

3rd Pentecost
June 25/26 Sermon

There is law and there is Gospel. There is the physical and there is the spiritual. It is not that there is duality in the world, although to think in those terms is not necessarily wrong. As Christ followers, we know that there is the Triune reality of God. The Holy Spirit is present and, for our sake, must be a part of all that we think, say, and do. Without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing. In the rebellion of this age, the consistent and troubling problem is that we tend to think in terms of power. Hear the word of Jesus clearly, "All power and authority belongs to me." We may, no, we should dismiss any pretense of power.

Some seem to have thought in terms of, "If God granted me this power, I could . . ." This is the rebellion wrapped in religious pretense. It is as if we are saying, "I know good, so give me the power I need to do what I know to be good." Do you? Do any of us know good? Jesus did not even allow Himself to be called good. If Jesus did not consider being called good, who are we to even dare to think along these terms? But we do. From these things, Jesus saves us. We need constant reminding that our faith is not about pretending how good we are, but about the God who loves us enough to die for us will bring us to living in truth. You know this. If we act as though we have no sin, we deceive only ourselves.

As a people of prayer, we know that it is not just about posture, although posture can be and is important, but to set our minds on what is right. Prayer is about being in constant communion, communication, or, in the words of Jesus, abiding always in Him. The sinful rebellion in our own minds brings us to think in terms of the self first when what is needed is to put on the mind of Christ. This is not an altruistic idealism, but the very reality of emptying one's self to be filled with the presence and purpose of Christ. It is, quite literally, to put on Christ.

James and John came to Jesus, first to gain position, and then to grab hold of power. Thinking that what they were doing was what God wanted, they were rebuked. How often in this world do we think we know that the Lord wants and self-righteously seek to reign down fire from heaven? Jesus tells us that He is the judge of the living and the dead. God knows the end from the beginning. The best we can do is to trust the Lord and, in prayer ask, "What would you have me do?" In our modern culture, we often do not like the truth of Scripture, but the truth is what sets us free. If we Live the illusion of the lie, these things we do not consider important will do us harm.

It is as simple as coming to the place where you recognize that things are the way they are, whether or not you like them. The projection and pretense of the culture around us drives us into the fantasy land of pretending or projecting what is not true. Too many think that church is irrelevant. They need to think again. The worst thing any of the faithful can do is to join with those who are under the illusion that our faith is just another religion. That thinking can bring someone to the point of saying, "We've tried that and it is not helpful." Jesus has not come to help us, but to save us. He has not come to brush us off, but to make us like Him. The One with whom we need to learn to become honest is the only One who is able to do what He says. The pretending that any of us are good and faithful followers of Jesus does not help. We may be tempted to think that we are smarter than the average bear, or like Mary Poppins and practically perfect, but such thinking only keeps us from the reality of what our Savior is doing through the gift of faith He has given us. In fact, we need each other. One by one we will be picked off by the wicked one and his followers.

There is no halfway measure in following the Lord. The God of all creation has called you through the promise of your baptism to follow Him. Many have a fine religion, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is not about what we are doing, but about what the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is doing. Jesus said, "Abide in me and me in You." He told us that we can do nothing on our own. He said that the Father would prune us in order that we might bear more fruit. We are told that we will drink the cup of suffering. We know these things in our heads, but we do well to put them into practice.

Jesus has done these things in order that we might bear fruit befitting the kingdom of heaven. What is the fruit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, charity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. These things are what come from within and proceed out of us to the world for one who is walking in the way of Christ. This in contrast to the fruit of this world, the list of which you have heard in the lesson from Paul. Are you able to grasp the singular and striking difference between the two? Our (optimal word here is 'our') passions and desires must die with Christ. Far too long, too many seem to have wanted a different path, but look around and see what happens in compromising with the world and what it does. It destroys the truth of the Gospel. Jesus came to save us. He came to save us from ourselves. He came so that we might have a new life, a life that is in Him. He did not leave any option for compromise. Either we set the hand to the plow and move forward, or else we stay with the world and let the world define who we are.

God created the heavens and the earth. God created you. The world tells you to go find your identity. God tells you that He will make you into what He will make you is you trust Him to be the One who determines your identity. The world is now telling us lies. You can be this or that when you know full well that such things are illogical. The world tells we can believe whatever we want, even if it is not true. The world is influenced by the principalities of this age which are in rebellion against the Lord. We are not fit for the kingdom of God, but for as many as place their trust in the Lord, He will make us fit. No matter the nice words, no other way has been provided by which the desire of heart may be fulfilled.

You have received the call to become like Christ. The world calls you to stay where you are. Christ has made the way before You possible so that you may have the opportunity to become like Him. Some are called as apostles, others preachers, others to good works, etc., each as the Lord leads. Our lives proclaim what we believe. It seems as though many believe in a good time religion. I confess, I could be wrong, but I actually believe what Jesus has been telling us. I do not know about you, but the thought of heaven being an eternity of people being like they are here is enough to make me say, "No thanks." No thanks to the pretense. No thanks to those who pretend to care but do not. No thanks to 'just enough.' No thanks to all the excuses. And I am just talking about myself. Either Christ saves us and makes of us what He will or else I have no hope. Christ has accomplished salvation for all who believe. Past, present, and future. Christ has accomplished it. We will either live in Christ or else perish.

Before you say, "Well pastor, that was not an uplifting sermon," consider carefully what Jesus says. His words are not suggestions. In this, "I had it may way" world, we are upset, even outraged if things are not as we want them to be. You know in your heart how silly this is. You really do not want something that is not complete either. You want the best. So does our Savior. Ponder on these words and consider again the hope within you. "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." No, you are not fit, but the hope of the Gospel is that He is fit for you. Trust Jesus now and always. Amen.

