

Sermon Proper 14 2018

August 12, 2018

John 6:35-51

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

“This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” The will of God is that we would have faith, and not just that we would have faith abstractly, but that we would have faith in Jesus. His desire is that we would look at our sin, that we would despise it—not give in to it, love it, or embrace it, but hate it. And His desire then is that we would look to that cross of Jesus, look upon the Son on the cross and trust that on that cross is our life. His will is that we would look at that broken and beaten carpenter from Nazareth and know that He is the One who was sent to be the bread of life.

Of course this faith truly is hard, isn't it? I don't mean just saying, “Oh yeah, I'm going to heaven because Jesus died for my sins,” and then that faith having no bearing upon your life, your perspective, your daily activities. No, I'm talking about a faith that's living and active. It's hard, isn't it?

Yes. Yes, it is. In fact, I know I've pointed this out, but think about the Third Article of the Creed, the article on the Holy Spirit, and think about what we say in Luther's Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.” Take a part of that line out and you see we're saying, “I believe that I cannot believe.” I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus. I believe that unless the Holy Spirit gives me the very faith which clings to our Lord, I just can't do it. Why not? Because I am so stuck in my own sin. I am so dead in my trespasses. I am so corrupted, I can't do it.

And that's just what we see in our Old Testament Lesson this morning. Here we have the prophet Elijah. That great Prophet of the Old Testament. The prophet whose faithfulness was so great that He stood on the mount of Transfiguration with Moses when Jesus showed forth His glory. And yet in this morning's lesson we hear of his trial and his doubt. Here he is in the wilderness and he's so afraid of the wicked queen Jezebel that he's ready for God just to take his life then. **“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he**

asked that he might die, saying, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.'"

Now as we hear those words, we need to remember the context. You see it's not as though the prophet hasn't shown his worth, hasn't passed muster. Oh no, just before this was the whole showdown with the prophets of Baal. Do you remember that? Do you remember how Elijah confronted those prophets of the false god Baal, and showed them that the true God was the Lord? He told them how their god was nothing, he told them to set up two sacrifices, set up two altars; one for Baal and one for the Lord. Then he told them to call upon Baal and see if he comes and sets fire to the sacrifice. And so they wait, and they wait. No fire. And they wait some more. No fire. The prophets call out to Baal, they rave, they cut themselves in hopes to attract his attention. No fire. Finally, Elijah says it's his turn. And he prepares to call upon the Lord. And as he's doing that, what does he do? He throws water on the sacrifice, not once, not twice, but three times. He baptizes the sacrifice. Then He calls upon the Lord. And as He does that, fire comes down. Fire comes down and it consumes the offering, it consumes the wood, it even licks up the water leftover in the trenches. There is faith, right? What faith to stand up to these false prophets. What faith to trust that the Lord will bring down this fire. What faith to confess when it feels like he's the only one. And yet where is that faith in our lesson this morning? It seems that it's hiding, doesn't it? Yes I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him.

Of course, as we look at the Gospel Lesson this morning, we see lacking faith on the part of the Jews, don't we? Jesus is telling him that He is the true bread come down from heaven—and of course as He says this, they can't help but think of the Manna that their fathers, the Israelites, received from God in the wilderness. And as they think of this Manna, what does John tell us they do? They grumble. In fact, I love that word there, in Greek it's *egonguzon*. You can hear it in the word, can't you? They're *egonguzoning*, they're grumbling. And who are they grumbling like? They're grumbling like the Israelites in the wilderness, aren't they. Do you remember that? Last week, we heard about the Lord giving the miraculous provision of Manna. The bread that appeared in the desert like flakes of dew on the ground. There was this bread from God. And think about that! Do you ever go to your bread drawer and find that flakes of bread have appeared like dew? I'm sure sometimes it seems like it because those crumbs can take over, or that you find other things sometimes growing in there, but never anything miraculous, I'm guessing. So think about that, there is this

miraculous bread from heaven. And what do the Israelites do? They grumble about it. Eventually they get tired of it: “Oh I remember when we had good food in Egypt, oh that was so good, would that we were back there!” Do you think about that? They had back breaking work, they were abused, they were forced to kill their children, and they wanted to go back because the food was better? And that’s the connection to the Jews in the Gospel. Here’s Jesus the bread from heaven that doesn’t perish, as He points out. Here He is the bread from heaven, the bread that one can eat and never die. The Israelites died even after eating Manna, but those who feast on Jesus will never die. And the Jews? They’d rather live under the slavery of death and so they grumble.

And we’re no different are we? We have roofs over our head, we have the blessing of wonderful food, we have more than those Israelites could have imagined, and yet we grumble too. You know what it is that you grumble about, don’t you? This work or that work. This ache or that pain. This trial or that ailment. Or if it’s not grumbling, we divide our devotion, don’t we?

A couple of weeks ago I mentioned a book I was listening to called the Benedict Option. Well, I was listening some more to that this week, and the author Rod Dreher made a great point about that. He made the point of how much we devote ourselves to progress in the world. We focus on making sure we make progress in our careers, about making sure our children get the best education at the best schools so they can go the best universities and get the best jobs. We focus so much attention on that, but what about focusing on the faith? Where is our devotion to Jesus? After all, He tells us that we can’t serve two masters. Now to be clear, that doesn’t mean that you all need to register at the seminary. No you can serve God in your vocation, but are you making sure that your vocation is in service to God? Or are you serving your own comforts?

Yes, I believe that I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him. Just as Jesus said, “**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.**” Oh we of little faith. But the Father does draw us. He draws us by the work of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. I believe that I cannot believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel. And He calls us by that Gospel where we find Jesus.

He calls us and He says, “You can’t believe, but Jesus was perfectly faithful.” He says, “You seek to serve two masters, you grumble, you doubt, but look at the cross where that is all atoned for.” He says, look at Jesus and believe, that is my will for you. My will is that you would look at Jesus and believe. “**This is the will of my Father, that**

everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” “My will is that you would find Jesus, not in the darkness of this world, or in your sinful hearts, or in nature, but where He promises to be. My will is that you would find Jesus in His Word that tells you your sin has been crucified with Him, in His cleansing water that joins you to His death and raises you in His resurrection, in His Holy Meal, where He gives Himself to you as that Bread of Life, that blessed feast for the forgiveness of your sins.”

And as we find Jesus there, we find that He is there not to look down on us or judge us, but to comfort us, to welcome us into His arms. **“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.”** All that the Father gives me, I will retain, I will cling to. In other words, “Come to me Christian, and I will hold on to you.” In the Greek, He says, “I will absolutely never cast you out.”

And I always think this is interesting. He is so gracious and welcoming to sinners. What a paradox? Isn't it? Here, He should condemn sin, and He does, but here He should condemn it in us, and He forgives us as we come to Him. In other words, our problem is with Him, and yet He is the solution to our problem. It's like when you get mad and yell at a dog and they come and lay at your feet. Oh that we would come to our Lord in the same way.

Christians, as we would He tells us then that we would live forever, that He will raise us up on the last day. He will take our filthy souls and cleanse them, He will purify our sin riddled bodies, and raise us body and soul to live with Him forever. Yes it's hard to believe. Yes I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the truth faith. That's His holy will for me, as Jesus said, **“This is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** Amen.