

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Before the reading picks up today, Jesus had silenced the Sadducees and said in his rebuke, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.” Those harsh words and what Jesus said in response to the question of the Sadducees created, at least in the minds of the Pharisees, an opportunity to discredit the Sadducees at the same time they could do the same to Jesus. The Pharisees come to Jesus with a question, “Which is the great commandment in the law?”

The question asked of Jesus is an important one. It’s a one though put forth by some to put Jesus to the test or another way it could be translated is they are trying to tempt Jesus. Like we heard last week about Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath and then turning things around and asking them a question in return. The people were left speechless. Their plot had been foiled and they were rebuked by the words of Jesus and in their own silence they showed their inability to justify themselves before the Lord. Are you seeing a pattern here?

Let’s pause for a second and think about how ridiculous this whole scenario the Jews time and again concocted for themselves. That very notion of what they think they can do is quite funny. You have to chuckle when someone comes up to Jesus in the Gospels and tries to tempt him or test him. I mean really, come on guys this is not going to end well for you. A 70-pound soaking wet elementary school kid has a better chance trying to run straight through the defensive line of an NFL team because at least he has a chance however slim that may be. Trying to get Jesus to forsake God’s word, fall into sin, or simply not know what the Lord has said is no chance at all, that’s impossible.

Now, today, the Pharisees wanted to know how Jesus interpreted the law of God and how he related to it. Where did he fit into this picture? It was common that rabbis would expand upon God’s law and provide a way where one could find the bounds of doing or failing to do what they had required. This is a hallmark of modern-day Judaism, especially among various orthodox sects. Here, though, they want to know where he stands so that they could find a way to rebuke and discredit his teaching. It’s a straightforward question.

It’s no surprise what happens, then. Jesus doesn’t fall into their trap. No, he gives an answer to this question. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” Lest we gloss over what Jesus says first in response to the people, this is all well and good what he said. God commands us to love him and to love our neighbors. Love is directed in both directions toward God and toward other people. Those are the two tables of the Ten Commandments. That should not be written off as insignificant. Like the reading last week, though, Jesus then turns the tables and ask them another straightforward question, at least it is for those who know who he is it’s clear. He’s being a good rabbi in this sense, at least, that he is teaching them even if it’s not what they want to hear.

“Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, ‘What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?’ They said to him, ‘The son of David.’ He said to them, ‘How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, “‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’? If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?’ And no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.”

Think about that for a moment. That’s an important question Jesus, in turn, asked the Pharisees in the Gospel reading today. Going from these commandments they can only be understood and lived when one knows and understands what Jesus asks, “What do you think about the Christ?” For the Christ to be the son of David doesn’t upset them. What does upset them, though, is that this son of David is also the Lord. He is God in the flesh. And not only that but this one is standing before them, and he speaks with this authority of God himself. He is the Son of David who is the Lord. They can’t respond to Jesus for really there is no refuting this, it’s the truth. It’s from God himself. They are left silent and unable to answer him just as their opponents, the Sadducees, had been unable to do. They thought they knew better.

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They thought they could outsmart God. Even when they tried to trap Jesus, they are the ones who are left speechless. The Pharisees were trying to justify themselves by the law but Jesus, even in his rebuke, is teaching them something. What matters is his authority not as a mere teacher of the law but who he is in his very person. The Messiah would be the Son of David but also the Lord himself. He is the one who is born of woman and yet uncreated, fully God in the flesh. This man who stood before the Pharisees, this one whom they were trying to tempt is the one whom the Lord calls “Lord.”

For us this question Jesus asks may seem a bit odd or even not relevant to our lives. How many of you got up this morning and started your day by examining the Psalm and pondering what Jesus puts forth here? But you see, there’s more to it than what may get written off as some Bible trivia question. This question is a matter of life and death and each of us gives answers to it in our lives. “What do you think about the Christ?”

It makes us uncomfortable, though to hear readings like this from the Bible. This is one of those passages where there is a clear demarcation between truth and error. Our sinful man likes a God that can be molded or one that is the least common denominator. We like when God fits our needs, wants, and beliefs. Or on the flipside we like to dumb God down and think we take the high road when we can say or assert, “as long as I believe in Jesus, or some version of him, nothing else is that important.” This reading appointed for today is the third in a series in Matthew’s Gospel where people are trying to pull things over on Jesus. God is clear in the ramifications of those who oppose him, his enemies will be put under his feet. They will be cast out of his favor.

Examine your life. Go back to those words of Jesus and the summary of the Ten Commandments he gives to us. So, when we go through this life and think we can do this what does that say about us? What does that say about who we think Jesus is? Who do we think we are when we think that we can disobey God’s commandments? How foolish is it when we think God’s word changes or that we can somehow find a loophole in God’s law? Or to add even more insult to injury how utterly ridiculous when we fall into sin and go against God’s word, we want to blame it on God? “What do you think of the Christ?” Is he simply my God of convenience or my God who just wants me to be happy and do whatever I think best for my life?

In all this God calls us to repent. He looks us in the eyes and tells us that he is the Lord and there is no other. He cannot be mocked. His grace cannot be trifled with, and his word does not err, nor does it change. He alone is the righteous one and we are called to listen to him. Our sinful man doesn’t like this though. We rationalize our thoughts, actions, and hearts with the mind of the Pharisees and Sadducees. We always think we’re the expert and when confronted with our sin or something we don’t like in God’s word we are so foolish to think we can pull a “Aha! Gotcha God!” on him and God will be like “o man you got me there I guess you’re right or I’ve never heard that perspective before. Your situation is so new and special, I never thought I thought when I gave my word.” Sin likes to be like in the reading and test God into letting us have what we want. In all this what do we think of Jesus? The Lord is no longer the Lord but instead a weak servant who is there simply to make us feel better about ourselves and someone we can pull out of our back pocket to serve our purposes or when it’s convenient for us. This is idolatrous. In Romans 3, however, God says, “Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.” Like the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the lawyer, God silences us as well. God will always have the last and final word.

Repent. God calls you to hear the Lord and his word. He calls you to confess your sin and turn from it. He calls you to not test him but instead hear the word of God and keep it. Your Christian faith is that important in this life. You are to think long and hard about all these things around you and look at who is eternal and whose words are unchanging and do not lie. You are not just people “of faith” or “have faith” that can mean whatever someone wants it to mean. No there is something far clearer in who we are. God is personal. Jesus is the Son of God and not some generic deity that can be molded and shaped into the flavor of the day. “Who do you think about the Christ?”

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Having been silenced by God and despairing of yourself God proclaims to you his grace and mercy shown in Jesus. In all this discussion in the reading today take great comfort that Jesus is the Lord. He's not some generic nebulous god who is unknowable. Jesus is God in the flesh who reveals himself to you though his word. He is the one prophesized and promised through David and all the prophets. Trusting Christ, you see Jesus as the Lord who has accomplished salvation for you. He is the one who has fulfilled God's law completely and perfectly as he has loved the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind and his neighbor as himself. This is the life, death, and resurrection of Christ for you. You see this perfect love of God to and for you as you behold him as the crucified one who has made atonement for your sin and God's wrath against you has been appeased by the shedding of his blood. He doesn't leave you searching for his will or trying to wonder where you stand before him. He is risen from the dead and you are righteous in his sight.

What a joy today to hear these words and hear that Jesus is the Christ. God has silenced you so that he speaks the word, "I forgive you." He is the Lord who has done all things well and sits at the right hand of the Father and is with you and comes to you in his word and sacraments. "What do you think of the Christ?" Baptized into him you give answer as the Holy Spirit has granted you the faith to confess, Jesus is my Lord.

In the Large Catechism, Martin Luther preaches what this means for you that the Lord is your Lord and teaches you how to confess this before God and the world. "I believe that Jesus Christ, God's true Son, has become my Lord. But what does it mean to become Lord? It is this. He has redeemed me from sin, from the devil, from death, and from all evil. For before I did not have a Lord or King, but was captive under the devil's power, condemned to death, stuck in sin and blindness. the little word *Lord* means simply the same as *redeemer*. It means the One who has brought us from Satan to God, from death to life, from sin to righteousness, and who preserves us in the same. But all the points that follow in this article serve no other purpose than to explain and express this redemption."

Humble yourself this day and do not lean on your own understanding for that will lead to death and you will be one of the enemies under the feet of Jesus on the Last Day. Instead repent and receive what your Lord has done as he delivers it to you in his word and sacraments. By the Holy Spirit work through the gospel, go from this place. In faith worked by the Holy Spirit, love God with your whole heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself for this who you are as new creation in Christ. You know who the Christ and who you in him as the baptized. Don't try to pull one over on Jesus. No, listen to him, trust him, and keep his word. Desire the things of God yearning for his word and delighting in his commandments. Delight in living in faith toward God and in love toward your neighbor. Always give thanks for the Christ who is the Son of David, the Lord, your Lord.

Salvation is found only in Christ, and he gives it freely to you. Rejoice, then, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus has done it, and he is yours. Rest in his care and trusting in his mercy toward you as he is your crucified and risen Lord. And wait for that day to come. Know full well too that you are not alone, and the Lord is with you as the Church of God. You Lord is here for you and will guard and keep you. Rejoice "you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

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