

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

First Sunday after the Epiphany (2020)

Out of the Mouths of Babes

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“And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”” (Luke 2:49, ESV)

Our text for today has great significance for you and me as followers of Christ not just because these are the first words of our Lord Jesus recorded in Holy Scripture, but because of what He says. He tells us of His necessity of being in His Father’s house. Not because He requires shelter, but because He must be about His Father’s business. Jesus is laying down the Law for His devotion to His Father, whether it is worshipping His Father in His house or in doing the will of His Father, proclaiming His Father’s Word among men. Thus, in His response to His mother, Jesus informs us that we who confess allegiance to Him, who confess our necessity of being in His Father’s house, are those who also confess that we are to be about His Father’s business.

Being about God’s business is not an easy undertaking, especially for corrupted humanity. Truth is, of ourselves we would never be about God’s business. Our desire is to be about the world and worldly business. We can only accomplish God’s divine work when He wills to pour out His grace upon us through the Holy Spirit, thereby giving us the gift of faith to believe and the desire to be obedient. However, this gift is not received by everyone, and those who do not receive the gift of faith have an exceedingly difficult time understanding those of who do. In fact, they generally despise people of faith considering them to be unintelligent and somewhat less than human. One prominent anti-Christian voice declared that believers in Christ are nothing more than red-neck rubes who clutch to their guns and Bibles. Yet, in our text for today, Jesus says I must be about my Father’s business and as His followers, as people of faith, we, too, are to be about His Father’s business.

As I said earlier, the words of our text this morning are our Lord’s first recorded words in Scripture. Then the Gospel Reading for today tells us that Jesus returned to Nazareth with His parents and there He grew into manhood as an obedient child, increasing, ***“in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” (Luke 2:52, ESV)*** Growing into adulthood, He took on the mantle of prophet, priest and king and had much to say about the Law and Gospel of God while also working numerous miracles.

During His ministry He called the Twelve to be His apostles and He sent them out to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand. As they went, He told them; ***“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes. “A disciple is not above his***

teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.” (Matthew 10:16–25, ESV) Our Lord Jesus makes it clear; persecution will surely come to those who proclaim Him as Lord.

These words of Christ from the Gospel of Matthew are extremely important for you to remember today, especially because of the events of the past week, those events which occurred in our nation’s capital and those that have followed. The rhetoric coming from politicians and the media since that event is most troublesome. In fact, it is a harbinger of their desire for retribution. An entire class of people are being marginalized. Oh, they would have the world believe it is because of their non-support for a certain political candidate, but nothing could be further from the truth. The true reason they are attempting to suppress freedom is to suppress faith in Christ Jesus and His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. These shamans of sin who make up the media and politics do not have faith in Christ Jesus, and they consider all who have faith in Him to be insane, diluted, or foolish. But it is not because they are atheist. No, no. Far from it. They have their gods, but their gods are opposed to the God of Creation and His Commandments for life.

Our heavenly Father says, ***“You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20:3, ESV)*** yet these elites’ worship at the altar of the god of abortion, sexual immorality, slander, hate, lust, corruption, greed, theft, coveting, blasphemy, murder, and every other god who opposes the one true God and His Commandments. So they are not godless, they simply worship false gods. St. Paul said it best, ***“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” (Romans 1:19–23, ESV)***

Since the foolish assault on the capital by a misguided mob, there is now no longer a need for those who worship other gods to suppress their hatred or their loathing of those whom they call religious zealots, fools, narrow minded boobs, and any other number of derogatory names. Slander against Christians in the halls of congress is and has been for too long, acceptable. Therefore, there is now serious political consideration to clamp down on the First Amendment rights of the freedom of speech and the establishment of and free exercise of religion. Through government fiat, laws are being considered, and will be introduced, that will create serious impediments to the proclamation of the God’s Word, its condemnation of sin and sinners and its offer of forgiveness and reconciliation. It has not yet taken form in legislation, but such legislation is merely a breath away from becoming a law that will make proclaiming Law and Gospel hate speech. It is coming.

To say that such legislation would be burdensome upon the church and create persecution of faithful pastors and laity is an understatement. But we fear not. Again, we remember when Jesus gave His instructions to the Twelve, He also said, ***“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:26–28, ESV)***

“Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” The godless should take notice of these words. Words which give them a minute glimpse into their future if they refuse to repent and ask Christ for forgiveness. Today they live in mansions eating cake, but if they should be called by God from this world while refusing to repent of their sins, while refusing to believe in the forgiveness of sins won by Christ on the Altar of the Cross, they will find themselves living in the sewers of hell for all eternity, eating Satan’s bile. Not a pleasant or peaceful thought.

So how do we as followers of Christ prepare for this persecution to come? No differently than we prepare for it now, being about our heavenly Father’s business.

The Gospel Reading for today tells us that Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover. This was the Covenant Law of Israel, every year on the 14th day of the first month the people were to gather in Jerusalem to observe the feast of Passover. Today, we who are followers of Christ understands holy Communion through the interpretive lens of the Passover. But rather than once a year as the Passover was celebrated, holy Communion is celebrated weekly. Moreover, the killing of the Passover lamb is understood symbolically as the killing of the paschal Lamb, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. So when we hear the words of consecration, **“Take, eat; this is my body.” (Matthew 26:26, ESV) “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matthew 26:27–28, ESV) and “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:25, ESV)** we are reminded of the Passover when God saved His people from the angel of death by the shedding of the blood of a Lamb. We are reminded that our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who went to the Altar of the Cross to secure the forgiveness of sin. The sins of all men! Including those who do not worship Him, even those who reject His Father, and those who seek after false gods. None are excluded.

Current events also remind us that throughout the history of God’s people there have always been times of persecution and leaders who actively led the people away from God. We are reminded of Manasseh who manipulated and seduced the people of Israel into worshipping false gods. He offered his own sons on the altar of Moloch, enticing the people of Israel to do the same. He led the people of Israel to do more evil than the Canaanites or the Amorites, leading them to reject the God of their fathers and do what was evil in His sight. Such was the corruption of his government. The people were enticed into sin, seeking witches, soothsayers, necromancers, and so called “wise” people, all of whom led the people away from God and straight to hell. Such was Manasseh’s reign until God had had enough. **“Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.” (2 Kings 21:12–15, ESV)**

So God brought in the Assyrians who captured Manasseh, binding him with hooks and chains and carried him off to Babylon. There, deprived of his throne, in abject misery, Manasseh cried out to God, humbling himself, repenting of his sins and God forgave him. (2 Chron. 33:13)

Are we not all Manasseh’s? Are we not all sinners? Sure we are. Oh, we are not of those who actively lead others into sin, but we sin none-the-less. And mercifully we have the same God as the God to whom Manasseh cried out; our Lord Jesus’ heavenly Father who for the sake of His sons atoning sacrifice on the Altar of the Cross forgives our sins and who is willing to forgive the sins of those in our country who would denigrate Him, deny Him, and persecute His followers.

As Lutheran Christians we are mindful of our obligation to obey those whom God has put over us, including those in government; Fourth Commandment. But we are also mindful of the words of Isaiah who said of Jesus, ***“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.”*** (Isaiah 9:6–7, ESV)

His government is the kingdom of God to whom we belong through the blessed waters of Baptism. It is to Him first that we owe allegiance and obedience. As followers of Christ, we are reminded that when we are denigrated and persecuted by government or other authorities, we must respond as did St. Peter and St. John before the Sanhedrin; ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”*** (Acts 4:19–20, ESV); ***“We must obey God rather than men.”*** (Acts 5:29, ESV) For ***“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*** (Acts 4:12, ESV) In the face of persecution and death we are also reminded of the words of the sainted Rev. Dr. Martin Luther who said, “The true Christian pilgrimage is not to Rome or Compostela, but to the prophets, the Psalms, and the Gospels.” Furthermore, we stand with Luther against the heretics, saying, “Our conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.”

Out of the mouth of the twelve-year-old Christ came words of great wisdom, ***“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?”*** Thus, we must be about the business of God proclaiming the forgiveness of sins in the name of His holy Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, go forth from here with His words on your lips. Go forth from here knowing that no matter what transpires in the days to come, you are a child of God, robed in His Son’s righteousness, forgiven, and promised eternal life. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the Peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.