

Jeremiah 23.16-29; Acts 20.27-38; Matthew 7.15-23  
8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity  
11 August 2019  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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

Wolves. Arising in and from the very midst of the dear flock bought by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And prophets—think of today's pastors—prophets *called by God Himself to speak to the truth of God Himself* teaching and preaching falsehood in His name.

It all seems so sinister. So dark. Wolves disguised in sheep's clothing. [Show cover of bulletin.]

But it seems that way because it is.

This teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ is nothing to sneeze at. And hardly anything to snooze through. Because wolves—they're not just unpleasant animals. They destroy. And false prophets—they're not just nice guys who happen to have it wrong. They pave the road to hell.

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Now look, I know you may think that sounds extreme. But in answer to that even the Lord Jesus Himself carries it all a step further.

You and I—we want to see the world in differing shades of gray. We want to be able to find the good, the bad, and the ugly—and often in the same exact thing. And oftentimes that works. You've got a great neighbor who's always lending you his garden tools. Good! Unfortunately, he never shovels the city sidewalk in front of his house. Bad. And his house—man you should his see house. Hasn't had a new coat of paint in 15 years. Ugly. So...there are some problems there. But on the whole, he's a good guy.

But, fellow-redeemed, that's not how it works in Christ's Church.

When it comes to the Church's stock in trade—the teaching and preaching of the Word—there are no shades of gray. There are either bad trees or good, wolves or sheep, prophets who lie in God's name or the whole counsel of God.

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That's what the Lord expected of Paul. The whole counsel of God. That in turn is what Paul expected of the Ephesian elders. And even today that's what the Church must expect of its pastors. The whole counsel of God:

The wondrous salvation that is in Jesus Christ, to be sure; but also the full force of God's Law telling sinners they actually have a problem—and one bigger than they can deal with.

The righteousness of faith alone in Christ alone, to be sure; but also the godly life that just...follows from being a child of God.

The bloody, cross-won salvation in Jesus' name alone, to be sure; but also how the Lord does and wants to give you that salvation through His Word, His Baptism, His Meal.

Christ's triumph over evil on His holy cross, to be sure; but also the cross of suffering that's laid upon all the followers of Christ.

The glorious day of resurrection, when the Lord Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead; but also the six-day creation, in which the Lord made the very bodies He'll raise up on the last day.

The Real Presence of the life-giving body and blood of Jesus under the bread and wine, to be sure; but also closed communion.

The forgiveness of sins in the blood of Jesus, to be sure; but also "forgive as you have been forgiven. Do not let the sun go down on your anger."

The whole counsel of God. Not a thing missing. Not a thing trifled with. Not a thing glossed over.

Because here, when we're talking about the whole counsel of God, there's no "almost," no "in the ballpark." It's not like hand grenades and horseshoes where close enough gets the job done. It either is or it isn't the whole counsel of God. That's what the Lord expects of His pastors. Not their opinions and dreams. Not deceitful messages disguised as the bleating of sheep. Not rotten fruit. But the whole counsel of God. "If someone speaks," says St. Peter, "let him speak as the oracles of God."

And that's why Jesus can speak in such "binary" terms. Pastors in the Christ's Church either speak what the Lord has revealed or they lie. There's no in between. They're either sheep or wolves. No in between. They're either good trees or bad trees. There's no middle ground.

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Now, all of this is very scary. People who go out in the LORD's name and prophesy...falsely! The wolves arise from the sheep and dress up like the sheep. And the trees—they're either good or bad.

How can you tell?

Well, praise and thanks be to God He's given you taste buds!

Bite into a crab-apple, and you know to spit it out right away. It's sour. And if you eat the rest, you'll get a bellyache. But bite into a Honeycrisp, and it's sweet. Eat the rest and it's a wholesome snack.

That's just what Jesus is saying. It's possible to look through all the subterfuge and masks that the false teachers wear.

And this is how you can do it: pay attention to their fruit—to their teaching.

And this means that you have not only right, but even a duty, to judge.

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Now look, I know some of you feel daunted by that. You think: "Who am I to judge the teaching of a pastor? Most pastors have 4 years of formal theological education; and many Missouri Synod pastors have 8 full years of formal theological education and the some. How'm I to stand in judgment over the teaching of a pastor? With my Catechism?"

Yes. As soon as you've asked that last question, you have your answer: use your Catechism. This is how it works.

I've got 5 examples. This just scratches the surface.

You walk into your average mainline Church and hear that God *might* have been involved in the creation of the world. But it was through a long process of evolution. And you remember your Catechism: "I believe that God created me and all creatures." And you go home, look in the back, and find the question "How did God create everything?" Answer: "God created by His Word. He spoke creation into existence, forming and filling it in six days. Genesis 1:1, In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

You stop in at a Methodist church like the one just down the road from me. And hear from the pulpit that not only it is okay for homosexuals to be joined in marriage, you're a homophobe if you disagree. And you remember your Catechism on the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we lead sexually pure and decent life and husband and wife love and honor each other."

You're at the funeral of your Baptist buddy. The pastor says that even though your buddy'd been raised in the Church he wasn't really a Christian until he got done with college, got married, had baby... made his decision to follow Jesus. And you recall the words of the Catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him." And then the pastor goes on to talk about your buddy's second baptism. The first didn't do anything for him, obviously. And you remember your Catechism: "What benefits does Baptism give?" "It works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal life to all who believe this." Everything your buddy needed for this life and the next he got when he got baptized—even when *he* was a baby.

You're at one of our Big Box churches on a Sunday when they actually have Communion and the pastor's careful to explain that it really doesn't matter what you believe about what he holds in his hand. But the bread and wine *do* represent Christ's body and blood, he says (you can listen to that sermon online, by the way). And you remember the Catechism: "What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine....Where is this written? Our Lord Jesus Christ...took bread...and said, 'This is My Body.'... Also, He took the cup...and said, 'This cup in the new testament in My blood.'"

You visit your Missouri Synod cousins and the communion card announces that any baptized Christian may receive the Sacrament. And you remember the question in your Catechism: "Who should not be given the Sacrament? Answer: Those Christians of a different confession of faith. Romans 16.17, Mark those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine that you have learned, and avoid them."

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Just a handful of examples. But look at what a job your Catechism does and can do! What a tool it is to see the black and the white in a world that we'd all love to see as gray!

That's exactly why you have a Catechism. That's exactly why we spend 3 years teaching it to the children of our congregation. That's exactly why it's a core textbook at Topeka Lutheran School—so that you can refine your taste buds and taste the fruit of the teaching of your pastors. And judge it.

But when it's not the "whole counsel of God." When it diverges from "the pattern of sound words." When it's not "the doctrine you have learned"—what are you to do?

The catechumens could help me out here, but I'll save them the embarrassment. Let me explain a little something. The only time they get to use a four-letter word in class is in answer to this question: What should you do when you encounter false teaching? And the answer is: "Run like hell."

Get away from it. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, Paul says. False teaching's like cancer. It starts small, but spreads through the whole body. It was the Ba'al worship of just one woman—Queen Jezebel—that left just 7,000 faithful in all Israel.

And this matters. It matters because if God said it's so, that's the way it is. And it matters because God has revealed His whole counsel for your salvation.

Baptism does save you. It's not just a symbol of joining team Jesus. That's what God says. Don't fall for what He doesn't.

There's but one Baptism. Not two or three or as many as you think you need. Only one. That's what God says: "He who believes and is baptized shall be saved." Don't fall for whatever else anyone tells you.

The bread in the Sacrament is Christ's body. The wine is His blood. Not just a symbol, but the very means by which He gives you the forgiveness of sins. That's what Jesus Himself says. My body. For you. My blood. For you. For the forgiveness of sins. Leave the minute you hear "represents."

Any marriage not between a man and woman is no marriage at all—in fact, it's unrepentant sin, placing you outside of Christ. That's what God says. Don't fall for the new morality invented by the world and swallowed by the sophisticated church. It's no good!

It's true: Jesus alone saves you. Not Jesus + your decision. Not Jesus + the holy life that follows. Just Jesus. And faith in Him alone. "The righteousness of God has been manifested apart from works of the Law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe." Don't listen to anyone who quibbles with that.

And deciding for God—fulfilling the First Commandment—not only is it a work of the Law, it's impossible, for you were dead in trespasses and sins. Anyone who tells you otherwise is a wolf in sheep's clothing. And wolves eat sheep.

You see. It matters. And if it's not enough for you that God tells you it matters, then certainly you can see how your salvation hangs in the balance.

So flee the false prophets. Run like hell.

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But when you run, don't just run away. Run to. Run to the voice of the Good Shepherd. And you will. For Jesus promises you that His sheep know His voice. When you're tempted by what the radio preachers tell you, that your life is such a wreck you need to get baptized again and make another decision for Jesus and get back on His team, remember the voice of your Good Shepherd: "I will never leave you nor forsake you." The Good Shepherd's already on your team!

When you're tempted to take communion with your cousins at their open rail, remember the good food you've eaten, and spit out the bad.

When the world—and even the sophisticated church—mocks your belief in the six-day creation, remember that the Good Shepherd who was powerful enough to create Adam from the dust of the

earth will stand over your grave on the last day and with His same powerful word call your name and raise up your body to everlasting life.

And when the world—and the sophisticated church—laugh at your belief in traditional marriage, listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd who wants nothing for His entire creation but the best, and who says, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”

For that’s God’s counsel. That’s what God would have you believe and do. For you, His beloved creature and child, nothing but good and blessing. Straight from the mouth of the Good Shepherd. Of the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the flock.

That’s how much God loves you. He didn’t spare His own Son. Instead, He gave Him up for us all. That’s His heart toward you.

And nothing—not one word—falls from His holy lips but that it’s blessing and life, wholesomeness and salvation, goodness and life everlasting.

But anything or anyone that perverts that word—that’s a false prophet. A wolf in sheep’s clothing. A bad tree.

And the fruit of it *is* rotten. It is sinister. It is dark. It *does* bring death. And it destroys the Church and God’s Christians.

So, fellow-redeemed: “do not listen to the words of the prophets who ... speak visions of their own minds, who prophesy lies in the Lord’s name, who think to make the Lord’s people forget His name.”

Instead, judge what you hear. Remember your Catechism and use it. That’s why you have it. It’s your right and duty. When you see paw where there should be a hoof, run. When the fruit is bad, spit it out.

And listen instead to the voice of your Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for you. Amen.

Let us pray: “Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word. Amen.”

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