

Ephesians 5.1-9; Luke 11.14-28  
Oculi (Lent 3)  
19 March 2017  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

+ Iesu Iuva +

Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

The basis for today's sermon is the Epistle and Gospel we just heard.

*Oremus: sint placentes sermones oris mei meditationesque cordis nostri in conspectu tuo, Domine fortitudo mea et redemptor meus. Amen. (Ps. 19.14)*

Why all the encouragement and cajoling? Why all the threats in the Epistle for today? "Love one another as Christ loved you." That's Paul's encouragement. "For those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." That's his threat. But why? Why?

Because Paul knows something about every Christian that's always true at all times as long as you remain in this life.

And it's this. Though you bear the name of Christ because of your Baptism into His death and resurrection and are rightly called a saint, you're still a sinner. And though you're engaged in life-and-death struggle against your flesh and sins, you're still a saint. "The good that I would, that do I not do; the evil that I would not, that do I do." That's you and me. To a T. And we Lutherans almost have a corner on the market in talking about this. Sadly. Because it's a clear teaching of Scripture, as we see in the Epistle for today. We call it the *simul*, as in *simul justus et peccator*—at one and the same time saint and sinner.

That's what St. Paul knows about every one of us. That's what's always true at all times of every one of us as long as we remain in this life. Saints we are. Indeed. By the blood of Christ. But we still carry around with us the old evil flesh.

Sin isn't charged against for Christ's sake. And thanks be to God! Because we still have plenty of it.

And the godly life doesn't just...come to us. It must be taught—taught to us by God Himself through His holy Word. And that's why all preaching must be Law and Gospel. If you're sick of hearing it, don't blame the preacher! Instead, be thankful that God in His mercy continues to address your very real situation: you are at one and the same time a saint—yes, whose good works must be formed by God's Word—but also a sinner, whose flesh must be curbed and mortified.

Sinners, but also saints. Above all saints. That's why St. Paul addresses you as "beloved children." Beloved children of none other than God Himself. By the blood of Jesus. Who is your brother through faith in Him. And in whom you have every good—forgiveness of sin, His righteousness, and the promise of everlasting life.

And precisely *as saints* this is your obligation: "Walk in love."

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We just had occasion to talk about love a couple of weeks ago. A few reminders. One, love isn't a feeling, it's always an action. Paul spells that out here: "Walk in love."

What does that mean, Paul? "It means this: Walk as Christ did, who in His love gave Himself up for you, an offering and sacrifice, as a sweet aroma to God."

This kind of love is so different from the world's love. And from the love that your flesh gives rise to. That kind of love only seeks its own advantage. It loves whatever it loves only as long as you can get pleasure and profit out of it. (LW 76.383)

Christian love, the love that Christ has and that we should have, loves entirely differently. It loves like Christ did. It spares no cost to self.

Our possessions? Nothing to us, if they can't also be of use to another. And not only to our friends, but even our enemies. Isn't that what Christ did?

But we shouldn't even be satisfied with that. Instead, we should be willing to die for friend and foe alike. To think about nothing all the time except how we can serve and be useful to *others*—friend and foe alike—not only with our goods, but even our body. A tall order. But not really. Because we who are in Christ already know that Christ belongs to us, a possession that can never be taken away, and that He's already given us everything. So that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

That's Christian love. I must put you first. And I put you first by living according to the 10 Commandments in everything I think, say, and do toward you and about you.

And that's why "sexual immorality, uncleanness, and covetousness" aren't even to be mentioned among us.

The first two are the same and they cover all sexual relations outside of marriage. Let that not even be named among us! Because that's not how you love someone!

Remember: worldly love and fleshly love seeks only its own advantage and loves only as long as it can get something from it. That's a pretty good definition of the one-night stand. Of cohabitation outside of marriage. Of adultery. And porn. And even so-called gay marriage and gender bending. You don't do those things for someone else's benefit and welfare. You do it for you. And it's not love. And that's not how saints live—saints made saints by the blood of Christ, who loved so much that He gave His life.

The third thing—covetousness—St. Paul calls idolatry. And now it's time to take stock of what you think of all the things the Lord has given you. And even of the things He hasn't.

The diagnosis is easy. If you're a servant of your money and house and car and clothes. If you'd sooner let the kingdom of God be ruined than pry open your wallet to support preaching and the administration of the Sacraments. Then, Houston, you've got a problem. Because you've given pride of place *not* to the Lord God of heaven and earth, who created you and everything you own, but to what He's created. And that's idolatry.

Instead, use what the Lord has given you in *love*. In love that helps and supports the poor and indigent. That upholds the preaching of the Word in this and every place.

So Paul's first motivation is enticement. Christ has loved you; so in return you love. But the flesh is strong. And God's Word brooks no breach.

And so Paul finally tells it like it is. If it's not good enough a reason for you that you *are* and *are called* a saint by the blood of Christ, then know this: "No one who practices sexual immorality or impurity or is covetous has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Paul tells it like it is because it's easy to deceive ourselves. It's so easy to say, "Faith is supposed to save me and not works. So let my works be whatever they will." Paul puts an end to all such silly talk. Faith does indeed save. But works always follow. Works not for God, but for our neighbor. That's what love is. It's giving your neighbor the works he needs from you.

When you do it, of course, your Old Adam won't like it. But that's okay. God has already drowned him in your Baptism and continuously crucifies him. Just walk in love. It'll be a struggle. As long as you're alive.

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But thank God that it's at least a struggle.

Because it certainly wasn't for the blind and mute man who was possessed by a demon. There was no struggle there at all. The struggle started as soon as Jesus healed him and he spoke. The struggle started when the demon who was cast out of him rounded up seven of his buddies and came back to harass the poor man. So that the world, looking on his struggle, could truly say, "The last state of that person is worse than the first."

That's how freedom from the power of the devil always looks to the world. The world doesn't struggle; we do. The world's deaf to the reality they live in. It's all calmness and silence as far as they're concerned, even while the devil leads them around by the nose. And they certainly can't open their mouth in protest to it.

That's exactly how every one of us once were. Deaf. Mute. Or, to use some other scriptural imagery, dead in trespasses and sins. In darkness. Blind. Lame. Paralyzed.

And there simply was no struggle at all.

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You know—and moms and dads, don't mishear me on this—I always love to hear a baby cry when it's baptized. It can be calm and sleeping in its mother's arms and even stay fast asleep while mom lays it in mine. And then comes the water with the Word of God: I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The baby grimaces and then the little corners of its mouth turn down; and then comes the wailing.

I'm sure most of the time it's just the shock of the cold water on its warm little head. But what a wonderful picture of what has happened!

2 seconds ago there was no struggle; now it's crying out. 2 seconds ago it was deaf and mute to its own reality; now Christ has claimed it as His own. 2 minutes ago it was so entirely sunken in its own evil it wasn't even aware of it; now the flame of faith is kindled in its heart. The strong man has been ejected by the Stronger Man, and the Cross of Christ has been hung up on the walls.

And so it cries. It's crying out because it's been marked with sign of the holy cross as one redeemed by the Christ the crucified. And that mark has become a target for the devil. The struggle has begun.

But it's a blessed struggle. And God would have it no other way. That's why in Christ He becomes "the One Stronger." He attacks and lays siege to the devil's kingdom and topples it. And makes His throne in the heart of the baptized. For unwitting slavery to Satan, He gives freedom in the kingdom of God; for the darkness of sin He gives the light of His holiness and righteousness; for the surety of death and eternal death He gives Himself as the resurrection and the life.

And so where there was only *peccator* before, now there's also *justus*. That is, where there was only sinner, there's now also *saint*. Saint by the blood of Christ. Saint by Christ, the Stronger One, who has invaded and toppled Satan's exclave in the heart. Saint by Christ, who gave Himself up, an offering and sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

May God the Holy Spirit strengthen you and preserve you in this blessed struggle. Love your neighbor as yourself. And hold fast to the Stronger One, who is your righteousness, life, and salvation. God grant it you all for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*sdg*  
*jsb*