

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity with the Rite of Holy Baptism for Justin Adams and Izzy Adams

11 August, Anno Domini 2019

St. Matthew 7:15-23

Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

One of my greatest joys as a pastor is the opportunity to teach the Scriptures and the Christian faith. There are really few things like having the opportunity to dig through the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions with others and share the glorious truth of God's Word with students of all ages. It doesn't matter if they've never heard these things before or if they've heard them a thousand times. The deepest joy that can be had or shared is the truth, the iron-clad reality, that the Son of God has made full satisfaction for our guilt and that God our Father will daily watch over and provide for our every need. And while it's fun, it is also extremely serious business to study and impart the full counsel of God. The toughest thing about it is that learning the truth also exposes what is false - it unmasks the wolves who are going around proclaiming false doctrine, lies in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The truth of the matter is that we cannot sit back on our heels as Christians and be content to remain infants in the faith. In the reading from 1 Corinthians appointed for this past Friday, St. Paul admonishes the Christians at Corinth for not deepening in their understanding of the faith beyond that of the milk meant for little children. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews issues a similar admonition in chapter 5, chiding his hearers for not growing in their knowledge and understanding of the Word of God. We need the milk to be sure and the milk saves. The teachings of the Small Catechism - the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the teachings on the sacraments - these are the foundation upon which everything else is built. We are to return to these every day and approach them as children eager to learn more from them. We can never be too mindful of the will of God as revealed in the Ten Commandments. We can never hear too much of the mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ for sinners.

If we lived in a perfect world, we wouldn't really need more than the basics. But we don't live in a perfect world. We live in a world whose prince is the devil. We live in a world that is consumed by sin and rebellion against God. We live in a world that seeks to use reason against the very God who gives reason and who is wisdom. We live in a world where words and ideas are twisted and perverted in

order to hide lies and death. And that means that we live in a world filled with those who seek by every means of craft and cunning to pervert the Word of God and bend it to suit their purposes. They hone their arguments and use familiar language to deceive and confuse us and lure us into their den of lies. If it weren't true, if you weren't in danger from these false prophets, then your Lord Jesus Christ wouldn't warn you about them. If they were always easy to identify, you'd have nothing to worry about. But Jesus has warned you because the threat to your salvation is real. He has told you that they will look like sheep. They will robe themselves in very good and holy appearing works. They will appeal to your modern sensibilities. They will be sure to never make you uncomfortable. And if you do not know the Word of God, if you are not daily its student, you will be led astray and down the broad and easy road that leads to destruction.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, you are not only permitted but commanded to be judges of the doctrine of anyone who would hold themselves forth as a servant of the Word. Every time I open my mouth in the sermon or in Bible classes, God commands that your ears be at full attention. You have gathered here to hear what the Lord God would speak to you. And if I speak anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures then for your own sake and the sake of everyone else who heard me speak, you need to come speak to me so that I can either repent of my error or show why what I spoke actually is what Scripture says. Salvation is at stake and Satan scatters his false apostles everywhere to deceive, if possible, even the elect. It's why knowing the theological education of your pastor is so important. It's why at a pastor's ordination and every time he's installed he vows faithfulness to the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions in both his teaching and his practice. You want to know what he believes and that, with God's help, he intends to conduct himself in the Office of the Holy Ministry faithfully and only according to God's Word.

No Christian can simply throw up his hands and say "I'm not a theologian." Christ doesn't speak the word "Beware" only to pastors or to people who are interested. He speaks these words to each and every one of us out of His great love and concern for our eternal well-being. He knows the weakness of our flesh. He knows how alluring false teaching is. And He knows that even the smallest amount of false teaching is enough to wreak havoc on every article of faith and rob us of salvation.

This is why the Holy Spirit has caused the Scriptures to be written - so that you may know what God speaks and refute the devil's lies. The Bible is the only way you can know false teachers from true teachers, false doctrine from true doctrine.

You aren't to judge the prophet by what you think about God or by your own reason or by his outward appearance, the multitude of his good works, or the size of the crowd who follows him. These too are false prophets - the blind judging the blind. You have the Word of God, what we call the source and norm of all doctrine and life. It alone is the infallible and inerrant Word that God Himself has spoken so that you might know Him rightly, believe in Him rightly, and recognize every imposter who would say "Jesus put this on my heart."

But the Holy Scriptures don't work by osmosis. They aren't downloaded onto your hard-drive when you're baptized. They don't filter through the air as your Bible and Catechism sit on your shelf. You have to open them up, read them, study them, learn them by heart, discuss them with and teach them to your family. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ. Every Christian, from the youngest to the oldest among us, need to hear God's Word every day so that faith in Christ might be strengthened and nourished and deepened. The Law and the Gospel are our comfort and shield against every demonic attack, wherever it may come from - from the false preachers behind pulpits, from the poisonous doctrine being spewed out by our secularist and materialist culture, and from the Old Adam within each of us trying to lead us into a false sense of security in ourselves or despair on account of our sin.

The Scriptures are given to you so that they can be in your ears and mouths every single day. They are the bright and clear light by which every teaching that comes from the mouth of man is illumined as either true or false. If it is true, we rejoice and receive that teaching in faith because it is from God. If it is contrary to Scripture then it is to be condemned and rejected as Satanic and your Lord commands you to reject and flee from those who teach such things.

This is why our study of God's Word together on Sunday morning during Bible Class and Sunday School is so important. It gives us all a chance to dig into the Scriptures and wrestle with difficult questions together. It allows us to have conversations and struggle together with what we're hearing out in the world and figure out what God's Word has to say. When we study together what God has done and how He continues to work both in all of creation and for our salvation through the Means of Grace, we are able to rightly encourage one another, comfort one another, and help defend one another from those who would deceive us. It's why we treasure our Sunday School teachers so highly - they are an important part of the body of Christ that God has blessed us with to help parents share the faith with our children. Sunday School teachers help to reinforce what children are to be hearing at home. They are examples to the children of the active life of faith

and continued study of God's Word. Pray for those who teach Sunday School and consider that the Lord would have you join the ranks and aid in the cause.

The world is daily falling deeper and deeper into the darkness of death. Satan's lies are everywhere - from television to music to schools to our places of employment to government to many who claim to preach the Word of God. And only to our great peril and the peril of those entrusted to our care do we not take up and arm ourselves with the truth given to us in Holy Scripture. The need for each and every one of us to learn and share the faith is growing exponentially. We can't bear witness to what we don't know and we can't refute what is false if we don't know what is true. With God's Word we give to ourselves both the true and only comfort and joy - our salvation in Christ and the promised love of the Father - and we strike down every lie and false teaching that would lead us away from Christ and into sin and unbelief, that would lead us to trust in ourselves and our work for salvation or to ignore the care of our souls all together.

May God grant to each of us a fervent desire to daily learn and grow through the Holy Scriptures, that we listen constantly to the voice of our heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ who, by the Scriptures, would lead us safely on the narrow path that leads to eternal life.

In the Name of +Jesus.