

Matthew 7.15-23
8th Sunday after Trinity
2 August 2020
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.

Two rules of conversation in America: don't talk about politics; don't talk about religion.

Jesus didn't get the message.

In fact, today, His words take us right into the belly of the beast that the latter rule prohibiting talk about religion tries to avoid.

For here Jesus not only talks religion. He talks true religion versus false religion; true versus false theology; true preaching versus false preaching; true teaching versus false teaching.

And the picture Jesus paints of false theology, false preaching, false teaching, false religion isn't pretty: it not only misleads, it kills. Its motivation isn't benign, but malignant and maleficent. Its practitioners aren't nice but misguided guys, but ravenous wolves dressed up as sheep. And their bellies are never so satisfied as they are when they devour the flock. That's what wolves do. They don't eat grass. They eat sheep.

So American niceties be damned: this business about true teaching and false teaching can't not be broached. It can't be swept under the rug. Or glossed over, well, sheepishly, with an aw' shucks.

There's only one true teaching, and the truth isn't plural, but singular. That means that whatever—whatever!—doesn't square with the Scriptures isn't just a little divergence, but falsehood and poison.

You know, every time I come to this Gospel in the church year I have one struggle: which false teaching should I focus on, or at least use as an example?

Should I talk about the Big Box churches that are such easy pickins, with their self-aggrandizing building programs, their theology that denies the work of God in the Sacraments and His Word, that puts it all on you, your decision for Jesus, and the strength of your faith?

How about the Church of Rome, with its prayers to the saints and not Christ, with its faith + love = salvation—Christ gives it a jump-start, but you finish it up?

Or how about the mainline churches—the UCC, the Presbyterians and Episcopalians, the ELCA, the Methodists—who've so warped the Gospel that it's no longer what Christ has done for you, but social justice? And so gutted God's Law that the Sixth Commandment may as well no longer even exist? Who've made a mockery of marriage and the God who instituted it by calling marriage what can never be marriage—between a man and a man or a woman and woman—and blessing it in the church?

As striking as all of those things are, and as opposed as you recognize all those things to be to what God teaches in His Word—it's not like they're out there in the pagan world, they have found their home within the church. The wolves have invaded the flock. And the sheep are being devoured.

I know it's tough to think like that. It opposes our every instinct. No one wants to think of their neighbors and relatives and coworkers and classmates as wolf-food. Nor do we have the stomach for thinking that the wolves for which they're food are the very men whom they love and who stand in front of them on Sunday morning wrapped in whatever religiosity they peddle. Even *they* might be our own neighbors. Deep down, too, we think to ourselves: "Isn't that a little arrogant of me? This little band of Lutherans—what does it say about us that we think we have a corner on the truth?" And we become unnerved.

But let me put it like this. Suppose you're a general on the battlefield. You've got your radioman, and his job is to relay your commands to your lieutenants in the field. As the general, you coordinate the entire effort. You know where your soldiers are going to be kept safe and win the day; you know where they'll run into danger and be lost. There are enemy positions out there, minefields, cover of woods and danger of clearings. And so through your radioman you give commands to the lieutenants. "Advance 2 clicks due east, then bear north 10 degrees for 3 clicks, take the hill, dig in, get a sniper out to the left flank."

Let me ask you: is there any room for error in relaying those commands? Would it be good enough for the radioman to say just to go 1 click east and then north 15 degrees for 4 clicks? Hold back the sniper? Don't worry about digging in because you'll be too tired by then?

Fact is, no one would fault the radioman for insisting on getting the message exactly right. And no one in his right mind would call him arrogant for insisting, "No. This is exactly what the general told me."

When you think of it like that, suddenly all of this comes into focus as the deepest care of the Shepherd for His flock.

For every one of you were bought at a cost that almost cannot be counted—the blood of God's own Son. That's how dear you are to the Father in heaven. And for His sheep, for whom He's already given the best, He wants nothing but the best.

He wants for you the Baptism that *He* instituted—a Baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, that isn't a symbol of you saying Yes to Jesus, but is actually the way God adopts you as sons.

He wants for you His Gospel, pure and unadulterated, not twisted in the mouths of wolves to mislead you to depend on something—anything—other than Jesus for your salvation and destroy you, but having and giving eternal life solely through faith in His dear Son.

He wants for you His Law in all its clarity—to show you how to lead a God-pleasing life and to avoid sin that ensnares, cauterizes conscience, and lets you think you have no need for Jesus.

He wants for you His blessed Sacrament not as a symbolic memorial meal, but as what He Himself says it is: His dear Son's Body and Blood broken and spilled on Calvary to forgive all your sins and give life and salvation.

That's just the general keeping the troops safe.

But let's return to an earlier point: isn't it arrogant to think that Lutherans somehow have a corner on the truth?

It depends on how you think about it. If you think it's something you or some other Lutheran invented, then yes. For what comes from the heart is nothing but wickedness. And if that's what you think start coming to Bible study and test whether these things are true. That's what the Bereans did.

But if you regard having the truth as what it actually is—the gift and blessing of God’s pure, unadulterated Word, not sullied by human inventiveness or imagination, not asterisked here and there, not “interpreted away”—then it’s not arrogance that you have, but thanks. Thanks to the God who not only gave His Word but who in every generation has raised up faithful preachers and teachers who, like that radioman on the battlefield, in all humility before the Almighty God simply repeat to the faithful what God Himself has said.

For not my word, nor Pr. Kerns’, or Pr. Lange’s, or Pr. Staudacher’s or Pr. Jacobsen’s, but only God’s, is a lamp unto your feet and light unto your path.

And now may the good and gracious Lord keep all of you steadfast in His Word and faith!

Amen.

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