

Judica

17 March, Anno Domini

St. John 8:42-59

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

Children of God,

Jesus couldn't be more clear. Unbelief, in all its forms, is demonic. I'm sure there were some things that the Jews agreed with Jesus about. But they did not believe in Him. They did not believe His teaching about their own sin. They did not believe that salvation and eternal life could be found only in Jesus and that it can only be given as a free gift. They found His teaching about the Lord's Supper in John 6 to be offensive. They would not receive Him as sent from God to give His life as a ransom for the world. They rejected the teaching that one must be born from above of water and the Spirit if he is to enter the kingdom of God. And because He loved them and us so deeply Jesus told them exactly where their rejection of Him and any of His Word comes from - the devil whose very nature is to lie and deceive and murder and destroy. It is impossible for him to do anything else. To reject anything of Christ is to take sides with the devil.

In matters of salvation, there is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all. There isn't close enough. There aren't versions of Christianity because there aren't versions of Jesus. There is one Jesus sent from the Father - the Son of God born of the Virgin Mary. There is the one faith, the catholic or universal faith built upon that Jesus. To err against it, to doubt any part of it, is to

err against God Himself who revealed Himself and the true faith with great clarity in the Scriptures, who took on human flesh to reveal and carry out His immeasurable love for sinners. We simply have no excuse not to believe ALL that Christ did and ALL that Christ said. God raised Him from the dead thus vindicating and verifying the truth of the entirety of Jesus' ministry. The Jews weren't engaging in pious skepticism and neither are we when we claim to believe in part of God's self-revelation but not all of it. All we are doing is returning to the sin of Adam and Eve, claiming to know better than God. The Jews hated God and His Christ. They hated mercy. They hated that they were not God and that someone, namely God, would suggest that they needed someone to save them from their sin and the death that they deserved.

The Christian faith is a radical departure from everything that the world and our sinful flesh believe and do. Not long ago we learned by heart the words of St. Paul from Galatians 5:17 "The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit and the desires of Spirit are against the flesh. For these are opposed to each other." Those who believe the Scriptures and seek to live a life of faith and obedience will not be received well by the world because such a life is a testament against all that the world holds dear. Even your own flesh will war against you because the things of Christ are contrary to the things of the Old Adam who is only selfish, deceitful, conceited, lustful, covetous, murderous, and idolatrous.

It is in our sinful nature to hold Christ at a safe distance. We want to make sure that he doesn't take away what is most precious to us. We want to make sure that we can still stay in good with our unbelieving friends and not make things awkward. We don't want to be ostracized or mocked. Some seek to use their Christian freedom as an excuse to engage in vulgar joking or conversation, or to use foul

language, or to get drunk, or to be immodest, or find sexual immorality or violence entertaining. Sometimes we use our freedom to not pray or read the Scriptures every day or not go to confession or keep the Sabbath or tithe. Our flesh really does not want to be a new man. Our flesh wants to be the same man, doing the same things but slapping a Christian veneer on them.

In the same way it is in our nature to limit God to our ability to understand or even just our desires, what we WANT God to be and do. How many of us find it completely unreasonable that God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac? Or that God would allow Job to suffer such devastating losses and then not even have the common decency to let Job know why, as though God owes Job or us an explanation for what He does? How often do we presume to know better how to handle things by grumbling against what God is doing?

This same prideful mentality lies behind those who teach that infants can't believe and that Baptism can't forgive sins, that pastors have not been given the authority by God to forgive the sins of repentant sinners but to withhold forgiveness from the unrepentant, that Jesus couldn't really have meant that the bread IS His Body and the wine IS His blood; clearly He meant that they are just representations.

Hear the word of the Lord - these thoughts and others like them are spawned by the father of lies. Of course he doesn't want you in trust in Christ. He doesn't want to you receive in full faith and confidence the Word of God. Of course he wants you to believe that your works contribute in some way to your salvation. Of course he wants you to place your hope in the merits of the saints and to call upon them. Of course he wants you to believe that the Bible can't be trusted because it was written so long ago by men. Of course he wants you to believe that God doesn't

really mind your sin because He knows that deep down you're really a good person.

Of course he wants all these things because these things lead only away from Christ and directly into eternal judgment. Jesus is a stumbling block precisely because everything He is and says and does puts to death the desires of our flesh and the thoughts of our hearts. Thus Jesus said to the Jews "Because I tell the truth, you do not believe me." (John 8:45a) Our flesh hates the truth. We might be okay hearing that we sin. But to be told that we are sinful, that NOTHING good proceeds from our hearts, that ALL our desires are evil, that there is NO righteousness at all in us except that which God Himself gives to us, that there is no work that we can do that is good before God on its own merits - these rile up the anger and resistance of our flesh because we want to be thought well of and we don't want to give up our pet sins and idols.

The Jews had their traditions that they were so good at keeping and made them appear so wonderfully pious and holy. The papacy has its monasteries and pilgrimages and relics and works of penance that are so wonderful that God just has to be pleased with and reward with forgiveness. For others you only need to try your hardest, or you need to be overcome by the Spirit and speak in tongues, or you need by the strength of your own will to make a decision to give your life to Christ and obey Him to show Him that you truly mean it and believe in Him.

None of these are from Christ. None of these are given to us in Scripture. And they aren't precisely because they do not bring salvation. They have nothing to do with salvation. Indeed, they detract from the work of Christ and therefore rob you of the true comfort which Christ alone has accomplished in His death and gives to you in

Holy Baptism, the precious word of Absolution, and the Holy Communion. Through these means Christ gives Himself to you. By His Blood, the Lamb of God, who allowed Himself to be caught in the thicket of your sins, cleanses your conscience of all devilish notions of self-justification and instead gives you the peace of His cross. He spares you from the eternal judgment you deserve and instead raises you to new and eternal life with Abraham, Isaac, and all who have kept the Word of Jesus, guarding it in their hearts against all who would pervert it and treasuring it above everything else in this world, including their own life.

All other teachings and those who teach them emanate from one place - the devil, whose sole goal in life is to steal your heart and your ears away from Christ so that you would perish without His forgiveness. Such servants of the devil will always rail against the truth. It doesn't matter whether they are hiding under the name "Christian" or they are proudly haters of Christ. They will accuse you of being demonic, hateful, and foolish and they will seek to silence you for it. They will always have stones in their hands to throw at Christ and His Church in hopes of destroying both. But they will fail. The only thing they will destroy will be themselves for all eternity. When I AM who was before Abraham returns on the clouds to judge the living and the dead, they will hear the terrible judgment of the One whom they rejected and crucified - "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels". (Matthew 25:41) It was not prepared for them because God takes no pleasure in them being there, but they rejected Christ whom God had sent for them and the word which He spoke to save them. They will receive that which they desired - everything that their works deserved.

On that same day, the faith of all who have been born from above, all who receive Christ in faith, all who love His cross, and love the gifts that He gives will be vindicated. Your cause for which you suffer now is not your own. It is the Lord's. And He will defend it. He has already conquered Satan. He has already marched triumphantly through hell, rendering the father of lies completely impotent, robbing him of the one thing he did have against you - your sin. His Word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path that lead you here to the holy hill of God where He promises to be present for you to save you, to comfort you, and to strengthen you that you may endure. Do not let the seething hatred of the world and even the deceitfulness of your own flesh lead you astray. Their time is drawing to an end. The devil's spite will grow as he knows that Christ's return is drawing near. But he is vanquished and your Baptism declares you to be on the side of Him who has won the victory for all eternity. Embrace every word of Holy Scripture with joy. Do not be ashamed by it or make excuses for it. Let it reach down and tear out every sin it finds in you so that you may remain safe with Christ and praise forever Him who is your salvation and your God.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

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