

Oculi

12 March, Anno Domini 2023

St. Luke 11:14-28

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

Redeemed of the Lord,

Division is something that we are all familiar with. Everyone is divided against everyone else for one reason or another. Religion, politics, nationality, age, and any other of a host of things. Sadly, some people are even divided against themselves - hating who they are, hating what God has created. One of the worst things you can be accused of in our day is being divisive. It is a great weapon unleashed particularly against any who dare point out the truth. How dare anyone call anything wrong! To each his own. Everyone is just trying to live their truth.

But like every other trick of the devil, the accusation of divisiveness is leveled by the guilty against the innocent in order to distract from the truth. It is not actually divisive to say that no one has a right to murder the unborn. We should agree on that. The divisive position is to suggest that those in the womb are suddenly not people who have been created by God and therefore it is not murder to kill them. It is not actually divisive to say that boys should compete against boys and change in only boys locker rooms. We have always known that until five minutes ago. It IS divisive, literally and figuratively, to say that I can take hormones and cut apart my body and change from a boy to a girl. It is not actually divisive to demand that those exercising the authority of the state keep their hands off the church and not seek to restrain her preaching or worship. That is how God so ordered creation. What is divisive is to demand that Christians worship only in state-sanctioned ways and preach state-sanctioned things. It is not divisive to point out false and dangerous teachings and to insist that only those who share our confession be given space to publicly teach in our midst. St. Paul clearly writes by the Holy Spirit "In Romans he writes "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them." (Romans 16:17) What is divisive is to invite those who do not share our confession of the inerrancy of God's Word to teach us God's Word and to try to place on our lips the deceitful language of those who despise all that is good and godly. We told to test every spirit to see whether it is from God. It is divisive to dismiss as fringe those who raise legitimate doctrinal questions and concerns. It is not divisive to say that only Christ can bestow life and that only through the means which He Himself has appointed - His Word, Baptism, and Holy Communion. It is divisive to teach, contrary to the Scriptures, that Baptism does not forgive sins and bestow salvation or that Holy Communion is not the true Body and Blood of Jesus or that we must rely on the dead to make intercession for us or that God saves us on the basis of our works. Many times does God in Scripture warn against

those who cause division in the church by teaching new and strange doctrines. To Titus St. Paul writes “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.” (Titus 3:10-11) And Jude warns “But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁸ They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.”¹⁹ It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.²⁰ But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit,²¹ keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.” (Jude 17-21)

What God speaks is never divisive. Lies are divisive. They divide us from truth and reality and from God Himself who is Truth. God is not divisive. Indeed, His desire is unity - unity in the truth. Who is it in the beginning that was divisive? Was it God who created all things and united man to Himself by giving man the Holy Spirit? No. It was the serpent who divided man from God and husband from wife by accusing God of being a liar and deceiver. Again, the guilty accusing the innocent of his own crimes.

In today's Gospel, the Pharisees take up the devil's deceit. They accuse our Lord of being divisive, driving out demons by the authority of the prince of the demons, Beelzebul, the devil. These same Pharisees who would accuse Jesus Himself of having a demon, seek to make Jesus the harbinger of chaos and disruption. “You come here, the lowly son of a carpenter, claiming to be the Son of God. We all know that can't be true. You are a liar. You question our teaching and humiliate our teachers using the Scriptures. You drive out demons but not in the way we want. You are causing division among the people as many have begun to follow You rather than us.”

But it was, in fact, the Pharisees and those who clung to their works righteous doctrines who had sown division and chaos among God's people. They introduced doctrines and practices that were contrary to God's Word. They pointed people to false Christ's. They cut deals with the pagan Romans to remain in power so long as they kept the people in line. They turned God's house of prayer into a den of thieves. And their chief demonic action? Rejecting the Messiah whom God had sent. The work of the Spirit - driving out demons, healing the sick, and forgiving sins - they blasphemed and credited to the devil.

Do not be easily fooled by those who seek to silence the truth of Holy Scripture by deflecting and accusing you of being divisive. Division is caused by rejecting that which is true. It is true that we are to speak the truth in love and we sinners quite often do not. We can and do give in to our anger and our pride and speak with unnecessarily sharp tongues. For such things we need to repent and seek forgiveness. It is right to admonish such things. But the weaknesses of man do not change the truth. Where God has spoken, we speak because God speaks the truth and the truth is the fountain of all genuine unity. The Good Shepherd said “And I have other sheep which are not of this fold. I must bring

them also and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” (John 10:16) There is no unity among those who all cling to their individual lies. Eventually they are forced to turn on and consume one another because at some point “my” truth runs up against “your” truth. Lies are what divide - man from God, husband from wife, parents from children, pastors from people.

The kingdom of the devil is by nature divided because it is a kingdom of lies. Even the demons are divided against themselves. Their only unity is their hatred of God and all that is good. They have no loyalty to one another. They are not a merry band of brothers fighting a common cause. That is why this world is plunging deeper and deeper into division and chaos - it is possessed by and enslaved to demons, the architects and sowers of division. This is made clear by the Ten Commandments. Is it divisive to help and support your neighbor in every bodily need, to protect the bodies God has created regardless of age or sex or nationality? Or are anger and murder, permanently mutilating our neighbor’s bodies and perpetuating their mental confusion? Is it divisive to lead sexually pure and decent lives, to love and honor your spouse? Or is it divisive to lust and fornicate and pollute the marriage bed? Is it divisive to remain faithful to the Word of God, to proclaim the divine truth, and to point out the devil’s lies? Or is it divisive to despise the Word of God, pretend that lies are truth, and take that which God has forbidden?

You all have felt the devil’s chaos approaching. Some of you have been divided from your children because they have drank the devil’s poison that comes spewing of televisions and computers and schools. Some of you have been divided from your spouse because of adulterous relationships or abuse or a rejection of the Word of God. Some of you have been divided from family and friends and coworkers because you dare to believe and confess the truth of God’s Word on any number of things - creation and evolution, abortion, sexual perversions, marriage, closed Communion, and a host of other things. You have been labeled divisive. So too was your Lord. Do not fear. Do not give up what is true.

Truth unites. It unites us to God and it unites us to one another. We, the body of Christ, the Holy Christian Church, are united into a mystical union by our common confession of what God Himself has spoken in Holy Scripture. In this confession we are united to God. Jesus says “If you abide in My words, then you are truly My disciples.” (John 8:31) And in His High Priestly Prayer Jesus prayed to the Father “Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one...I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and

loved them even as you loved me.” (John 17:11, 20-23) Jesus prays for our unity and bestows that unity as we rejoice and confess with one voice the truth of His Word.

Saints of God, it is not God or His Word that cause division. That work belongs alone to the devil and all who reject the Word of God. You will not find unity or peace by agreeing with the world or accepting its terms. Instead, you will only find division and chaos and God’s wrath. Cling in faith to the one and eternal truth - God’s Word. It has the authority to drive out demons and make you an heir of God’s kingdom. It alone brings unity and peace among men. May God drive out the demonic forces of division and chaos and unite all men and open our mouths to speak with one voice the truth of Holy Scripture that we may be one with Him and one with one another in love.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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