

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

St. Matthew 7:15-23

26 July, Anno Domini 2026

It is not uncommon for Jesus to say very uncomfortable things. We certainly heard an example of that today when Jesus said “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’, will enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Mtt. 7:21) The Bible doesn’t teach what is known as universalism, the idea that, in the end, everyone is going to go to heaven regardless of what they believe or do. God is very clear. He desires that all men be saved but those who do not trust in the only true God, namely the Triune God, and who do not trust only in the death of Jesus Christ, true God and true man, as the atoning sacrifice for their sins, will not enter eternal life. It doesn’t matter how nice they were, how many people they helped, or how many things they did in Jesus’ Name. They will suffer eternal judgment because they refuse the way by which God in His mercy has made their eternal salvation possible.

Here in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is warning us specifically about false prophets who claim to speak and act with Jesus’ authority. If the faith you confess is not the true faith, then you will be cast into the outer darkness where you will live forever in torment and the delusions of your sinful flesh. Whether you are the preacher or the hearer, if what you are saying or receiving as truth is anything except the Word which God has spoken through the apostles and prophets in Holy Scripture, then you will join those who hear those terrible words of Jesus “I never knew you.”

You might be wondering where the good news is, the Gospel of the Lord, in a reading like this that seems to only be filled with warnings and threats. But the good news lies in the fact that there is a way to know and recognize the false prophets - you can identify good fruit and bad fruit because God has graciously given you the Bible, His pure truth which is supposed to be the source of the prophet’s preaching. The Holy Spirit carried along the writers and inspired them to write down without error the God’s own Word which tells us everything that is necessary for salvation. Nothing has been left out. Nothing extraneous has been added. St. John affirms this when he wrote “These have been written so that you too may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in His Name.” (John 20:31).

The way of salvation is not hidden. You don’t have to wonder what the truth is because God has told you plainly and clearly. He has caused it to be preached and written down in your language so that you could hear and know what Jesus did for

you, so that you can know what God's will is and therefore know when someone is speaking falsely. No one today has a single excuse for not knowing what is actually in the Bible.

That is why it is not simply a joy but the duty of every Christian to read the Bible and know what it says. God has caused His Word to be written down precisely so that you might not be deceived. He knows that the devil is constantly unleashing false teachers into the world to deceive anyone and everyone who does not pay attention to what God actually says. And the cost is always the same - eternal death. The purpose of all false teaching is to lead you away from faith in Christ. It's not just a difference of opinion or interpretation. This difference is the difference between light and darkness, life and death. Who are those who are deceived except those who don't know what God actually did say? No one has any excuse. God's Word is readily available to anyone who wants it. Anyone can buy a Bible, download one on your phone, or walk into a church and ask for one. If you don't have a Bible, get one. If you can't, I'll get it for you. The devil's false prophets pray on those who are too busy or distracted by worldly things to read and know the Word of God.

Now, in years past, we have often pointed to the fact that the chief fruit of a prophet is his preaching. Does he say what God's Word says? And while that is certainly true, we must not forget Dr. Luther's succinct explanation of the Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer "Hallowed be Thy Name". Luther writes "But anyone who teaches or lives contrary to the Word of God profanes the Name of God among us." The life of the prophet is as important as his preaching. The two should be in harmony, just as every Christian's life should be in harmony with their confession of Christ. That is what sanctification is - faith pouring out in piety toward God and in works of love for the neighbor. That doesn't mean that the pastor has to be perfect. We know that is impossible for anyone who still bears sinful flesh. But, as we were reminded last week, our freedom in Christ from the condemnation of the Law is also not an excuse for unrighteousness - either false belief or wicked living. The pastor is to be an example of godly living, namely a life of repentance, forgiving and being forgiven, truthfulness, devotion to the Word of God and the means of grace, bearing the cross in faith, humility, and love for the neighbor. If the pastor either preaches and teaches false doctrine or he is not actively seeking to conform his life to God's Word, then every Christian listening to him is obligated out of both love for God and love for his fellow hearers to bring the pastor's error to his attention. Lord willing, the pastor will repent of his sin and there can be forgiveness and rejoicing. But if he refuses and continues to preach or live wickedly, then he must be removed or rejected. He is not to be tolerated because he is leading

God's people astray from the truth which means leading them away from Jesus and away from salvation.

This is why St. Paul says things like "Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Timothy 3:2-5) The pastor's life of faith is just as important as his preaching of faith.

As carefully as you listen to what a preacher is saying, so you must pay attention to his life. Again, not because the expectation is that a pastor is perfect, but because a pastor who does not strive to live the life of faith, even though he preaches it well, makes a mockery of Christ before the flock and before the world and thereby providing a terrible stumbling block to faith and encouraging others toward sin and unbelief.

Make no mistake, false prophets are good at what they do. They can seem very genuine. They can use passages from the Bible. They can get a lot of people to agree with them and follow them. They can be members of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. That is why Jesus said "they come to you in sheep's clothing." They play the part very well. They have degrees and have been ordained. They have taken vows. Some wear vestments and others wear polo shirts. None of that changes the fact that they are ravenous wolves. They are hungry for glory, wealth, influence, recognition, accolades, and sometimes just an easy job. The wiser ones are more subtle, luring you into blind trust, stroking your ego, helping you justify your sin. They want you to like them and won't dare confront you in your sin because they don't actually care for you. They don't tend to their God-given duties because there are books and speeches to write and online followers to satisfy. They are too busy policing the internet or scrolling through YouTube to visit the sick or pray or study the Scriptures and the Confessions or tend to their families. And they are appalled and offended if you dare call them to account.

The more foolish ones are more obvious. They happily set aside the words of Christ for the opinions and desires of men. They are always concerned about what people want and like. They are happy to let others do their work for them and dress it up as a "ministry". They want to be CEOs rather than caretakers of souls. They love titles and big paychecks. They surround themselves with favorites and have no trouble showing favoritism to either the biggest givers or those who adore them.

Certainly not all who are false prophets set out to be false prophets. Many began faithfully but were lured away by the temptations of greed and lust and the prospect of fame. That is why every pastor needs the prayers of God's people. The devil is constantly trying to attack and draw faithful pastors into unfaithfulness. Others have been false prophets from the beginning, hiding behind sheep's clothing in order to use the people of God to their own advantage and gain with no care for their souls or their salvation.

But the end of both is the same along with those who follow them - God's judgment. He warns you because the danger is real. The devil does not want you or anyone else to believe in Christ and be saved. And he certainly knows that not everyone is going to be saved. He's working hard to make sure that the number of the condemned is as large as he can possibly make it. Every Christian is in his crosshairs. Our defense, our only defense, is the Word of God which is a lamp to our feet and light to our path. The gate to eternal life is narrow and the way is difficult. But it is not hidden. God has given you the Ten Commandments so that you may clearly see what is good and what is evil. He has had four different evangelists preserve for you faithful accounts of the person, the teaching, and the work of Jesus for your salvation. He has said plainly that Holy Baptism saves you. He has promised you that when the ministers whom He calls deal with you according to His divine command, in other words, His Word, it is just as valid and certain as if He was standing before you dealing with you Himself. And He has in clear language told you that the bread and wine of Holy Communion are joined to His true Body and Blood and impart to you the forgiveness of sins which He obtained with them on the cross for you. You don't need to take my word for it. You have the Bible. Read it. Study it. Learn it. Be formed and shaped by it. Submit your own thoughts and ideas and reason to it, to God. Treasure the Bible as the most precious thing you could ever possibly have because, in truth, it is. You don't need God to whisper to you in your heart or speak to you in visions or dreams. I pray He never does that to me. I can't be certain of any of those. But I can be certain of His Word. The Bible alone, not reason, not tradition, not my feelings, is the sole rule and norm of Christian faith and life. Judge every preacher by it and hold every preacher to it because it is a matter of eternal life and death for both of you. It is the difference between hearing Jesus say "Well done, good and faithful servant," or "Depart from me you worker of lawlessness. I never knew you."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, read your Bible every day. Read it and teach it to your children. Study it with your brothers and sisters in Christ so that together we may recognize and flee from any and everyone who would seek to lead us away

Many members. One body united in Christ.

from the Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed us and shown to us the way of everlasting life.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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