

Sermon Proper 9 2018

July 8, 2018

Mark 6:1-13

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our meditation this morning focuses on the Gospel Lesson previously read, especially these words: **“So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.”**

In this Gospel lesson, we hear the disciples sent out with the message of Jesus, the message of John the Baptist before him, the message of the Church in His stead after His ascension: the message of repentance. Now in this call to repent, we often think about this as a “change of mind.” And that’s true. That’s exactly what the disciples were calling people to. That’s exactly what we call people to still today, exactly what you are called to. But as I was studying this week, I found something interesting: this call to repent not only can be understood as a change of mind, but in a subtle nuance can also have the connotation of being a change in purpose. In other words, when the disciples **“went out and proclaimed that people should repent”** this call said that people needed to shift what they understood as the reason for their existence. Specifically, they needed to shift their purpose from being their own God to being the beloved of the true God. What does that mean?

Well to start, we like to be our own God, don’t we? I’ve talked about this a lot. We like what we like. We like to think it’s up to us to do it. Ultimately, we think it’s about us.

We see this in our culture. “I don’t care what your belief is, I’m going to trample on you.” “I don’t care that you have this need or that need, I’m going to do this and you can’t stop me.” “I don’t care that if I take a step back and look at things logically what I am doing is obviously harmful to myself and others, I am entitled to my rights.” It’s about me.

And we see this in the church too. As an example, look around, there’s the millennial service, the contemporary service, the praise band service, the polka service, the jazz service, the Taize service, the acoustic service, the cowboy service, the seeker service, and that’s just what I thought of off of the top of my head. If you don’t like one service pick another. Is that what church is about? Is that why we’re here? And as I say this, this is something we see across denominations. I hear of

Catholics who go to contemporary services because they “don’t like” the repetition of the liturgy. I hear of Lutherans who go Eastern Orthodox because they “like” the unity of their church around a high liturgy, better than the diversity they see amongst Lutherans. And even as Lutherans I often hear of how one hymn’s music is too much of an upper, or how this music is too much of a downer, or too simple or too complicated. Do we come to church to satisfy our tastes for how we worship God? Of course, that betrays something doesn’t it? To take a second and reorient ourselves, do we first come to church to give something to God?

No. God doesn’t need our worship, instead, it’s first about God giving to us. That’s why you’ll hear me criticize things like this in the church. It’s not that I just don’t like contemporary worship because I don’t like the music. I listen to a lot of music that’s “contemporary” outside of church. It’s not even about the music per se—although I do think that there is a lack of reverence stylistically in a lot of that. I don’t think it reflects the picture we see in Scripture when people are the presence of God, as we find ourselves in the service. No it’s more about the word. The music is there to support what is being said. And what should that be? The work of Jesus for you. There is a lot of music that focuses on me, on what I’m going to do, even how God makes me feel. And a little of that is OK, you see some of that in the Psalms: “I will praise you o Lord...” but then what do you see? Praising of God. Confession of what He has done. Proclamation of His salvation. That the Lord is the One who has rescued us, redeemed us. Made us His beloved. In fact, I’ll admit something. I am a Lutheran pastor who does not really like the tune for A Mighty Fortress. I can’t tell you why, it just doesn’t fit my tastes. But you know what? I wouldn’t change it. First of all to be clear, the biblical nature of the words, the Christian confession of the lyrics is superb. So that’s part of the reason I love the hymn. But you know why I wouldn’t change the tune? Not because Luther wrote it. Not because it’s old. No, first of all because it supports the words so well. It carries them. It exalts them. It puts the focus on what’s being said and reflects it at the same time. I don’t get distracted and caught up in the music in itself. Sure I maybe sometimes think I don’t like it, but it’s not about me. It’s about the Word of God confessed in the song. And so often we don’t think like this.

But you know what this reflects? It reflects our desire to have what we want and how we want it. It reflects that we are more concerned about our tastes, about how something makes us feel, or not feel than we are about God’s word. In other

words we're more concerned about our preferences than what is really biblical. And I think we can see the sinful divisiveness in this when we look at the mass of differing kinds of services. Has the Church always reflected such fracturing? To be sure, there has been some measure of difference in local practice. And that tells us that this doesn't have to be done according to only the old red hymnal page 15 in every time and every place. But what we see now, shows a consumerism that thinks that Church is just another product that should be tailored to my tastes. In short we want to dictate this, we want to be God. That's what we see our underlying purpose to be.

But what does the call to repent tell me? It tells me that my purpose is not to be God, instead it tells me that it is to be beloved by God. It tells me that my sin and my self-centeredness pushes me from God. It pushes me to hide from God like we've been referencing with the fall a number of times lately. It pushes me to hide from God and to think it's about my own tastes, my own preferences. Even that it's about my ability to sustain myself, to be good enough myself. But it's not about me. It's about the goodness of God given to me. It's about me being moved from the state of being God's enemy, to being beloved by Him, to being the object of His affection.

If I understand correctly, you all read "The Purpose Drive Life" a few years ago. I'll admit I haven't read it. But I have to ask did it say that it's not about you, but it's about being beloved by God? From what I understand it did say it's not about you. But then it proceeded to talk about how you had to do all of these things. But what does that say to hear that your purpose is to be beloved by God?

When I phrase it like this it sounds like perhaps I'm shifting something because I'm not focusing on sin, or rather toward good works. But look at this being beloved by God from the beginning. Look at the state of Adam and Eve in the beginning. What did they do? Well we don't get a lot of insight, but we know that they lived in a state of dominion. But what did that mean? Interestingly, it appears to mean that the plants of the garden provided for all that they needed. The animals served their enjoyment. Did they have to do anything? It doesn't specify. It's clear though, that they were sustained utterly by God. Does that mean I'm advocating a leisurely life only full of hedonistic pleasures? Not in the least. We can't assume that our life in this broken and fallen world would be a perfect reflection of the goodness we saw in Eden. But all of this does tell us something about God caring for us.

In fact, in a way it says what the Lord said to Paul in our Epistle lesson: **My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.** Think about that.

Isn't that statement another way of saying, "I have done it and will do it all for you?" Isn't it another way of saying that your purpose is that you be beloved by God? Isn't that grace being sufficient is another way of saying, "stop thinking it's about what you do, but that God has done is enough?" To be clear, does that mean there isn't a calling from God for you to love? Does that mean that you aren't supposed to do good works? No, if you ignore that call you're returning to wanting to be your own God. In other words if you hear the commandments and do what you would want to do instead, that's wanting to be your own God, to rebel against God. That is the Old Adam, the sinner and He needs to be drowned and die, through daily contrition and repentance as Luther says. But in the end it tells you that God created you that He could love you. You were created in His image to reflect that love, so we don't ignore that. But what we see is that it comes from Him.

To put this in the context of what we see in the Gospel Lesson, we see the disciples going out. We see them proclaiming this message of repentance, and we see them healing, right? In other words, they are going out to tell people how they are to change their mind, change their purpose with regard to their sin. They are to hear what God commands, and to heed that command knowing that they are wrong, knowing that God calls them away from their sinful self-centeredness to a new life, to life in Christ. To the life centered around God, around His will, around His desires, around His love. The life where His grace is sufficient for them because their sin has been crucified with Jesus, declared forgiven in His resurrection.

And Christians that same call comes to you. Repent. Repent of your sinfulness. Repent of your self-centered desires to ignore God's Word, to ignore His commands. Repent of your delusion that you are good enough to deserve His grace. Repent of your desire to make even worship of Him about your tastes rather than His promises to come to you in His Word and serve you with forgiveness and with Jesus' body and blood. Repent and cling to that cross of Jesus. That cross with His blood spoken into your ears. That cross with its death into which baptism buried you. That cross with Jesus' body which He gives you in His supper. And as I say all of that, do you hear it? Do you hear who's doing the doing? He is. He's calling you to repent of thinking it's about you, to instead trusting that He has done it all for you. That it's about Him loving you, caring for you, providing for you now and eternally. It's about His purpose for you not being something you do, but first and foremost about His grace which is eternally sufficient for you. It always has been and will be forever. Amen.