

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

“Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?”

It's always fun when things line up with sermon morning with other topics in Bible studies throughout the week. In adult catechesis today we are talking about the 2nd Article of the Apostles' Creed which is about the person and work of Jesus. The Gospel reading today is confessing Jesus as fully God and fully man in one person. For the Pharisees and those listening to Jesus in the reading, the call is to believe what Jesus says about himself even as the Scriptures testify to him.

So, what's going on? Well, Jesus does a bit of catechizing. At first it appears the Pharisees are the one's trying to drive the bus, however, they are really along for the ride. Listen again to the beginning of the reading, “But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’” Their question may sound innocent but the mindset they are coming from is far from it.

The question asked of Jesus is an important one to be sure, but it was asked 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?

Now, today, the Pharisees wanted to know how Jesus interpreted the law of God and how he related to it. There are hundreds of laws the Pharisees and Sadducees taught people must obey. Some estimates have it into the 300s or even more. Where did Jesus 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. All these laws, they made and were more ceremonial in nature and they assigned a moral judgment to them. When they ask Jesus this question, they think it's a no win answer for Jesus and they will come out looking like righteous followers of the [their] law.

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.” Jesus gives the answer God gives on more than one occasion which summarizes the moral law, the Ten Commandments.

In Deuteronomy 6, God gives his people the specific command about his law just after he tells them who he, God, is. The people are to confess this daily in what is known as the “Shema” from the first word in Hebrew in this passage. It functions in many ways like a creed for them. God said, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

God commanded his people to love him and to love their neighbors. Love is directed in both directions toward God and toward other people. Those are the two tables of the Ten Commandments. And, by the way, the one true and only God is the one who commands this to you. Jesus refers them back to their “memory work.”

Now listen again to what happened next, “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.

The Pharisees 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. 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.” Jesus catechizes them about who their God is and it’s him.

Listen to what Jesus is teaching you today in this reading. You are to love God above all things. Everything comes back to the First Commandment when you look at your life. You shall have no other gods. That’s a full stop and no exceptions or loopholes. It’s absolute and this is God’s law. The manmade laws of men create a false god. The Pharisees in the reading were trying to tempt God himself who stood before them. This man, who is fully God, is their Lord just as David said by divine inspiration in Psalm 110 that Jesus quoted to them. The Pharisees saw Jesus, but they were not seeing. They heard him but they were hearing.

The question put before you is a similar one, “What do you think about the Christ?” Jesus asks you that question, but he does so even as he has given you the lips to confess and the very words to confess. Your answer is done in the Holy Spirit who has called you to faith through the word of God and you boldly confess, “you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Daily you are called to this confession. Take this heart and what this means for you as you live out your vocations.

Examine your life. 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?” This is the Christian faith.

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 through 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. Your 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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