

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity  
8 August, Anno Domini 2021  
Jeremiah 8:4-12  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

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

One thing that should disturb a Christian more than anything else is a quiet conscience, a conscience that is ignorant of its sin, a conscience that can hear the holy Law of God without at least wincing a little. The Christian is not free of sin in this life. He is free of its guilt because of the forgiveness of Jesus. But there is never a time when the Christian can say “I need no forgiveness because I haven’t really sinned”.

“But, Pastor, didn’t Christ come to give us a quiet conscience, a conscience that isn’t plagued by the fear of God’s wrath?” Yes. But a conscience that rests in the justifying work of Jesus, is precisely a conscience that is aware of the sin that still hangs around its neck and hates it, otherwise it has no need to rest in Jesus. The psalmist does not declare “Blessed is the man who no longer has sin.” Such a statement is only true of our Savior and those who have already departed in the faith. We, on the other hand, have sin. If we think otherwise, we are only deceiving ourselves - making light of God’s Word and demonstrating that the truth is not in us. If we think our sins of bitterness, jealousy, unchaste thoughts, cruelty, coldness to God’s Word and the Holy Sacraments, prayerlessness and doubt are little things that Almighty God doesn’t really care about then we have swallowed the pill of false peace and are marching merrily down the road to hell.

Jesus said to the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.” Those who think little of their sins, think even less of their Savior, if they think of Him at all. Instead such a person is foolishly convinced that he isn’t all that sinful and that his Baptism makes sin okay. If you believe you are a Christian because of your moral conduct, you are no Christian. If that is what you trust in, yourself and your own good works, then you don’t trust in the precious Blood of Jesus. Can you stand the thought of being called a sinner or do you prefer to listen to those false prophets who cry “Peace, peace! Your sin is no sin. It is how God made you. Rejoice in it!” He who believes such outright lies, has absolutely zero use for someone to save him.

Rather, the conscience that is agitated and troubled by the dark, evil, selfish thoughts it finds within is precisely the conscience that will cry out to God for

mercy. This is the conscience that is disgusted by what it sees in the mirror of the Ten Commandments because all it sees is weakness and brokenness. It takes no pride in the reflection it sees because with each commandment it can only hear that terrible sentence - "This you have not done."

But, strangely, and contrary to all reason, this is something to rejoice in. Only having been crushed by the hammer of the Law and tasting the bitter gall of our guilt, can we take any pleasure or comfort from knowing that the just punishment for our sins has already been met in the death of Jesus. The troubled conscience is relieved by those very beautiful words of Jesus "I have come to call sinners to repentance." He didn't take away our sinful nature. He forgave it. He stood in the breach between us and God's righteous judgment. He gave His innocent flesh over to the sinner's death so that the sinner might be judged innocent before the throne of God. This is the thing - the only thing - that makes for peace.

And this is what God wants to do for each and every sinner - for you. Nothing pleased Him more than to see His Son willingly die in your place. Nothing brings God more joy than to cover you in the baptismal robe of Christ's righteousness. He wants and asks for nothing in return. Simply receive what He gives believing His promise that your sin has been freely atoned for.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem not because she had sin, but because she sat there covered in her own filth insisting that she could take care of it herself. They weren't concerned about the vultures of judgment that were circling overhead and so they refused to be sheltered by the wings of God's mercy and forgiveness. The scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees proclaimed an impossible peace rooted in the Law. "Keep these rules and ceremonies and sacrifices and God will be pleased with you."

This is the root of all religions other than the one true Christian religion. "Save yourself. Do not seek God according to His Word. Seek Him according to your own self-made righteousness. Work ever harder and harder to be a better person. Look inward for peace and comfort. Judge yourself according to man's law not God's. Proclaim your own righteousness against the backdrop of the unrighteousness of others. Prove to God your good intention and that you work very hard to give your whole life and heart to Him."

Repent. Sisyphus had a better chance of rolling the stone up the hill than you or I do of perfectly obeying the will of God. It's impossible for bad trees to bear good fruit. Sinners can't produce righteous acts. Their works may look good outwardly,

but inwardly even the most godly looking works are an abomination to God because they do not spring from faith in the atoning work of His beloved Son whom He gave for you. The apostle writes by the Holy Spirit "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin." Faith in Christ is what is pleasing to God. Trusting in the Son whom He gave over to death for you as the all-sufficient sacrifice for you sin pleases God. He longs to gather you in safety as a hen gathers her chicks. Run for shelter under the wings of Jesus stretched out upon the cross. This alone is able to bring your terrified conscience peace - the strange and incomprehensible truth that God has already and willingly suffered and died for your sin and declared you to be something that you could never make yourself - righteous. That is the only true and saving religion.

A disturbed conscience is truly a gift of God, not because your sin is good but because it keeps you mindful of your need for Jesus. It prevents you from falling prey to the idea that righteousness is something you can obtain by your own doing. It is a gift of the Lord Jesus. And the gifts Jesus gives are only for sinners. If you aren't a sinner, if you tremble at thought of being counted among sinners, then there is no seat for you at Christ's table. These seats are reserved for bona fide sinners, who find nothing good in themselves but everything good in Jesus. If you are a sinner troubled by your sins and longing for God's mercy then Jesus has exactly what you are looking for. He is the sin bearer. He has made satisfaction for your sin. He has brought you peace through the Blood of His cross, ending the hostility between you and God.

May God our heavenly Father bless each of us with an agitated and active conscience that we may never look anywhere else but Jesus for life and salvation.

In the Name of +Jesus.