

Exaudi with the Rite of Holy Baptism of Zacciah Herbert Slade
29 May, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 15:26-16:4
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

More and more and more, the world is retreating into a world of fantasy. Instead of the reality of God's created order, the unbelieving world is desperately trying to create an alternate reality of its own design. Like a spoiled child screaming and covering his ears because he refuses to be told "No", the world simply will not have anything to do with truth. Because they want to be their own gods, unbelievers will not be told that their wisdom is foolishness, that boys are boys and girls are girls and that is what they will always be (thanks be to God!). They will not hear that filling our children's eyes and ears and hearts with death and violence and sexual perversity WILL hurt them and those around them. They insist that the things of salvation are unnecessary and, in fact, are hateful and detrimental to society. They shout and lash out whenever they are confronted with the actual truth and will only be satisfied when the truth is completely silenced.

But even worse than unbelievers refusing to hear the truth are those who claim to be of Christ and yet embrace the devil's lies just so that the world will accept them. Some refuse to accept the Scriptures as the inerrant Word of the Lord that is simply to be received and believed rather than subjected to our sinful, weak, limited reason. Others mock as foolish the promise of Christ that the washing of Holy Baptism, which Zacciah has been blessed to receive this day, actually forgives sins and makes you a child of God. They will not believe Jesus' own words "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." By the same false spirit they deny the Real Presence of Jesus' Body and Blood in the Holy Communion, completely contrary to Jesus' clear testimony "This is My Body and this is My Blood". Some falsely imagine that Jesus has completely overthrown the holy Law of God and the created order even though Jesus expressly says "Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets." These false teachers deceive many because they say what itching ears want to hear rather than what God Himself has spoken.

And let us not imagine ourselves innocent in this matter either. Whenever we sin against the Ten Commandments - when we lie to our neighbor, when we remain

silent in the face of falsehood, when we do not gladly set aside the time in our daily lives to hear God's Word and call upon Him in prayer, whenever we trust in ourselves rather than in the forgiveness of Christ for our salvation, when we act and speak immodestly, when we choose not to gather together with God's people on the Lord's Day to hear God's Word preached and receive the Lord's Supper which He gives us, whenever we speak poorly of our neighbor - then we are rejecting the truth and living with the world in its made fantasy of lies that lead only to death.

That is why, in the midst of warning the disciples about the troubles and the suffering that lay ahead of them, Jesus promises His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit who is the Helper or Comforter. How does the Spirit help? He bears witness to the truth. He bears witness to Jesus - the very embodiment of Truth. That is what the disciples needed more than anything as they watched their Teacher suffer and die. That is what they would need when they were cast out of the synagogues and were martyred for proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus Christ and salvation in His Name. They needed the truth because that truth is at the same the source of life and the reason for their greatest suffering. They would be attacked as heretics and blasphemers and perverters of God's word. They would be charged with leading people astray with lies. And how tempting would it be to abandon what you believe if the most distinguished and revered theologians all called you a liar? The absolute greatest comfort that any Christian can be given in this world is that her faith and hope in Jesus and His Word are not misplaced or in vain.

Make no mistake, the Gospel that the disciples went out preaching was radical, not new, but radical. That a man is God. That that God died for sinners. That that man then rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. That that God-man will return on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead. That you are not saved on account of your good works but on account of the Blood of the God-man. That even the best and seemingly most holy works are useless in matters of your salvation. That those who trust in their own righteousness are condemned. That circumcision is nothing. That neither the Law of Moses nor the law of man can save you. That someone as little and helpless as Zacciah is able to receive salvation by the washing of water with the Word. That through common bread and wine the atoning Body and Blood of God are given to us to bestow life and salvation. Such truth defied reason and logic. The disciples were in the minority. The apostles didn't have the status or the degrees to make such wild claims. Who are they to proclaim such things and claim they are from God? They needed to know and constantly be reassured that this radical Gospel of a gracious and

forgiving God who condemned sin in Himself rather than in us is THE truth. This truth condemns all other attempts at salvation. It is not simply a truth, one among many. It is the only truth, the one and only salvation for all people.

It is very tempting in the midst of the fiery trial to begin to question whether the hope that you have in Christ is the truth - whether God really is who He says He is or will do what He says He will do. Doubt can very quickly overwhelm you when your sin is staring you in the face, when your reputation is being destroyed, when your prayers seem to go unheard and the suffering doesn't stop, when you speak the Word of God and everyone turns against you and makes you out to be the most loveless, hate-filled, bigoted person they know. This is especially true when they are people who are close to you, your family, your close friends, maybe even people living under the same roof. We begin to wonder - "Maybe I have it wrong. Maybe everyone else is right. Shouldn't the truth be easier? Who am I to claim to have the truth?" Satan begins to whisper "Are you sure? Did God really say? Are you sure that that is true? Maybe not EVERYTHING in the Bible is important or God's Word. Maybe you really can't trust the Bible at all. Maybe you've got the Christian faith all wrong. Maybe there's more than one way to heaven. Maybe your suffering is your own fault. Maybe you're the one who's wrong and everyone else is right."

This is why our Savior very specifically referred to the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth. This truth matters for everyone forever. It's the only one that does. The truth of your clothes, your investments, the severity of diseases, politics - these truths last only as long as this world does. In death, even in the face of death, we suddenly see how irrelevant and powerless they and we really are. They cannot help you before the judgment seat of God. Even now, they cannot in anyway help your conscience before God. They cannot give you security concerning eternal life. They cannot promise that you will not have to answer in full for every wicked thought, every unkind word, every selfish decision, every lust-filled glance. No matter how hard we work to try to provide ourselves with some kind of certainty of our eternal salvation, we will not ever be able to provide it by means of our own making because this simple truth remains "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." (Ecclesiastes 7:14) It doesn't matter how hard we try to convince ourselves otherwise, all will be revealed on the Last Day and the fig leaves of our own making, no matter how convincing they are before men, will fall away and we will be left exposed and helpless in God's presence. What others think of us isn't going to matter in the slightest.

Lies may be more comfortable in the moment, which is why we tell them. But every lie comes with a cost. And no lie has a higher price tag than lying to yourself and others about who God is, what He has done, and how He saves us. Note God's anger toward Israel who profaned His Name among the nations. By their preaching and living, they spoke of God in ways that were not true. They conducted themselves as though God were not their merciful Deliverer and Redeemer. They lived as though God would not provide for them as He had promised. They withheld their worship, their trust, their offerings. They invented their own works and worship to try to appease God. They adopted the pagan practices of their neighbors and for that their neighbors liked them more, to be sure. But what does that matter when you have broken faith with God? And more, you have kept others from knowing and believing in the only true God and so kept them from salvation while also throwing yours away. Lies may be comfortable but they are not comforting and they come at a terrible, eternal price. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." (Exodus 20:7)

There is only one truth that provides sinners with comfort and peace in this life and eternally - Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who spilled out His innocent Blood on the cross to cover the entirety of your sin and to reconcile you to God. The forgiveness of His sacrifice is the only thing that can calm the terrified conscience and resist the attacks of Satan, the world, and your own flesh. And this is true because it is the only means of salvation that is completely out of your hands and does not involve your works. The sacrifice of Christ, the word of absolution, the salvation of Holy Baptism, the forgiveness of Holy Communion - these are all God's works for you. Everything has been accomplished by Christ from start to finish. All that remains for you is to receive this great treasure in faith. Christ's complete work on your behalf sets you free and this truth destroys all the lies that would have you take confidence in even the smallest thing you could do. This work of Christ is so complete that even your faith in it is a gift from the Holy Spirit whom Christ sends as a gift to proclaim to you what He has done for you.

And that truth is exactly what the Holy Spirit bears witness to. He confirms in your heart what you have heard with your ears from the prophets and apostles: that the Triune God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - has delivered you from sin and death purely out of His grace and mercy. He has brought you to the font and washed you clean and adopted you as His own dear child. He will bestow upon you all the blessings of His gracious kingdom from your daily bread, to a clean conscience, to the peace of eternal life. He will never lie to you or lead you astray because He doesn't want anything from you. He wants you. He wants you to

know that everything that comes out of His mouth is the truth. And that truth is driven by His love for you. It doesn't matter what affliction befalls you, it doesn't matter how dark your sin seems, it doesn't matter how hopeless this world seems - in Christ you are alive, you are forgiven. What God promised you at the font never changes. What Christ promises in the Holy Supper never changes. They are the Word of the Lord spoken to you which endures forever.

In Zacciah's baptism this morning we see God acting to deliver yet another sinner from death and the world of lies. The eternal guilt of every sinful desire and thought that he inherited from Adam and which Zacciah himself has committed since have been drowned and died and left in those waters. Zacciah has been born again from above by the will of God and is now a child of eternal life. He now lives in the reality that is Christ and the forgiveness of all his sins. Zacciah has been given the gift of the Holy Spirit who, as Zacciah continues to hear the Word of God and be raised in the faith, will keep Zacciah in the true faith and comfort him with the assurance of his salvation. This is true of all the baptized. We are not left to create some false existence where we are good people only to die in the truth of our sin. Instead, we live and rejoice in the truth that we have been rescued from death by Christ and been enlivened by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Let these promises of Christ, witnessed to you by the Holy Spirit through the Holy Scriptures comfort you and be your peace today and always. Believe nothing other of God than what He Himself has told you. Don't believe reason or your guilty conscience or the world. Don't believe the sorrow of your heart. Don't believe the diseases that threaten your body. Believe Jesus. He is your Deliverer. He is your Rock and your Refuge. He is your Redeemer. He is your Father. And all that He has promised and declared to you, He will do. That is the truth.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Ulmer