

Many members. One body united in Christ.

The Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
St. Matthew 22:34-46
4 October, Anno Domini 2026

Beloved in Christ,

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

I am becoming more and more convinced that so many of our personal and corporate struggles are rooted in the fact that, like the lawyers and Pharisees whose thoughts centered on the law and what they must do, we also very often give our attention only to the question of what we have to do. We want to know the choice, the right next action step. We want to know how much is good enough. And while there is a time and place for some of those kinds of questions, asking only such questions and beginning with those questions will only ever lead us into the same errors and eternal destruction as the lawyers and the Pharisees.

We are never the answer to our questions or our problems. But that is what our sinful flesh is thoroughly and foolishly convinced of. “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” “How are we going to save this country?” “What do I have to be doing to make sure I can retire comfortably?” “What do I have to do to feed my family and pay my bills?” “Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?” These are all questions pertaining to the law which tells us what we must do. And the law certainly provides answers to those kinds of questions. You must love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind or be condemned eternally. And to do that you must also love your neighbor as yourself, without exception or hesitation or grumbling being merciful and forgiving, protecting and improving everything that the Lord God has given him with a perfectly willing and cheerful spirit. You must stop being anxious for tomorrow and worrying about tomorrow’s bread. You must pray to God and ask Him to give you what you need this day and then go about your vocations in faithful confidence that God feeds His beloved children. You must gladly hear and learn God’s Word and gather with the body of Christ so that together you can take, eat, and drink the holy Body and the precious Blood which Christ our Savior died to prepare for you and commands His children to receive for the forgiveness of sins.

Those are the law answers to those questions. Are you satisfied? Are your problems solved now that you know what you must do? If you are honest with yourself, then you are not only not satisfied but you are actually now in a worse situation

than when you asked the question because you either recognized that you can't do what you must or you don't want to. Either way, being told by God what you must do never really solves the problem because having the demand held up before you only reveals the truth that you haven't, you can't, and you don't want to do what you must. It reveals the deep corruption of your flesh that makes us blind and dead enemies of God who deserve nothing except to spend eternity with the devil suffering the fullness of God's judgment against sin. It takes a truly hard heart to hear any of the commandments, let alone Jesus' answer regarding the greatest commandment, and still imagine that you either have or could keep any of them and be holy as God is holy.

What the preaching of the holy, eternal law of God shows you is that not only are you and your doing not the answer to your problems, you and your doing are the cause of your problems. The Law exposes the idolatrous, angry, greedy, adulterous, slanderous, vengeful, evil heart that dwells within you and your complete inability to do anything to change it.

To be sure, this must happen to each of us. We must all be brought to recognize and be terrified of the wretchedness of our own heart. God has to take off the blinders from our eyes so that we no longer live under the delusion that we are good and can make ourselves pleasing to God. Praise God if He has graciously worked this knowledge and terror of sin in your heart! This is the beginning of true repentance. If He hasn't or if you have grown cold to the Law's preaching, pray to God that He would open your eyes so that you might not be dragged into eternal judgment with the wicked, because the same Lord who gave the Law to Moses on Mt. Sinai also promised Adam and Even and all their children the Seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's head by atoning for the mountain of sin that crushes our consciences.

It is essential to having a proper understanding of the Law to see that both times God gave the Law to Moses it was preceded by statement which proclaimed the mercy and faithfulness of God. Before God said "You shall not" He said "I am". In Exodus 20, before giving the First Commandment, God tells us who He is and what He does for us "I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Then, after the people treacherously abandoned God who had redeemed them and set them free and worshipped instead the gold calf they had made for themselves, God gave new tablets with the same commandments but only after Moses told the people that the Lord was unwilling to destroy them, that He would still bring them into the Promised Land as He swore to their fathers. Despite our failure to do what we are supposed to do, God remains

faithful and does exactly what He promised.

Before we think about what we must do, we must think about what God has done. “What do you think about the Christ?” The right answer to this question alone sets broken consciences free from the terror of knowing how completely we have failed to do what we are supposed to do. The wrong answer removes all hope of salvation. If the Christ is only David’s son, a really good man who showed us how to do what we are supposed to do, then he is only another flesh and blood man whose example can only drive us into further despair because we know that we haven’t and can’t live as He lived.

Now, the Christ is David’s son. But the Christ is not only David’s son. He is also David’s Lord, God’s Son, who brought Israel up out of the land of Egypt and into the Promised Land, who promised Adam and Eve redemption from the sin and death that they had unleashed on all creation. The Lord our God, who requires of us that we love Him with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind, whom we have instead rebelled against in thought, word, and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone, humbled Himself by wrapping Himself in our flesh for the singular purpose of taking all of the Law’s just accusations of you, all of God’s wrath against your sin, and pay for it Himself to set you free from the judgment of hell and your slavery to sin. The Lord our God was unwilling to destroy us because He is merciful and faithful even though we are anything but. What God demands of us and we fail to do, He Himself did in our place. Then having actually kept the Law, the Christ, the God-man, traded places with us, allowing the His own Law to condemn Him for our disobedience. The righteous for the unrighteous. The innocent for the guilty. He was counted a sinner and we were counted obedient sons.

Jesus Christ is where every question should begin and end. Jesus, the son of David, is the exact imprint of the Father. If you have seen Jesus then you have seen the Father. They are one. Jesus, the Lord your God, heard your cries because you belong to Him. In Holy Baptism He laid claim to you and put His own name upon you. He promised to take responsibility for you, to be your Redeemer, your God, your Father. He promised to cast your sins behind His back and never look upon them again. He promised that He would not count your transgressions against you. He crushed the heads of all your enemies by being crushed. They live forever under His feet where even they must now serve His gracious will to save you. You didn’t do any of that. He did.

Beloved of God do not take your problems, your sins, or your fears and lay them at

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the foot of the Law, asking “What must I do?”. Lay them at the pierced and resurrected feet of the Christ. Rest in all that He has done for you. He has gathered you here to His house so that He may forgive you, heal you, and strengthen you by all that He has done. In that joy and confidence you will no longer ask “What must I do?”. Instead, you will begin with eager hearts to ask “Father, what may I do in your kingdom this day to the glory of Your most holy name?”.

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.