

**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**

**The Eighth Sunday after Trinity (2022)**

**Doing God's Will - Fixing our eye on Jesus**

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***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21, ESV)***

The Areopagus was a rock outcropping north of the city of Athens where a group of respected men of the city, a council, would come and debate the spiritual and philosophical ideas of the day. These respected men of Athens were much like the Sanhedrin, consisting of different sects who held to contrary beliefs in spirituality and philosophy. Conservative in nature, they primarily defended the status quo of Athens. Although like the Sanhedrin, these men were not interested in defending the true God, the God of Israel, but rather their interests lay in defending the “Greek gods.” While in Athens, St. Paul came upon this group and engaged them.

In the book of Acts we learn that ***“Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:22–23, ESV)*** This was a groundbreaking moment in the lives of some who heard St. Paul speak of the true God who is not made of stone, who does not live in the temples of men, and who is not served by human hands, but instead is the God of Creation who gave life to man and all living things. Moreover, He is the God who calls all men to repentance, to faith in His beloved Son Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. And to give men the assurance of His forgiveness, He raised His Son from the dead. Wow! Some of these men thought, let us hear more about this God!

Fast forward a couple of thousand years and today we see people turning their back on the God spoken of by St. Paul, the One who is revealed in Holy Scripture, while searching for the unknown god of the Athenians. I am not speaking of the ever-questioning world of unbelievers and atheists who never turned to the true God in the first place, but of those who say they believed in the one, true God but have turned to made-made gods for comfort and reward. Forgetting or defying Jesus, they seem to be unaware that our Lord warns against following false teachers, saying, ***“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” (Matthew 7:15, ESV)*** Instead, they eagerly seek these false prophets and their gods: decision, prosperity, self-help, and feel-good.

Fooled by secular forces and personal desire, many today are seeking spiritual aide in the arms of man-centered teachers. Men who are great motivational speakers, who seek to inspire and motivate their audience through human wisdom rather than God’s Word. Their message is sweet, attractive, complementary, and enticing. But it is also shallow, weak, hollow, and devoid of the Scriptural way to salvation. Their message, devoid of God’s Word, Law and Gospel, lulls the hearer into a world of work-righteousness, false hope, and reliance on self. Any declaration of sin is steadfastly avoided, so there is no need to proclaim Law or Gospel. Those who listen and believe these false prophets, place their eternal lives into great jeopardy. When they are called from this life and find themselves standing before the Lord, they will claim, ***“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in***

*your name?” and to their great shame and surprise, they will hear Him say, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (Matthew 7:22–23, ESV)*

Those who seek earthly wealth, listening to a prosperity gospel, do not hear Christ when He says, *“Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33, ESV)* They do not hear, *“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21, ESV)* And they do not hear, *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24, ESV)* Instead, they hear that God wants to bless them with material wealth more than anything.

Scripture is clear, God does not promise a life without tribulation or a life of wealth. Instead, He promises eternal life for all who believe in His Son Jesus Christ. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us of what our Lord Jesus Christ did for us, when he wrote, *“He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.” (Hebrews 9:15, ESV)* What greater wealth could anyone possess than eternal life in heaven? Furthermore, the evangelist James reminds us that you don’t have to be wealthy to receive the blessings of God, writing, *“Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?” (James 2:5, ESV)* Furthermore, James reminds us of the true blessing of God: *“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.” (James 1:12, ESV)*

It’s not like we haven’t been warned. God Himself warned that false prophets would come among us, saying, *“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.” (2 Peter 2:1–3, ESV)*

As in the past, today’s false prophets exploit the weak, the unlearned, and the wavering believer, taking them in with their self-help messages, their prosperity gospel message, their make a decision message, and their feel-good, entertaining, thigh slapping, hands waving, emotionalism messages. But such false prophets will meet a terrible end. God says, *“My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and who give lying divinations. They shall not be in the council of my people, nor be enrolled in the register of the house of Israel, nor shall they enter the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 13:9, ESV)* Again, God says, *“The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” (Deuteronomy 18:20, ESV)* And our Lord Jesus said to the Pharisees, *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.” (Matthew 23:13–15, ESV)* Herein, our Lord describes these modern-day false prophets and the Christ-less churches perfectly.

We are reminded that our Lord Jesus said, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6, ESV)*** To teach there is another way to God, another way to heaven, is blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It is the message of the apostate, and sadly, today, many listen to these false prophets.

But woe to those who sit in the pews of these churches. For God’s condemnation is not only against the false prophets, but God promises condemnation also to those who hear and heed their false message. God has warned us, ***“Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” (Jeremiah 23:16–17, ESV)*** Jesus explains this warning by saying, ***“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21, ESV)*** Here our Lord Jesus reminds you, *Doing God’s Will - is Fixing your eye on Him.*

Scripture, in speaking of Jesus, reminds us, ***“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)***

Let us remind ourselves of what true Apostolic Service looks and sounds like. St. Luke reminding us that after St. Peter’s preached on that first Christian Pentecost day, three-thousand souls were baptized and the Christian Church, with its new and unique worship life begin, one which was, ***“Devoted . . . to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers . . . And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42, 47, ESV)*** Word and Sacrament ministry, filled these hearers with saving faith in Christ and the Church grew.

Jesus warned that false prophets would come, saying, ***“For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (Matthew 24:24, ESV)*** Our Lord’s prophecy was quickly fulfilled as false prophets abounded within the new church. St. Peter tells us, ***“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.” (2 Peter 2:1, ESV)*** Moreover, St. John warned us not to believe every spirit, but to test them, for false prophets abound (1 John 4:1). But even with these warnings, many who followed Christ were fooled. St. Paul in his ministry found these false teachers among the people of the church of Galatia, believers who had been mesmerized and fooled by their false teaching. Thus, St. Paul says to them, ***“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6–8, ESV)*** The issue in the Church of Galatia were Judaizers who were preaching the necessity of circumcision. Trying to pull these newly converted Christians back into the world of works, of salvation by the Law. To these Christians St. Paul said, ***“You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.” (Galatians 5:4, ESV)*** So don’t listen to those who would pull you back into the world with its selfish, sinful, way of life. Don’t listen to the false prophets of the gods of decision, prosperity, self-help, and feel-good.

Following teachers of works-righteousness, teachers of feel-good theology, teachers of self-help, teachers of prosperity gospel, and teachers who would make you believe there is more way to heaven than Christ is following the unknown god who cannot save you. The unknown

god does not offer forgiveness or salvation. Following the unknown god will keep you out of heaven. You reject the grace of the one, true God when you believe these false prophets and their message.

Seek the church and her pastor who leads you in the Word of God, not the words of men. Seek the church and her pastor who folds you in the arms of God and His Son Jesus Christ through Word and Sacrament ministry, through God's grace and forgiveness, through life and salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin, death, and the devil. Seek the church and her pastor who will immerse you in the waters of Baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those waters in which you are baptized into Christ Jesus, robed in His very righteousness, where God forgives you your sin and adopts you as a child of His. Seek the church and her pastor who will feed you the true body and blood of Christ in and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion that was given and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

In the Apostolic Church there are no false prophets only undershepherds of Jesus Christ, those who desire to proclaim the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus Christ, those who proclaim the all-sufficient, and all-encompassing blood of Jesus that was offered on the Altar of the Cross so that all may be saved. No gimmicks, no tricks, no empty promises, no false gods. Only the promises of the One true God of heaven and earth, the God of whom St. Paul spoke on that day in Athens at the Areopagus. If you encounter such a church and her pastor, you will quickly find that *Doing God's Will – is Fixing your eye on Jesus*, believing in the One whom God sent (John 6:29). In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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