

**Judica (Fifth Sunday in Lent): April 7, 2019**

**“Doctrine: A Matter of Life and Death”**

Grace, Mercy and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text for this morning is our Gospel Lesson, John 8, especially these words, “**John 8:51.**”

This Sunday in Lent is known as Judica Sunday; the Latin word for judge. As we are one week now from Holy Week, we turn our attention to the reality of being judged. What is to be judged? Christ shows in our Gospel lesson, both your doctrine and your life. Both of these are important to Our Father in Heaven, as they both are connected to the holiness of God’s Name. In the First Petition we pray, *“God’s name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be kept holy among us also. How is God’s name kept holy? God’s name is kept holy when the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, and we, as the children of God, also lead holy lives according to it. Help us to do this, dear Father in heaven! But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to God’s Word profanes the name of God among us. Protect us from this, heavenly Father!”*<sup>1</sup>

The Word of God is to be grasped with the entirety of your being. It should be listened to carefully with both ears, earnestly taken hold of with a believing heart, and continually put into practice with your body. Many today will look to your life first, and while it is part of it, consider this: doctrine comes from God, life is seen by man. Think of this today, especially in light of many false preachers. False doctrine harms many men. It forces men to hear wrongly, and so how can they not but profane the Name of God among us. Protect us from this Heavenly Father! A bad life, on the other hand, typically affects the one who is living badly.

This is how one can tell the difference between Children of God, and children of the devil. Children of God hear God’s Word, receive it with a believing heart, and conform their lives to it, confessing that the salvation and blessedness of all men stands only in God’s Word, as Romans declares, “***I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.***”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Luther’s Small Catechism, First Petition

<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:16

But the children of the devil, however godly and holy they appear, cannot hear God's Word. They refuse to let their own works, their own deeds be rejected. They want God to accept them based on at least some of their own merits.

Judica Sunday finds Jesus doing battle against false teaching. False teaching is the devil's, first, and truly, most deadly weapon. It was false doctrine that led Adam and Eve to act against God's Word. This is why the Lord Jesus repeatedly condemns it. God reserves His harshest judgment for those who promote false and soul destroying doctrine. 1 Kings 18 is but one example. After the altar of Baal failed to produce results, and the altar of God was consumed by fire from heaven, what do you find? The people got to repent. They were given opportunity to turn and again confess the One True God. The false teachers, the prophets of Baal and the prophetesses of Asherah, were not given the same. They were all killed; condemned to death for leading people away from God.

Jesus showed compassion to thieves, prostitutes, and every kind of sinner you can imagine; for those who taught falsely, He spoke very harshly. Against false teaching, you see the Jesus that many Christians don't like to talk about, because He is not the fun, happy-go-lucky, chipper dude. Perhaps at no point in His recorded ministry does Jesus speak as strongly against false teaching and false teachers as He does this morning. Hear again what He says to those teaching false doctrine, ***"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murder from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe Me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."***<sup>3</sup>

For many, to speak dogmatically on any topic is to be considered rude; that is, to speak about doctrine, about teaching, about the actual confession of the truth that is true for all people and all times, is considered fanatical today. Everyone is quick to want to be a teacher, but only if they can speak their own truth. They want to tell their own story, as if their story is the only one that matters, as if their story is the one that saves. To speak of life is easy, to speak of doctrine seems strange, so many

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<sup>3</sup> John 8:44-47

seek to avoid it.

Read the Gospels. Jesus spoke dogmatically, a lot. He suffered abuse and mockery in patient silence. When He was insulted, He did not reply. They called Him a Samaritan. He ignored it. Jesus lived a life of deep humility. His humble obedience led him to His death on the cross. He did what He did in obedience to His Father, and suffered in humility.

But when they questioned His doctrine, His teaching, His claims about the truth, He set aside the spirit of meekness and spoke out with the full assurance and conviction that He was telling the truth. That is because doctrine belongs to God.

How different Jesus is from so many popular preachers of our day. The ecumenical movement, with its endless dialogues, joint statements on this and that, all designed to paper over doctrinal differences with theological doublespeak, where nobody ever says that anybody is actually wrong, has done its damage. Contending for the truth is regarded as a sign of fanaticism. Asserting ONE truth is considered hostile. To speak of ONE truth, denies many truths. It means that there is A RIGHT AND A WRONG. So the contentions fly in, "Can we really know what is true?"

Jesus says we can. He speaks the truth without compromise. In this debate between Jesus and the Jews, Jesus makes claims about Himself that no one has ever been able to refute. He makes claims about who He is. He makes claims about what He can give.

Who is He? He claims to be sinless. He claims to speak the truth. He challenges anyone to find sin in Him. No one can. There is no sin to be found. He is unique. He is unlike any other preacher who has ever preached. Compare Jesus to leaders of other religions. Could the Buddha, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, the Dali Lama, L. Ron Hubbard, Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer, or Pat Robertson challenge the world to find any fault with them or their teaching? Their sins and errors are clear to everyone with eyes to see. But nobody can find fault in Jesus. Even those who reject His teaching have to admit to His holy life.

He is of God. He is eternally begotten of the Father. He doesn't glorify Himself. His glory is the Father's glory for He is from the Father. He is not from the Father

as the creation is from the Creator. He is of the same substance as the Father. He is the only begotten of the Father. He shares the same nature as the Father. This is the same nature that the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, has.

He is God in the flesh. He is before Abraham. Abraham saw him. He saw the Holy Trinity by the appearance of three men as recorded by Moses in Genesis chapter eighteen. He saw Christ on Mount Moriah when his son, his only son, Isaac, was spared, and God promised the Lamb who took Isaac's place on the altar. Abraham trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin two thousand years before he was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man. He rejoiced to see Christ.

Truly, truly, I say to you, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." "I am" is the name of the God who met Moses at the burning bush. Before He gave Himself the name "I am," He called Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Abraham's God is "I am." Jesus said to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am." They knew what He was claiming. He was claiming to be God. That's why they picked up stones to stone him.

Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Listen to Him. The prophets said, "Thus says the Lord." They knew that the truth of God came to them from outside of them, from the Lord. It didn't originate within them. But Jesus says, "I say to you." "Truly, truly, I say to you." Literally, "Amen, amen, I say to you." The truth lies within Jesus. He knows the Father. All that the Father has is His. He is one with the Father. He is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity. God gives life. Jesus claims to be able to give eternal life. God in the flesh gives eternal life. Jesus Christ gives eternal life. He gives it because it is His to give.

While the claims of Jesus are most comforting, they are, at the same time, some of the most antagonistic words ever spoken. The comfort is for those who keep His words, that is, those who believe what He says and rely on the truth of His promises. He says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." To keep His word is to believe it. Jesus teaches that eternal life is received through faith in His word. It is His word that gives it. He speaks. His words give what is His to give. And there is no other way to receive eternal life;

there is no other way to have eternal life; there is no other way to heaven, to God, to the Father, than through faith in Jesus Christ. The most comforting claims are at the same time the most antagonistic.

Jesus said to Thomas, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.”***<sup>4</sup> He said to the crowd of people who followed him after the feeding of the five thousand, ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”***<sup>5</sup> He said to Nicodemus concerning Himself, ***“Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”***<sup>6</sup> His Apostle John, wrote, ***“Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”***<sup>7</sup> His Apostle Peter, preached, ***“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”***<sup>8</sup>

Words of the greatest comfort are words that cause the greatest offense. When He claimed that whoever kept His word would never see death, and when the Jews who claimed Abraham as their father challenged His claim, He proceeded to claim to be the God of Abraham, the very God who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. They were so enraged by His doctrine that they tried to stone Him right there in the temple – which, according to their own standards, would be a sacrilege.

What was it that so angered them? His claims offended their pride. Jesus still offends the proud and He always will. One must be “of God” to believe Jesus’ words. One must be born from above, born again, by the Holy Spirit, to keep, that is, to believe Jesus’ words. The Spirit who opens to you the kingdom of God by the new birth that He brings about in Holy Baptism is the Spirit who testifies with your spirit that you are children of God. He does so through the word that Jesus speaks. It is the word that you keep through faith. It is the word that gives you eternal life.

The word that gives us eternal life is from God. God had already revealed Himself

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<sup>4</sup> John 14:6

<sup>5</sup> John 6:53

<sup>6</sup> John 3:18

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 5:12

<sup>8</sup> Acts 4:12

to Moses at the burning bush. He had already revealed Himself through Moses at Sinai. His holy law revealed Him in His holiness. But nobody had ever kept the law God revealed to Moses on Sinai. Jesus is the only One who ever did. Jesus, who humbly submitted Himself to its demands, went to the cross to bear the sin of the world. The whole world was condemned by the judgment of God's law. God in the flesh, our Lord Jesus Christ, bore that judgment in His own body.

Nobody else obeyed. Nobody else suffered for the world's disobedience. Only Jesus, your God and your brother, obeyed and suffered. Only He can give eternal life. He gives it in His word. This is why He promises, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever keeps my word shall never see death.*"

It is the word of your baptism where you died and rose again, being joined to Christ's death and resurrection. It is the word of the Lord's Supper, where Christ's words make ordinary bread and wine to be His sacred body and blood by which your sins are forgiven. It is the word you hear in the absolution, in the sermon, in the Holy Scriptures, the word that tells you that God, for Christ's sake, is gracious to you and forgives you.

You don't get to heaven by dying. People die and go to hell every day. Jesus is the only One who gives eternal life and He gives it to you in His word. If Jesus hasn't given you eternal life, you don't have it. If He has given it to you, you have it and can die in peace. The words that anger the proud are the words of eternal life to those whom God has graciously humbled. May your gracious God humble you so that you toss aside all confidence in your flesh and entrust yourselves solely to Christ whose word gives you eternal life, and upon His cross, may you be judged. The Word Incarnate suffered in your place. "Jesus died and rose victorious That we may know God by grace."<sup>9</sup> Amen.

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

**Prayer of the Church**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent (Judica)**  
**7 April 2019**

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<sup>9</sup> Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness LSB 849:3

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. For all the baptized, that we would be led by the light and truth of God's Word to see, with Father Abraham, the day of our Lord Jesus Christ, when He went uncomplaining forth to the cross to suffer and die in our place to atone for our sins, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the men who have been called and ordained to preach the Gospel in its purity and administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution, that they would be blessed with faithfulness as they carry out their duties; and for an increase in the pastoral vocation, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our partner churches around the world with whom we share altar and pulpit fellowship, that they would be kept steadfast in the saving doctrine of the blessed apostles drawn from the Word of God, and that they would be blessed in their endeavors to share that saving doctrine with their communities, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For the gift of family, let us give thanks to the Lord; that the Lord would bless all families, protect them from harm and evil, give them hearts of love for one another, and provide for all their needs, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all those who have been placed in authority over us, that they would serve with integrity and honor, seeking to promote the common welfare of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who suffer in body and soul, [*especially Philip, Larry, Greg, and those we name in our hearts*] that they would be blessed with patience and strength, and that they would receive healing and restoration in accordance with the Lord's will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially his servant *Anna*, that they would grow in wisdom and grace, and that God would strengthen them to trust in His goodness all the days of their life, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all the saints who have gone before us and now reside in heavenly bliss, let us give thanks to the Lord; that we would be kept in the faith and, with them, receive the crown of glory as we enter into the life of the world to come when Christ returns on the Last Day, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**