

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent Sermon  
March 19/20, 2022

The practice of faith for many is a subjective thing. Granted, there is much latitude in certain things, but there is an overarching reality that the word makes clear and we do well to take into our hearts the truth of the Lord.

God gave the law to Moses. We also know that the Lord has written the law upon our hearts. We also know that the law does not save us. We need to be saved, which means our behavior is not the qualifying thing. What then? Should we do away with the law? But then there is the question of things that happen to people. A drunk driver hits a car and the occupants are killed. A robber shoots a clerk. Bad people strike it rich and good people struggle. We become confused and think that justice is some kind of equalizer in which good people get good things and bad people get bad things, but we know that is not true.

We are tested by this world. It is filled with sin. When it comes to those who perpetrate war, it is easy for us to see. When it comes to daily life and the things happening around us, it is often not so easy to see. Why things like disease, mental illness, and the young dying of cancer? There are so many questions. But I remind you that we look at things through our own eyes and not from the reality which God has revealed to us.

It begins with the simple truth that each of us daily make the decisions we make. Some are good and some are not good. Every person in this age has the equal ability to make the decisions that they make. God gave us this ability. We know that the collective decisions have often gone in a direction that does not seem good to us. What has happened to the culture those of us who are older knew when we were younger? It certainly was not perfect, but it was better. The collective decisions has moved the culture from where it was to where it is. We can see the influence of our will moving things. This ability is the only thing we know that also gives us the ability to love, for love is an act of the will, or perhaps, the giving up of our will for the sake of the other.

We may ask the question of how it is that God made people of such rotten stuff that they have gone bad? One who has the will to love also has the will to go into themselves and become bad. The one thing is not possible without the other. It is in each of us. That thing you did that no one knows about, that thing of which you are ashamed, you exercised your will and made a bad decision. It may seem that no one knows, but God does. It has left a lasting mark on your soul. Everything around us makes those little marks that move us either in the direction of becoming like Christ, or else like the devil. In one hundred years it may not make a huge difference, but in a million years, it will make us either a heavenly or hellish creature. These are the two directions set before us.

We find that we are caught up in an age of good and evil. We struggle between the two and want answers to the questions we have. Jesus answers them. Paul explains them. Isaiah prophecies concerning them. We do well to take in the mystery of this age. I say mystery because we see it, but do not fully understand it. There is evil in the world and we know that, but our hearts desire the good. But there is also evil in us. Quite simply, evil is anything that is against God. We do not need to go far, for we each know those places where we have broken one of the commandments. Maybe not outwardly, but in our minds and in our souls. We know that the infraction of even one law in a singular event is enough to separate us from the perfect and holy God. The struggle is within us as well as around us. It is through this struggle that we are each invited to walk the life of faith which is offered us.

Jesus has called each one of us to walk with Him on a personal journey. He went to the Father in eternity in order to have all the time needed, so to speak, for each one of us on a personal journey. We need to be led through this age of good and evil in order to come to the narrow path which Christ alone knows how to navigate. We are not blind, for we know what He is doing. He will lead each one of us, enabling us to learn what it means and how to love our neighbor as ourselves. He will teach us what it means to love the Lord, our God, with our hearts, souls, minds, and strength.

No person is beyond the reach of the Lord. For those who, to us, seem to be wandering in this world of good and evil, our hearts are troubled. I remind you that there have been times in your life when your hearts were troubled. Perhaps they still are. The Lord is the author and finisher of our faith. He knows what we need even before we ask. For each one of us, He is willing to lead us through all of the things we experience. There are those who reject the salvation He offers. But some seem to have accepted it, but are slowly moving away from the Lord. Others who are far off are slowly being brought into His fold. This too is a mystery. The most unreasonable thing to do when you see these things is to reject salvation because things are not the way You think they ought to be. You see, this salvation is very personal. It is what it is for each one of us. We have our system, our religion, and this is good, but it is not the thing itself. Our relationship with the Living God, that is the thing into which we are invited. If we walk with Jesus, there is the life we are given.

It is to these things that each of our lessons are pointing. Jesus awaits the time of Your bearing fruit. He is patient, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. This age is a time of waiting. We may become anxious, but we call it faith for a reason. As the age unfolds, it takes its twists and turns, but the objective of the salvation of Christ continues one person at a time. It is through the slow process of our being conformed to the image of Christ that we are slowly being turned from someone who is constantly questioning God, chafing at the reality in which we find ourselves, into one who learns to trust the Lord in and through all things. There are those currently wandering whom the Lord will bring into His fold, often through the witness of those of us who are struggling to live a life of faith. We bear fruit and others see that fruit. Do not worry about what you are doing if your goal is to walk with the Lord. Learn to be consistent. In that consistency, the Lord is able to do much. You do influence those around you. All of these things Jesus has told us so that our hearts would not be troubled in this very troubling world. Just stay the course in your life of faith. Learn to be faithful.

These are some of the things Jesus teaches us. It begins with repentance. That is, seeing what you see and, knowing what is evil, fleeing from those things. It is looking to the Lord for guidance and direction day by day, trusting that His grace is sufficient. He is slowly bringing all things into subjection for the eternal kingdom which is coming. The world is still in the throws of the battle of good and evil. You and I have set before us this day the simple and humble truth that Jesus has come to till the ground around our feet in order to keep us growing where we are.

At the end of this age, those who did not come into repentance will be cut down. Those who do will have seen that the Lord has been lovingly tending us each step of the way. Be assured in the faith You have been given. Be guided by the One who saves you, for we all need that salvation which only Jesus can and does give. Do not become anxious as those whose hope is in this world. Continue the race of faith so as to win the prize and know that our Lord is and will lead you each step of the way. Things will happen around us, but trust the Lord, for He has all things in His hands. Amen.