of Christ rejected Him. They couldn't be bothered for one lame reason or another. They had to go off to their fields or their businesses, or worse; the invitation insulted them. They thought: "Who is God to invite us as though we were beggars in need of charity?" They killed the servants for even asking them to come.

They, in turn, were killed. Their cities were destroyed. This was fulfilled, partially, in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. But this wasn't a wrath reserved for the Jews alone. So also was Persia destroyed, Rome, Alexandria, the Aztec empire, and all the ancient kingdoms. So will all the nations, kingdoms, and power bases of men be destroyed, because the world is evil.

This text falling on LWML Sunday has an inherent temptation to interpret this text with a mission appeal in hopes to guilt you into working harder to win the lost. It can easily turn into getting you to focus on where you are not working hard enough, then turn you loose with the command to go and work harder; thereby centering the whole thing on your work. That is not what this text is about. This is a warning. The uncomfortable truth is God doesn't need you. It is His Kingdom. He'll take care of it. You can't convince the devil to believe. You can't hog-tie people and bully them into the Gospel. You pray, and teach, and do the work God has given you to do; but He is the one who gives the growth. God is the one who invites and gives the garment. He calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps.

Even though God doesn't *need* you, He *wants* you. Yes, He wants you to do good works including evangelism. He wants you to reach out to your neighbors, live in love towards your enemies, and raise your children in proper, God-fearing homes. What you need to hear, it is not your fault that most people reject God; and it should not surprise you that they do. While everyone has been reconciled to the Father in the death of the Son, not everyone wants it. Most refuse it. This parable is not for them. It is for you. You need to be warned that not everyone in the world goes to heaven and you can't fix that.

You also need to be warned that not everyone who goes to Church goes to heaven either. Some seem to come in, but they don't. They are like Simon the Sorcerer in

Acts 8. They want the power of Christianity, but not the cross. Some are like Herod, wishing to see some miracle, curious but distant. Others are like Nicodemus before his conversion, coming by night, speaking out of both sides of their mouths, calling Jesus teacher on the one hand while insisting on their own way and understanding on the other. Whatever they are: they aren't Christians. They come to the hall but they will not be clothed by Christ. They lack the wedding garment and stand instead in their own garments.

It is possible to come to church and yet be a self-righteous, self-satisfied hypocrite. You can fool all the world but you can't fool God. The only way you come into the Kingdom is if you shirk your own righteousness and are clothed with His righteousness. This banquet is only for beggars who need a garment that was not their own.

This is great news if you know you're a beggar, but terrible news if you're not. Jesus says to you: "Take your own clothes off. Go in there and get sprayed down; rather drowned. You can't bring your junk in here. It is infected. It is death. It is no good." The prominence of the baptismal font in our sanctuary ever testifies to this uncomfortable reality. This place is for the poor in spirit, that is those who have nothing to bring before God but sin and failure and stench of death. This place is for the miserable who are tired of the sinful world, who live in misery of brokenness, the misery of the temptations of the devil. This is not good news if you aren't poor or miserable.

This parable is a call to repentance, and it is a promise of God's steadfast mercy. The servants gathered everyone they found. They made no distinction. This is good news for sinners and those who can't help themselves. It doesn't matter how poor in spirit, how short of the mark of God's commands you have fallen, how infected with sin, or contagious with iniquity you are. They are all gathered in, good and bad, clean and dirty, smart and stupid, industrious and lazy; everyone is clothed with the same gentle hands, and everyone eats of the same single Bread of Christ's Body, and everyone is proclaimed to be the very immaculate, stunning, and lovely Bride of Christ Himself: cleansed by Christ, fed by Christ, clothed by Christ, loved by Christ.

This is the essence of our religion. God does all the work. He provides all the

grace. You haven't been good enough. You don't deserve to be in His presence, to eat the Body and Blood of the risen Christ, to call Him Husband and to call His Father Our Father, but He wants all that for you, has paid for all of it that you might have it.

We seized and killed not just the messengers but also the very Son of God. Yet God welcomes us in as beloved children. We get what we tried to steal. We neglected or confused His doctrine and made up excuses, but He remains steadfast in His mercy. He gives us His Word. He speaks kindly to us and restores us with His absolution. In Word and Sacrament, He speaks us clean, declares us righteous. He gives us good works to perform not as punishment but because we are part of the family. He gives us a part of His Kingdom.

“Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord, “I am the burner of cities, the destroyer of Sodom and Jerusalem. I cast into darkness the one who refuses my garments who has neither faith nor good works. Yet, I choose to be merciful, to pardon, to reconcile. I declared war. Yet now, in My Son, at the proclamation of angels, I declare peace. I choose, from my sovereignty, to be generous and merciful, to raise the dead, to fill the banquet hall and the hearts of repentant sinners with joy. I say to him who has no money, ‘Come, buy and eat without money and without price.’”

The Kingdom of God is like a King who is unlike the kings of the earth. We live in this kingdom not by the lucky circumstances of birth or acts of violence but by grace in faith. But what if you are worried that your faith is insincere, that you are here without the wedding garment, that you are secretly a hypocrite and liar?

Repent and stop looking at your faith. Look to Jesus and to His Word instead. Trust the promises of God and look to the objective reality of what He has done, and said, rather than into our hearts or at our works. Our hope comes not from repentance or from our faith. Our hope is in the objective reality of Christ's sacrifice and promise. If you look to your faith, you will always find it lacking. If you look to your efforts, you will see that they are always infected by sin.

The question isn't “Do I believe in Jesus enough?” If it was, we'd be doomed. We haven't believed enough. The question is “Did Jesus die for the whole world and am I part of the world?” Yes. He did, and I am. There is my hope and comfort – not in my faith which is often weak and waning, but in God's grace and promise.

I am Baptized. He put His Name on me. I am not worthy of it. I don't live up to it. I sometimes try to forget it or doubt it. I have often betrayed it. Nonetheless, this is a historic fact. It happened. I am Baptized and I didn't do it myself. He did it. And when He did it He made a claim on me, and for me, that won't let go. Jesus did not die in vain and is not now dead. He died for me and He rose for my justification. I am not worthy, but I didn't invite myself. He invited me. He said, "Friend, come up higher." My heart is fickle. My reason and my conscience can lie and deceive, but His Word does not lie. He is the One who sent servants out to gather up the good and the bad from all the corners of the earth. The question isn't whether I am good or bad. The question is "Did He send them or not?" "Did He include even me?" "Was He sincere in this effort or not?" "Is the invitation valid or not?" The answer to all those questions is a resounding yes because God's Word is trustworthy and sure.

This is the message that is for you and for all people. The LWML focuses efforts and seeks to strengthen and help you in reaching the lost. It has many resources that are aimed at supporting you in Christian living as you work as parent, grandparent, family member and friend. In the bulletin you will find the LWML pledge; it says, "In fervent gratitude for the Savior's dying love and His blood-bought gift of redemption we dedicate ourselves to Him with all that we are and have; and in obedience to His call for workers in the harvest fields, we pledge Him our willing service wherever and whenever He has need of us. We consecrate to our Savior our hands to work for Him, our feet to go on His errands, our voice to sing His praises, our lips to proclaim His redeeming love, our silver and our gold to extend His Kingdom, our will to do His will, and every power of our life to the great task of bringing the lost and the erring into eternal fellowship with Him."

This message is often met with resistance or hostility. It may be rejected, but take heart. You can rejoice in knowing that the Lord is at hand. He is working, even when you can't see it. You are baptized. Your misery has been turned to joy. You have a place of rest and refreshment, here in the sanctuary of Immanuel. You have been found and restored, forgiven and cleansed, filled with joy.

The Lamb of God has been slain for the forgiveness of your sins, everything is ready. The Word of God's Son removes your heart of stone and gives you a beating heart of flesh. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, hangs upon the cross, died, and rose

again to supply the waters that make you clean. It is His blood that fills the basin, and coming up from that holy bath of baptism, everlasting life is given to you; a robe of white awaits you. You are covered in the precious baptismal robe, the wedding garment has been supplied; Christ covers you. He restores and refreshes. He provides everything. His blood your drink, His body your food.

Everything is given to you. Satan will still attack, but God is here. He has not left you nor has He forsaken you. This wedding banquet that has been prepared by the King is prepared for you; today is your day! Rejoice in the Lord always, for the Lord is at hand. Christ, the Lord, your heavenly bridegroom has said to you, "I will... I will take you to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, death will not ever part us, it has no victory, it has no sting...and I pledge to you my faithfulness." Amen.

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

Prayer of the Church**Twentieth Sunday after Trinity: 17 October 2021**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love. Because You desire not the death of a sinner but that all would repent and live. Hear our prayers for those outside the Church. Take away their iniquity, and turn them from their false gods to You, the living and true God. Gather them into Your holy Church to the glory of Your name. Magnify the power of the Gospel in the hearts of Your faithful people that Your Church may spread the good news of salvation. Protect, encourage, and bless all who do the mission work of Your Kingdom, parents, grandparents, family members, friends, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, and all missionaries at home and abroad, in all homes and places where Your people dwell. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your kingdom come, O Lord. Preserve the invitation of Your saving Gospel among us, that many may come into Your Son's eternal wedding feast. Protect and vindicate Your servants who preach and teach Your Word, and guard their families from those who oppose their ministry and way of life. Open our ears to listen diligently to Your living and life-giving Word. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O merciful Father in heaven, because You hold in Your hand all the might of man and because You have ordained, for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do well, all the powers that exist in all the nations of the world, we humbly pray You graciously to regard Your servants, especially Joseph, our President; the Congress of the United States; Kim, our Governor; and all those who make, administer, and judge our laws; work repentance and faith in our leaders that all who receive the sword as Your ministers may bear it according to Your Word; bless and strengthen those who work in the emergency services of our land, police, firefighters and medical personal, and those in the public services of our armed forces, Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Steve and Tanner*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; 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 *Finn, Pam, and Kris* 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 *Richard & Esther* 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.**

Father of mercies and God of all comfort, our only help in time of need, look with favor upon Your servants that suffer in body and soul, the homebound, the sick, the lonely, the downtrodden, and all who have requested our prayers, especially *Carmen, Susan, Zoey, Donna, Floyd, Tricia, David, Mark, Joyce, and those we name in our hearts*. Assure them of Your mercy, deliver them from the temptations of the evil one, and give them patience and comfort according to Your good and gracious will. If it please You, restore them to health, and give them grace to walk through these tribulations with courage and hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Forgive us our trespasses, O Lord, in this Supper prepared through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and delivered according to His testament. Gathered together with Your guests, lead us to forgive those who trespass against us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Spare us from all temptations, Lord, and deliver us from evil. In true repentance, lead us to forsake our wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts and return to You for abundant pardon, seeking You while You may be found, that when Christ returns in His glory, we may not be cast into the outer darkness but welcomed into His everlasting wedding hall by grace; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

