

Pentecost 12, 2010C  
 748 “Heaven is My Home”  
 \*655 “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word”  
 728 “How Firm A Foundation”

“Division because of Christ”

<sup>49</sup>[Jesus said:] “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! <sup>50</sup>I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! <sup>51</sup>Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. <sup>52</sup>For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup>They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (Luke 12:49-53)

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Today’s Gospel according to St. Luke is quite different than what we’re used to hearing. When it comes to the Gospel, we’re ready to hear about God’s goodness and kindness, not His judgement and condemnation. We’re ready to hear about unity and solidarity, not about disunity and division, especially because of God’s Word and His Son Jesus Christ Himself. When we hear that word ‘Gospel,’ we usually think of the good things of God and of peace with Him. And rightly so—because of Jesus and His death on the cross.

But the good things of God and our peace with God only come by way of God’s grace through His Son, not by our merit and what we do. We have nothing to contribute. That word ‘Gospel’ reveals God’s favor in Jesus Christ, but not because of who we are as sinners.

But there is another Word of our Lord, too. That is the Word of Law, God’s Law. And this Word of our Lord is just as much His as that Word ‘Gospel.’ The Law of God is that which reveals you to be sinners, and deserving of God’s judgment. But thanks be to God, our heavenly Father sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, **but that the world through Him might be saved** (John 3:17).

Our sinful nature doesn’t like to hear either of these words, the Law and the Gospel, for both run counter to how we want to think of ourselves. We don’t want to see how bad things are between ourselves and God. This has to do with the Law. But we also don’t want to think of ourselves as needing help. We don’t want to see ourselves as needing a Savior, let alone a Savior who dies horribly on a cross by means of crucifixion. Such means of salvation seems barbaric to our ‘cultured’ societal standards. And such a proclamation is a turn off to all who want to save themselves and want peace with God in a man-made kind of way.

But salvation, as St. Peter says, is found in none other than Jesus Christ, **For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved** (Acts 4:12). St. Paul calls this kind of preaching—which is preaching of the cross and Christ crucified—foolishness.

**For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence (1 Corinthians 1:18, 21-29).**

Such preaching of Christ that knocks down our ego and builds up Christ is not what the world wants to hear. Nor is it what our sinful nature wants to hear. We want to hear how good we are, how much we're trying, how much we're improving. We want to be affirmed in our relationship with God and feel good about ourselves.

But though we might want to hear such preaching, those are NOT the words that we—nor the world—NEEDS to hear. God would have you know your sin, that you might know and believe in Jesus, your Savior from sin. He would have you humbled before Him, in order that He lift you up.

The world wants to hear of love, acceptance, tolerance, unity and diversity, and agreeing to disagree. They chant the mantra, "let's just all get along" and "Let's stop fussing over minor things."

Christendom, too, has given in to these kind of compromises. Any discussion and distinction of the true Christian doctrine from false teaching, even within our own circles, marks one as a conservative or confessional, a traditionalist, or even 'legalistic,' which is far from the truth. Even to mention the 'Lutheran doctrine' among some Lutherans makes them uncomfortable, as if the Lutheran doctrine is not somehow the Christian doctrine, as if being a Luther is somehow less than being a Christian.

But what is it that we believe, teach, and confess that is different from the true Christian faith? What is it that we believe that is not Christian or contrary to Holy Scripture?

We could also ask that other question, too—that question which follows such confident boasting of the Lord's doctrine and Christ (for that's what it means to be Lutheran): If what we believe, teach, and confess as Lutherans IS Christian, then what is not Christian of other churches and church bodies? Here's where the 'rubber hits the road.' This, too, we don't like to hear. We'd like to think that all who call themselves Christian are—in fact—Christians. But the proof is in their preaching and teaching. How consistent are they in the true doctrine, and how consistent are they in distinguishing Law and Gospel?

How do others answers questions like these?: What does the Bible say? What does it mean? What of God's Law? What of sin? What of Christ? What of the Gospel? What of salvation? What of God's gifts of Word and Sacrament? What of the Church?

All these are questions which, if answered according to what God says in His Word, would have a similar answer in the various denominations and church bodies. But the truth is, not all who call themselves Christian are in fact Christian in the entirety of their teaching, and not every church body that claims to be in the realm of Christendom is Christian, except in name only.

Different and contradictory answers are given to such questions as just asked among the plethora of 'Christian denominations' today. Some say that man has a spark of good in him, though God says that man's nature is corrupted and that he is a 'poor miserable sinner,' whose **unrighteousnesses are as filthy rags** (Isaiah 64:6).

Others say that God wouldn't command us to do what He knows we're unable to do, though He truly does command us, that we see our sin.

Some use the word Gospel, but say nothing of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and don't mention anything of the forgiveness of sins.

Others speak of *A* Jesus, but not the Jesus of the Bible "who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried, and who rose again from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven, not sitting on the right hand of God" (Part of meaning to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Apostles' Creed).

Still, others mock the means of grace, saying that God gives nothing in water baptism, though it be in the Name of the Triune God. Some deride the Lord's Supper and say that through it, God does not forgive sins, even though Christ says that He does.

All these things are to say that Christendom is a divided house. And even within our own church body, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, questions and concerns are raised because of the divisiveness among us.

What does the term, "Close" or "Closed" Communion mean and how do we consistently practice it when so many allow anyone who calls themselves Christians to partake of the sacred meal where premium is given to not only what the Lord's Supper is, the very body and blood of Christ with the bread and the wine, but also to the unity of faith confessed by those communing at the same altar?

How are pastors and congregations in our church body not divided when pastors and members of one congregation are unable to commune at another because of unlutheran worship services centered on what man gives to God and not in what God is giving to sinners in Word and Sacrament, and where the preaching focuses on man and his doing and not on Christ?

Friends, we are divided house—in the LCMS, and within Christendom. Not all agree what the Christian faith is, the true Christian doctrine, let alone, how to live it. Some of this dividedness

is caused by human pride and ego. But more than this, it is caused by God's very Word, because not all believe it, though it is true. Few accept it, though it brings life. More deny it, though the Scriptures present Christ and peace with God through Him.

Jesus Himself said in today's Gospel reading that He came to bring division, not peace, but a sword. This is just what He brings—still today. Not all who hear the Word of God take it to heart as their very own. Look what happened to Jesus. He spoke the truth. He loved the sinner. He said what needed to be said. And they crucified Him. Because of what He said, many of His disciples left Him. Because of what He said, they crucified Him, hanging Him on a cross to die a criminal's death.

And yet, Jesus rose again from the dead. He died for them who put Him on the cross. He died for you, that your sin no longer separate you from the Father. He died for you that your sin be forgiven you. He died for you, that you be united with Him and the Father, not and into all eternity.

Christ suffered what He did—for you—to save you from your sin—that by faith you live in Christ and have the hope of everlasting life.

Through Christ bringing division by means of the truth, by His conquering sin through His death, and by means of His preaching which brings down earthly kingdoms, the devil, and our sinful pride, Christ gives you peace with God the Father:

**For it pleased the Father that in *Christ* all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight -- if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard (Colossians 1:19-23).**

In Christ, you are truly united with Him and the Father--through faith. And you also are united with all who believe in Jesus. You are members of that same "Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints" which we confess in the Creed. And though this church we cannot see with our eyes, we believe with our hearts according to the Lord's Word and promise.

Here is where true unity is found—in Christ. His Word and His promise truly unite. But they also divide, for not all believe. Not all believe Jesus' Word. This doesn't mean that there is a problem with Jesus or with His Word. There's not!

What this demonstrates is the problem with sinful man. And all the more reason is this to keep preaching Christ and Him crucified, this message which is **Foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God** (1 Corinthians 1:18). Amen.