

TRINITY 8

July 22 2018

Old Test: Jeremiah 23:16-29

Epistle: Acts 20:27-38

Gospel: Matthew 7:15-23

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's sermon is meant to better equip you to discern between what is true and what is false. Sometimes that is easy to do, and other times, it's a challenge.

We hear this text every year,
because we need to be reminded of the difference between good fruit and bad.

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in Your sight O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sitting...

Our Bible readings contain quite a number of visuals.

There's God's Word being like a hammer breaking the rocks in pieces.

There's fierce wolves who speak twisted things,
as well as wolves in sheep's clothing.

There's grapes and thorn bushes,

Figs and thistles,

healthy trees bearing good fruit

and diseased trees bearing bad fruit.

All of it inspired by God the Holy Spirit for you to know the
difference when it comes to heresy—heterodoxy—and
orthodoxy, and what to do about it.

That which is *orthox* is straight—it's correct—it's true.

It's what we want to believe, teach and confess.

It's what we want to build our lives upon and carry to our graves.

That which is heresy isn't merely twisted...it's broken—worthless even.

And no matter how influential or zealous the person peddling it may be,
we recognize it for what it is, and say, "No thank you."

But then, what's *heterodox* is twisted—it's bent—it's close to the truth, but still false—
And it's bad fruit.

My assumption is, most of us don't buy into a lot of heresy.

Heresy like those of the Mormon's or Jehovah's Witnesses—

who use the name of Jesus but redefine His history,

twist His Gospel into a gospel of works-righteousness,

and add their own prophecies to His teachings.

Though there is much to be said about heresy—
 how it never goes away—
 but just keeps getting repackaged and redefined
 and then promoted year after year after year as being something new...

My concern this morning is...

those who believe what is *heterodox*.

It's all the teaching—all the doctrine—that's close to being straight, but it's not.

You hear it in the music played on Christian radio stations

and see it everywhere on Facebook.

You hear it from your friends, even think of it yourself!

We are bombarded with *heterodoxy*—bent and crooked beliefs.

And even though our Lord says, "Beware of this!"

We think, "It's okay."

Locks are on our doors—

Security systems are in place—

but we leave our ears wide open

for anyone to enter in and spew their

heterodox teachings.

I mean, you wouldn't add onto your house with a bowed 2x4,

not to mention use one for your deck.

Get that—we're more careful picking out straight lumber for our projects
 than we are in analyzing, examining, and comparing to see if what is being
 taught is *orthodox* or not.

By the way, this is why our liturgy is so important.

What do we recite before the sermon? Yeah—one of the Ecumenical Creeds:

The Apostles', Nicene and one time a year the Athanasian.

Those creeds are straight as an arrow—as orthodox as they come.

Recited before the sermon so that if a preacher gets in the pulpit and
 preaches something different, you'll know.

Some say, "C'mon pastor, heterodox teaching isn't going to hurt me."

Really? The prophets, the apostles and Jesus all beg to differ.

For you see, neither heresy nor heterodoxy is good for you—

It's not good for your family,

for your faith or for your soul.

Actually, it's the most dangerous thing known to Mankind.

For it is the Devil's attempt,

either slowly or all at once,

to pull you away from Jesus.

To dislodge the cross from your heart.

Stuffing your ears with whatever it is so you don't hear the Gospel and cut you off from the Lord's forgiveness.

You think I'm kidding?

Just listen to one episode of the Plucked Chicken Podcast where Pr. Bruss and I lay a crooked stick next to a straight stick and see for yourself.

Unfortunately, heterodoxy does not come with a WARNING label.

What if above certain churches, even ones here in town, a sign read:

WARNING:

WHAT IS PRERACHED HERE IS BENT—IT'S CROOKED.

LISTEN AT YOUR OWN PERIL.

That would be extremely helpful.

But, as you know, it doesn't exist.

To make matters worse, heretical and heterodox teachers are not easy to spot.

They carry the same Bible you do,
quote Bible passages left and right,
pray the most beautiful prayers,
and are such a joy to be around...

They believe in Jesus, for crying out loud!

But they tell you what your itching ears want to hear.

And your Old Adam just laps it up,

like a dog over a puddle of anti-freeze.

Some say, "But pastor doesn't Jesus tell us not to judge?"

He does—but that is not a blanket statement prohibiting every form of judgment.

What Jesus says in Matthew 7:1 has nothing to do with paying attention to what is taught and seeing if it's orthodox. For 15 verses later, our Lord says,

"Judge"

"Beware"

"Be critical and discerning about what is taught."

Because—on this side of heaven,

we have to listen and think critically.

I mean look, when the Pope and his adherents were leading Christians astray with their false teachings, Luther didn't just sit back, do nothing and say, "All that matters is we love each other." No—he did something about it. He identified the heretical and heterodox teachings in the churches.

And gang, believe me, I know...

what makes discernment even more difficult is that we all have friends and family who do not believe as we do.

These people care for us and pray for us,

yet they are bound to a heterodox or heretical teaching.

I cannot count the number of friends and acquaintances my wife and I lost

in abandoning our own heterodox beliefs.
Gratefully—gratefully, my mother still loves me.

So, how do we critique? How do we judge?
We can't see into another person's heart.

So, there's got to be some way to check them out. Well, there is.

Jesus says, **By their fruits you will know them.**

These fruits can include a preacher's life,
how he behaves—his deeds, etc.

However, even thoroughly orthodox preachers have a sinful
flesh, and won't always do the good they want to do.

So, judging a man by his life and good works is
secondary.

The main fruit of any preacher is his teaching—

This is why Jesus asks,

Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?" [7:15]

The answer is no—Jesus continues:

**Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad
fruit.**

**A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear
good fruit.**

So, the fruit will be the judge.

And we have to examine it carefully,
on all sides, to see if it's good or bad.

Thankfully, God has not left us unequipped in this matter.

He has put His whole Word at your fingertips to study and to learn,
and the whole Book of Concord as a faithful guide.

He's given you Bible classes as well as the Divine Service...

all to learn how to examine the fruit,
and see through any lies, any deceptions and any falsehoods
that pass for "Christian teaching."

You might think Jesus would say,

"Don't listen to anyone.

Don't worry about preachers and teachers and finding a church.

Just stay home with your Bible, sit in a corner, and you'll be safe."

But He never said anything like that.

On the contrary,

He has sent true preachers who bring forth good fruit.

That being, the teaching of the Scriptures, where law and gospel are rightly divided.

The good fruit is the teaching of repentance,
the preaching of the law which brings us
to contrition,

to the end of ourselves,
 to the knowledge that we can do nothing to save ourselves,
 and then the preaching of the Gospel that brings forth faith.
 The good fruit is the preaching of Jesus, who won
 the forgiveness of our sins by His death on the cross.

Fruit like this gives all glory to God and comfort to you.

For they are the words Jesus wants you to hear.

If the words of the false teacher are poison,
 the words of the Lord are medicine, the medicine of immortality.
 If the words of the false teacher bring death,
 the word of the Lord brings life and salvation.

And where you find the Gospel purely taught and the Sacraments rightly administered,
 there you know the preacher is a good tree bringing you good fruit.

And there, you should remain.

Yet, where you find teachings that differ from this or practices to the contrary,

anytime you find bad fruit—from there you should flee.

Don't settle for "it's bent but it's close enough"

Don't settled for anything twisted—that's bad fruit.

It's what the Lord never intended you to have.

May the Lord Jesus keep us steadfast in this,

His Word of life,

until He calls us to Himself. Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and
 minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

8:15—We sing the Te Deum

11:00—Remain standing for the Offertory