

Judica (5th Sunday in Lent): March 26, 2023

“The Who, What, Where, When, and Why of Judging?”

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

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!”*¹

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!

On judgment Sunday, it is easy to get the idea of judgment twisted around. We don’t like to be judged, but we like to do the judging. The sinful nature likes to believe that it knows everything and so it has nothing left to hear, or learn, or be corrected in any way whatsoever.

There is a great tension here that exists, as we are to judge, but not according to our own judgments. We are to constantly judge; however, it must be fair and only upon the basis of God’s eternal word.

¹ Luther’s Small Catechism, First Petition

Where God Himself has not given direct and clear judgments, we cannot speak beyond His Word. I would urge you instead to think of Jesus' healing of the blind man in John 9, ***“As [Jesus] passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work.’”***² The results of living in a sinful world means not only dealing with sinners like ourselves, but it also means living in a world corrupted with disease, decay, and death.

These days give but more and more showings of God's grace, and many opportunities for the mercy of God to be given to His people, and shown through His people. Working while it is day, while the light is here, the works of God are displayed in the Son of God, and what work does He do?

This is the very basis of our Epistle reading from Hebrews. Hebrews is a sermon written to Jews who had converted to Christianity. It presupposes that those who hear the sermon have knowledge of the sacrificial system both as it was prescribed in Leviticus, as well as the current practices of the temple in Jerusalem.

From the Old Testament, the Israelites understood the Temple was an earthly copy of the heavenly reality. From the outer courts to the inner courts to the holy place to the most holy place, the earthly structure was an earthly imitation of the heavenly temple. Of course, it is more than just a mere facsimile, it is an actual place where God Himself dwells and rules, speaks and works.

What was not understood by those outside of the faith, was the temple was actually teaching towards Jesus. Every function, every structure, every work, every furnishing of the temple all taught something about the coming Christ, and Jesus fulfilled every single one of them.

Our text from Hebrews focuses on the specific act of sacrifice. One cannot understand the importance of this act, unless one first understands blood. Blood is the life-sustaining biological necessity of a human being.

² John 9:1-4

After Adam named every animal, and then fell into sin, God sacrificed animals and made garments of skin for Adam and Eve.³ These served as a very visceral reminder of their sin, AND of God’s mercy to cover their sin.

Genesis 9 records God saying, “***You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning.***”⁴ Hebrews 9, just a few verses after our text for this morning, we read, “***Under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.***”⁵ Under the Law, restitution had to be made. The animals that Adam named will stand in man’s place and shed their blood to cover the sins of man. This was to teach that the innocent, sacrificial Lamb of God, would shed His blood to take away the sins of all mankind.

The High Priest would make atonement for the sins of Israel once a year by the blood of a lamb, the Great High Priest, Jesus Himself, would sacrifice Himself. He would give his innocent lifeblood, as He bore the name Jesus—the one who would save His people from their sins.

The works of God through the Old Testament were manifested through the work of the priests. The priests of the Old Testament had very specific tasks and very important tasks. They were set aside to keep the holy things of God holy. They were to do the actions of the ceremonial law. They were to teach, intercede for the people of God, and they were charged with conducting the sacrifices. They served as mediators between God and man.

They were not to institute their own policies or design their own works. They simply were to be administrators, overseers and doers of the things given to them. They were not called to be inventive or innovative; rather, they were called to be faithful. At the ordination of the first priests God declared, “***You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean, and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the Lord has spoken to them by Moses.***”⁶

³ Genesis 3:21

⁴ Genesis 9:4-5

⁵ Hebrews 9:22

⁶ Leviticus 10:10-11

Why? Because God desired to be with His people. Through the works done by the priests, because they found their fulfillment in Jesus, God was able to do this. The shedding of blood done by God for Adam, was carried out by His priests, until it was done by Him again as He shed His blood on the cross. Judgment for sin demanded restitution, and full payment was made by the Son of God and Son of Man on the Hill of Golgotha.

In great beauty among great sadness, our brother Jesus Christ, puts on our lips to pray, “Deliver us from evil. We are accustomed to praying the last petition of the Lord’s prayer as: “Deliver us from evil.” That works fine, but there is a definite article in the Greek. It is literally “Deliver us from the evil.” That suggests that we are asking for deliverance either from the evil one or from the evil beings. Either way, and even if we just pray for deliverance from evil, the Bible teaches us that evil is not a disembodied abstract reality. God is not the source of evil. The devil is.

The Augsburg Confession confesses, *“It is taught among us that although almighty God has created and still preserves nature, yet sin is caused in all wicked men and despisers of God by (their) perverted will. This is the will of the devil and of all ungodly men; as soon as God withdraws his support, the will (of unbelievers and the devil) turns away from God to evil. It is as Christ says in John 8:44, “When the devil lies, he speaks according to his own nature.”*⁷

We tend to be far less aware of the spiritual world than our ancestors were. We think that between us right now there is nothing but air, that it is empty. But God is omnipresent. To say “Our Father who art in heaven” is not to stick God into the upper atmosphere. Rather it is to say “Our Father who is all around us, in the air we breathe, in the space between electrons and neutrons, in the deepest part of the ocean, on the highest mountain, and in deepest space. Wherever there is, God is there. He is everywhere and thus He is especially here, as He has promised, in His Word and Sacrament, and shields us from the other beings all around us.

⁷ Augsburg Confession Article XX: The Cause of Sin

We need Him to be around us because the demons are here also. In Ephesians 2 St. Paul writes, ***“(Christ) made you alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience.”***⁸

Satan is described as a prince who has the power of the air. Air is a reference to the invisible realm all about us. Again St. Paul writes, ***“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”***⁹

We need the God who is in the air to save us. Satan has power, but it is limited. He only has power over the demons and unbelievers, that is, over those who walk in darkness. Though they do not know it, he was the false god worshipped by the Jewish leaders who attacked Jesus in the Temple. That was why they sought to murder Him and were willing to tell lies to get it done. Their father the devil is a liar and a murderer from the beginning.

We live in a world in which Satan can appear good and God evil. Our God is the God who commanded Abraham to kill Isaac. Isaac was spared, of course, but the Father does sacrifice His only Son to reconcile Himself to His enemies. From a human point of view that seems evil, but in this case is the greatest good of all time. The Jewish leaders could not convict Jesus of sin, but they hated what He was doing, not just that He was threatening the status quo, but that He was loving the world. Since they rejected this, His love accused them and showed them for what they were.

We are tempted to do the same thing. We imagine that there are better ways for God to be God. This is blasphemy and it shows that we have listened to Satan. This lie is behind all our sins. Whenever we sin, we are thinking in our hearts that God is holding out on us or that we know better. We do not trust that what He says is not harmful or that He will provide us not just with all that we need, but that He will shower us with abundance. The God who laid down His own Life to buy us from darkness is not stingy or slack. Jesus does seek His own glory. He seeks the cross of our salvation. He steps into the breach and is lifted up to draw us to Himself.

⁸ Ephesians 2:1-2

⁹ Ephesians 6:12

Thus, we pray, “Deliver us from evil.” That summary petition embodies all our hope and need. We aren’t merely asking to be cleansed of spiritual flaws and made pure. We are asking that God make everything right. We are saying, “Defeat the devil for us for he is all around us. Pull us out of his kingdom for the sake of Your Kingdom.”

All the evil that infects and attacks us: poverty, disgrace, sickness, slander, oppression, injustice, loss of loved ones, greed, envy, and all the rest, every single bit of misery and heartache that humanity suffers, finds its source in the devil. He is not only a liar but a murderer as well. We must not heed his word; rather, we turn to God’s eternal word and listen to His word.

Do not then have any sympathy for the devil. He seeks your destruction. And because you are protected by Christ, he vents his anger by causing accidents and injury to our bodies, dividing families and countries, seeding envy and jealousy. He crushes some, drives others to despair, false, belief, and other great shame and vice; depravations that falsely promise comfort, even as he rewards others to lull them into false security.

He is a most dangerous foe, too powerful and clever for us alone. Therefore, we must heed God’s Word and pray without ceasing against him. We must insist and hold fast to the singular reality that God is control and works all things together for our good. For if God did not support us, we would not be safe from him for a single hour.

But, of course, God does support us. He is working out our salvation, chastening as we need, guiding us as is necessary. Hindsight will show how necessary it all was and how gentle. But for now we live by faith. We trust God’s Word and not the devil’s lies.

Jesus hid Himself that day in the Temple and slipped away unscathed, not because He was afraid or unwilling, but because the devil is not in control. As powerful as the he is and as weak as Christ makes Himself, nonetheless, He is still YHWH, God almighty. He picks the time and circumstances and all aspects of His crucifixion. No one takes His life from Him. He lays it down of His own accord and He takes it up again. This is the day that Abraham saw and in which He rejoiced, and so we rightly do the same. 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
Judica (Fifth Sunday in Lent)
26 March 2023**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Holy Father, You have received Your ascended Son back into the more perfect tent of heaven, His sacrifice complete. Give Your Church an abundance of peace, knowing that He has purified our consciences from dead works and prepared the way for us to our eternal inheritance. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, we thank You that You have made us Your holy people, cleansed and redeemed by the blood of Your Son. Grant that we, Your priests serving under Christ, our High Priest, may now offer living sacrifices in prayer and good works. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, You called Father Abraham to offer his beloved son to You, yet You spared him for the sake of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Help all godly parents to bring up their children in Your fear and love, to direct their ways according to Your Holy Word, and to commend them to Your fatherly care. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Uphold all civil authorities, especially Joseph, our president, and Kim, our governor. Preserve our nation in peace, and allow Your people to live quiet and peaceable lives in godliness and honesty. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, 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, *Marvin, Joe, Dennis, and June*, bless also those who celebrate another year of earthly life, especially *Chris and Joel Reuben*. 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 *Ben & Emily and Arnie & Joan* 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.**

Heavenly Father, do not cast down the souls in turmoil, but call them continually to Yourself and Your truth. Sustain especially *Marvin and Carol Stone, Zoey, Greg, Sandy, David, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, John and Helen Maddick, and those we name in our hearts*. Lighten their darkness, bring Your joy to their every sorrow and defend them against all evil. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, having heard Your righteous judgment against our sins and Your vindicating absolution, lead us by the light of Your truth to Your holy altar to receive the joys of forgiveness, life and salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, Your Son spoke the truth before His enemies even as they sought to trap Him in His words and deliver Him up to death. Rescue Your people from fear, and grant them courage to confess Your truth, assuring them of Your deliverance in time of trouble. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**