



Pastor Gwen's Sermon
14th Sunday after Pentecost
"All In"
Sunday, August 25, 2024

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN!

This morning we have a continuation of last week's Gospel lesson and finally the end of our bread stories. It brings us to the conclusion that only Jesus has the words, in fact, He is the Word of eternal life. And folks we need to choose Him and Him alone.

Have you ever heard someone use the phrase, "going all out for something"? They went all out to celebrate the election of a certain politician. Or they went all out to celebrate the wedding of their only daughter. Maybe we should go all out to celebrate our new life in Jesus Christ.

When our son Frank, moved to Las Vegas, he found that two doors down from them was a guy that went to school with Tim, Frank' husband. I asked if he knew that they lived there and he said, "no". What a coincidence. Well, I asked what he did for a living and Frank said he was a professional poker player. Wow. I sure did not expect that. Didn't know that was actually a profession.

Well, I want to use a phrase today that Frank's neighbor uses quite often, I would imagine. That is, to go "all in". Those of you who might have played poker before, and you don't have to raise your hands, have surely heard this term. Of maybe you have heard it on TV as I see that the World Poker Tour is broadcast quite often on several stations. You might have caught an episode as it has become quite a popular sport? Might be more interesting than watching golf on TV. To me that is like watching grass grow. Well, anyway, when a poker player goes "all in" that means that he pushes all his chips, i.e., money into the middle of the table as his last bet. Sometimes I suspect it is a bluff or he may really have a super hand. The part of poker when you become a professional is when you can read your opponents and bet the right amount at the right time, so it is not just a game of chance.

To got all in, is making a commitment, in this case to your hand and the belief that you will win. And then it is up to the other players to figure out whether to fold or accept the challenge. Lots of

strategy here, which any professional player would not explain to you as that is how they make their living.

Well, if poker does not interest you, you might surf the channels and find a talk show. They are sometimes interesting to listen to experts and people with interesting life stories. Many have interviews with famous people and people with infamous dilemmas. Once in a while you will come across a talk show that tells you how to make lots of money. Or lose it in a hurry. Have you ever seen Wall Street Week? Well, that is another game of chance to me of investing in the stock market. You never know what our government will say or disclose that could make the stock market tumble.

Hopefully you have the ability to decide which experts to listen too, and which ones to avoid. And in order to do that you need what I would call wisdom, understanding and discernment. And I think that the same is true for our spiritual life. We need to know who to follow and whose words to listen to and take heed of them. I am pretty sure that you can guess, who I am talking about.

The good shepherd, Jesus, He said in John chapter 10 that, my sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I will give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one can snatch them out of my hand. Folks, Jesus is the one, the only one that can give us eternal life. We need to hear his words and we will find that they are true. Jesus after all, went "all in for us". He gave up his life on the cross for us, so we could have forgiveness of our sins and with His resurrection we receive eternal life. Jesus certainly told his followers this many times and it came true. Jesus talked the talk, and he walked the walk right to death on the cross. So, when Jesus says that whoever believes in Him will not be condemned but have eternal life, you can take that to the bank! You have already won the jackpot, that is if you believe that it is true.

I know that several of you have had situations where you felt caught between life and death. Well, I felt that way, the Dr told me I had breast cancer. A shock certainly, especially since I had walked with my mother as she died of the same. When the shock wears off, you see life more clearly. And what you see is that you need to reconnect or be sure of the connection to the One who has the words of eternal life. I needed to strengthen my connection to Jesus. And by the grace of God, that happened. I am sure many of you have had similar situations where you have felt the need for God more than ever before and you delve into His Word, you pray, you seek the strength of the Lord. I hope you too have felt showered with God's love at those times in your life, just like I did.

This Chapter 6 of John has explained to us over and over again about bread, the bread from heaven Jesus Christ. From the manna in the wilderness to feeding the 5000 to being the living bread from heaven which we all must eat; Jesus tells us nothing but the truth. And eating of Jesus is probably the most difficult of the teachings to grasp. We get it now as we have the stories of the Last Supper where Jesus instituted the His special meal that we now celebrate as Holy Communion today. Many of Jesus' followers did not trust and walked away from him. They just could not see themselves eating the body of Jesus. It sounded too much like cannibalism to them and they walked away. So, Jesus asks his disciples if they are leaving too and then good old Peter pops up and answers Jesus, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God".

WOW! What is statement of faith. Peter and the disciples are "All in"! Sometimes we think of Peter as impulsive and hot-tempered, but he got this right. Jesus is the only one we can go to for our salvation. In Acts 4:12 Peter says to the council of Jewish leaders, "There is salvation in no one else,

for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” Here Peter is quite bold about his faith. A good lesson for us.

When it comes to eternal life, I think it is rather easy to bet on Jesus. He is the only one offering such a gracious gift that we all desire. And since he went “all” in for us His word must be good, but what about investing our faith and life in Jesus. There are times when that is not as easy. Sometimes, we hesitate and hold back sort of like those folks who left Jesus after he told them they should eat His flesh and drink His blood. So yes, we are not so different. Different pressures of life today, but still the weakness of faith that the devil gets excited about. We pick what teachings of Jesus we want to follow and avoid the hard ones. One of the hardest is to love your neighbor as yourself. That is immeasurably the most difficult for people and it really is a summation of seven of God’s commandments. Can we truly love someone who is a different color than us, has different religious beliefs, different political views, commits crimes or hurts us in some way. Yes, we are to love as Jesus loves us, means we won’t get our way all the time. It means that we don’t criticize others but rather build them up. It means that we will support each other and put their needs first. We do need to change; society needs to change desperately. And we need to show the way how to do that.

We cannot avoid any of the words of Jesus We cannot pick and choose. We must go “all in” because He is the Word of eternal life! So even though some of his teaching challenge us, we cannot turn away from Him.

As we look forward to eternal life with Jesus in heaven, he gives us new life in Him on earth. Jesus is the Lord of the here and now as well as our future. Today’s Gospel invites us to go “all in” for Him. He is truly the Holy One of God.

As I look around this sanctuary this morning, I see people who have a deep personal relationship with Jesus. I see people who wake up each day with a song of thanksgiving in their hearts. I see people who forgive others as Jesus forgives them. I see people in whom the word of God dwells richly. I see people who encourage others in their spiritual walk. I see brothers and sisters in Christ. I see many in our church family who pray without ceasing. I see those of you who help one another in a time of crisis. I see others of you that have eternal hope. I see many who do talk the talk and walk the walk of Jesus. I see people who are truly “all in” for Jesus. I am blessed to have spoken to you who are “all in” this morning. AMEN