

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
7 August, Anno Domini 2022
St. Matthew 7:15-23

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

Beloved flock of the Good Shepherd,

Christ Jesus has rescued you from eternal judgment. He has given you life by laying down His own. He has led you into the lush and satisfying green pastures of forgiveness and has provided you the living waters of Holy Baptism as a stream from which you may daily drink and refresh yourself.

The Good and faithful shepherd calls you by name and leads you safely in and out, gently guiding you with His rod and staff, His words of Law of Gospel. You hear His voice as His called undershepherds faithfully proclaim the Word which has been given to the Church in the Holy Scriptures. And when you follow that voice, when you refuse to listen to any other voice, you are safe and you will have peace even when the storm clouds gather, when you are dismayed by your own frailty and weakness, when the wolves surround you, when the world is descending into the deep darkness of unbelief.

But there will be unfaithful shepherds who sneak in, dressing in all the trappings of the sheep. You won't be able to tell by looking at them that they are false. They will look like sheep. They will be kind. They will be pious. They will read from the Bible. They will wear the shepherd's vestments. They will hold positions of authority in Christ's church. They will have a great personality. They will be great administrators. They will have the best presence in the pulpit. But it is all fake. Those things don't make the prophet. They are glittering gold meant to distract and deceive you so that you don't dare look at what's underneath and discover that they are wolves whose only interest is to consume you by leading you away from Christ. These deceivers will even talk about Christ. They will extol Him as a wonderful teacher, a loving God, a source of strength. They will say as much as is necessary to sound the part. Remember, the antichrist sets himself up in the midst of the Church.

The only way to recognize these snake-oil salesmen is to carefully evaluate what comes out of their mouth. Prophets preach. The question is what are they preaching. They will say lots of things about Jesus and heaven and love. But that

doesn't mean that what they are saying is true. You have to know the Scriptures in order to figure that out. They will say things about Jesus dying for you. They will use churchy words. But they are as forked-tongue as their father, the devil, who is completely incapable of telling the truth. They are master manipulators whose concern isn't that your trust is only in Christ and that you are fed and nourished with the gifts Christ gives. Their concern is their own egos and their bellies are filled with the donations of your wallet and the admiration of your heart. They will preach what your sinful flesh loves to hear because that is what gets people in the door and opening up their wallets. They will tell you that it is just fine to hear the Scriptures but to live contrary to them. They will tell you that it is okay to despise holy marriage and instead commit adultery by cohabitation. They will promise you that God doesn't mind that you withhold your tithes from Him because you are afraid and love your things. They will use all manner of inclusive language and tell you that God loves you just the way you are and that He has no problem with you believing about God whatever you want.

False prophets will tell you there is no wrath of God to be feared at all, that God really doesn't mind if you eat from the trees which He has forbidden by the commandments. In fact, they will tell you that the desires of your flesh are good, they are who you really are and God wants you to be happy. They will point out how pleasurable the fruits of the flesh are and that it isn't healthy to deny your flesh what it wants. They will tell you how wonderful it is that Jesus died on the cross and now all you have to do is give your life to Him or make Him your personal Lord and Savior. They will insist that God doesn't want you put too much stock in Baptism or the Lord's Supper because water, bread, and wine can't forgive sins. Instead, they will point you to the holiness of the saints as your source of refuge and comfort or your good intentions. Worse yet, they won't provide you with any true comfort at all because it's hard to manipulate those who aren't perpetually uncertain of God's forgiveness and their eternal salvation. They will hide behind human institutions like districts and synods, constitutions and bylaws, popes and traditions, smoke machines and laser lights so that they can veil their unbelief in the Word of God.

You have to listen closely to everything they say and then, like the Christians at Berea, judge them against the Scriptures. If they are saying anything contrary to God's Word, they are to be called to repentance and if they persist avoid them. Indeed, flee from them. Don't listen to a single word that comes forth from their mouth because it is hiding the devil's poison by which you will die. We do not judge the Word of the Good Shepherd but we are obligated to judge those who purport to come in His Name. If they speak His Word, we receive them with great

joy. We give honor and glory to God by submitting ourselves to their authority and their teaching. But if they speak any other word, then we unmask the wolves and drive them out and pray that God would convert them to the truth.

These wolves in sheep's clothing, these false prophets hiding out in the church, are a far greater danger to you than the outright paganism of Hinduism or Buddhism or Secular Atheism. Of course these are evil. They are demon worship. But they are easy to spot. They aren't even trying to hide. They don't want anything to do with Christ. In love for our neighbor and out of concern with their salvation we point out these false religions and point our neighbor to the one true God so that together we might enjoy the blessedness of eternal life. Even the heresies of Islam and Mormonism and Jehovah's witnesses are fairly evidently not Christian (though Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you they are - but you can't be Christian and deny the full divinity of Jesus).

But the false prophets Jesus is specifically warning against are much more subtle. They may even say some right things. But only telling part of the truth while withholding the rest is not really telling the truth. In fact, it is more dangerous because in the name of the truth, it leads people away from the truth. An example of this would be those who proclaim the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins but then teach, contrary to the clear testimony of Scripture, that infants should not be baptized and Baptism doesn't actually save you. That is a lie. Our Lord said "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved." St. Peter writes "Baptism now saves you." St. Paul writes "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death?" We must ourselves flee from those who teach otherwise and encourage others to do the same. The same is true of those who declare in Christ's Name that we must make satisfaction for our own sins and call upon the saints in our time of need rather than upon Christ. These false teachings appeal to our flesh because our flesh is constantly looking for what it must do to earn God's love and forgiveness. Nonetheless, they are deadly lies that teach us to trust in ourselves rather than in Christ. Even a little bit of these false teachings leavens the whole lump of faith and destroys it.

This is why it is essential that throughout our lives we grow into a fuller maturity in the Christian faith by constant study of the Word of God and prayer. We will never recognize the false preaching if we don't know the root of preaching - what God has spoken. Yes, the very simple faith of children is sufficient for salvation. But, false teachers are preying specifically on those who know nothing more than "Jesus loves me, this I know for the the Bible tells me so." If we know and understand nothing more than that, then we will come to quickly doubt it and even

despise it. If I don't know who Jesus is, or if I don't know the shape of His love for me then it is all the more easy for the deceiver to deceive. How can I beware of false teachers for myself and my neighbor if I can't recognize false teaching? This is why it is imperative that parents be daily leading their children through the Scriptures, explaining them and drawing them to a deeper love and understanding of them. This is why Bible Class is so important. It serves the purposes of arming adults against false teaching and aiding them in arming their children and teaching their neighbor. If the Scriptures don't hold an actively prominent place in the daily life of us parents, we can be certain they won't be important to our children. We have been given a Word to speak. Woe to us if we do not speak it faithfully.

Do not dismiss the danger of false teachers and teachings. Jesus wouldn't have warned against them if they weren't dangerous. Only look around and see how effective these false teachers are. Some of Christ's precious lambs have already fallen away from the faith they once confessed before God and His Church. They closed their ears to the Good Shepherd who loved them and instead ate their fill of lies and deceit that tickled their ears. They sought out churches and pastors more to their liking, who were more interested in entertaining them than preaching God's Word to them. They thought they could handle a little poison but no one can. "But Pastor, I really enjoy (enter name of popular TV preacher here). He (or even she) is such a good speaker." It is equally unloving to do our children and our neighbor the great disservice of trying to cover their wickedness by saying things like "They were raised in the church." "They were confirmed at such and such Lutheran Church." "I'm sure they still believe." "At least they're going to church." Such lies only hurt them further by blessing false teaching, calling their unbelief faith, and giving them the false impression that they are Christians. It is to join the false prophets of Jeremiah's day who said to those who despised the Word of the Lord "It shall be well with you" and to those who stubbornly followed his own heart "No disaster shall come upon you." As long as they continue to despise the Word of the Lord, it will most certainly not be well with them and as long as they stubbornly continue to follow the thoughts of their own heart disaster will most certainly come upon them - the wrath of God against unbelief. Repent. It is not in vain that Jesus said "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Don't give false prophets any time in your or anyone else's ear. That is to give the devil an opportunity to speak and deceive and destroy.

And let us also beware of the little false prophet within our own heart, the most deceptive of them all. We must repent of setting our thoughts and desires over God's Word rather than humbly submitting ourselves to it. We must flee from this

false prophet and trust only that which God Himself has spoken even if that word exposes the evil of our thoughts. Just calling yourself a Christian and doing all the right thing on the outside, saying “Lord, Lord” means nothing if it is not joined to a true and living faith that does what the word says, a faith that trusts not what it has done in Jesus’ Name but what Jesus has done for it; a faith that is not used as a cloak for unrighteousness but as a fountain for works of selfless love.

The true Prophet, your Lord Jesus Christ, has spoken and revealed with all clarity the truth of salvation and what is pleasing in the sight of God your Father. This truth has been preserved for you in the writings of the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles. You can know all the articles of faith because Christ Jesus has made them know. If anyone, even an angel from heaven, speaks a different word to you, let him be anathema, cursed, because he is trying to steal you away from Christ and eternal life. He is the devil’s wolf masquerading as one of Christ’s sheep so that you will listen. Don’t be fooled. Listen only to the true Shepherd and the prophets whom He has sent who faithfully speak His whole counsel. You will know they love you because they will not shrink from a single word of God in order to flatter you or make you like them. The true prophet gives you the fruit of Christ which come to us from the cross. The true prophet proclaims to you Christ’s forgiveness and warns you against sin so that you are not led back to trusting in dead works. The true prophet constantly calls you back to your Baptism and holds before you the promises of God bestowed upon you there. The true prophet feeds you with the sweet fruit of Christ’s Body and Blood which have reconciled you to God and opened the way to eternal life. That prophet who gives you these things and nothing less or more is the prophet sent from God and the prophet to whom you ought to listen with joy, giving thanks to God who has sent a true prophet to proclaim salvation to you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

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

Pastor Ulmer