

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Sixth Sunday after the Epiphany

February 13, 2022

The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

Psalm 1:1–6 (ESV): 1 Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

3 He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

4 The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

1st Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 17:5–8 (ESV):

5 Thus says the LORD:
“Cursed is the man who trusts in man
and makes flesh his strength,
whose heart turns away from the LORD.
6 He is like a shrub in the desert,
and shall not see any good come.

He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

7 “Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

8 He is like a tree planted by water,
that sends out its roots by the stream,
and does not fear when heat comes,
for its leaves remain green,
and is not anxious in the year of drought,
for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

EPISTLE: 1 Corinthians 15:1–20 (ESV):

The Resurrection of Christ

15 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. 10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. 11 Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

The Resurrection of the Dead

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching

is in vain and your faith is in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. 20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Gospel: Luke 6:17–26 (ESV):

Jesus Ministers to a Great Multitude

17 And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, **18** who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. **19** And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.

The Beatitudes

20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! **23** Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.

Jesus Pronounces Woes

24 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

25 “Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

“Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Sermon 7 – Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

“Take the Lifegiver”

1 Corinthians 15:12-22

Dear friends,

In our epistle lesson Paul strikes the heart of the Christian faith, one of the real core truths. We build not just our faith on what he says here, but our way of looking at life, our way of looking at death, our way of mourning, our ways of patient endurance in struggle. A lot depends on what Paul explains here. I do not expect any of this to blow your minds precisely, but I do want our meditation this morning to be about this truth, because it is always relevant to us. We live under the spectre of death. Gloomy as it sounds, we all know that one day we will die, and we all know that those we love will die too. Paul doesn't tell us how to cope with that reality, he does something much much more profound and awesome. He gives us a truth that outshines, that outlasts, that outmatches the depressing reality of the world in which we live. Christ has turned death into life, He turns mourning to joy, Christ has paved the way through the grave and into paradise and that is simply wonderful.

Paul has just finished a long discussion about how the church is supposed to function and what attitude the church should have while they function. He talks about how there should be order to the church, AN ORDER, any order. Church should make sense and try its best not to confuse people. There should be good reasons for the way we do worship and the way we organize ourselves. He goes on from this to reiterate the basics. Here's what we've learned, he says, we have this order because God Himself is an orderly God, and He uses the Christian basics like Jesus getting crucified as an example of that order. God did things a certain way. Man sinned, then God sent promises about Christ, then, when the time was right, God sent Christ Himself to live, suffer, then die. Paul uses the schedule of salvation, if I can put it that way, to get across His point and segue into his next point. That all the things Jesus did, the order in which God designed

things, that isn't just an example for the church, it is the core of our Christian faith. That's what He gets into next.

“12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” Now remember, this letter has been written to the Corinthians, and there are plenty of skeptics in the Corinthian church. Some of those skeptics were doubting the fact that there would be a resurrection from the dead, any resurrection from the dead. This is something people have doubted throughout history, this era included. Much of what Jesus says is pretty practical and straightforward, but a resurrection from the dead, a final judgment, these things stretch our faith and our credulity a bit. Paul goes back to those basics to state his case. If there is no resurrection, Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead either, and if Jesus hasn't been raised from the dead, our faith is in vain.

That's a strong thing to say. Why? There are two reasons. One, if Jesus didn't rise from the dead, that means Jesus is still dead. Which means God is dead, or Jesus isn't God. If Jesus isn't God, then none of this matters at all, because that means that Jesus' crucifixion was just Him getting crucified. It could not pay for our sins, it could not satisfy God's wrath. God required a perfect life, a perfect sacrifice, to make up for our sin. That was the way it had to be. Justice demanded it. So if Jesus isn't God, that means Jesus is man. If Jesus is man, that means He was not perfect. If Jesus wasn't perfect, than we are all still under God's wrath, we're all doomed come judgment day.

Two, it makes Jesus a liar. **“15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.”** Jesus predicted and laid out very clearly why He was here on this Earth. Jesus walked this earth to deal with sin once and for all, across the board. He does this by healing diseases, casting out demons, calming storms, feeding the hungry. He does this

by preaching and teaching the words of eternal life. He does this by getting crucified, by dying, and finally, by rising from the dead. Jesus' whole life is geared towards this, and on top of that He explicitly says several times that the Christ must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, die, and rise again. If there was no resurrection from the dead, and Jesus says He's going to be resurrected, then He's a liar and we are all spectacularly and very pathetically wasting our time. Paul says that too. **“18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”** Why? If this life is all there is, and if death is just the end and that's that, then we are dumb little dolts who are deluding ourselves. We're believing a lie.

That is what the devil and the world would have us believe. That this life is it, you get one shot then it's over. If that is true, then the only thing that matters is having the best life here you can possibly have, and maybe, if you're lucky, leaving some kind of legacy behind you. Christian living is not the way to have the best life here on this earth, it just isn't. We aren't as concerned with this life's pleasures and pains because we know that pleasure is fleeting, we know that pain is temporary, and we know that glory is eternal. Specifically, our glory is eternal, because Jesus is eternal and He gave us that gift when He saved us. That is why the world will never understand Christians. We aren't rushing, urgently trying to solve all the problems on this earth, because we have the humility to know that we never will. We aren't rushing, urgently trying to cram in all the good times that we can, because we know those good times never last. We just go through our life, trying to be helpful, trying to be righteous, trying to be virtuous, because Christ asks us to do it. Christ asks us to show compassion without letting that compassion consume us. Compassion and sympathy can make you an insufferable tyrant, do not be fooled on this, believe me, I have been there. We don't do it because we think we can fix it, we do because Christ showed that compassion to us and we can let go of the results. We can leave it to God what He wants to do, either with our suffering, our compassion, our good works, any of it. The way Christians live, denying ourselves and what we want, focusing on what's good for our neighbor and what God wants, makes no sense unless

you believe what we believe, that this world is doomed no matter what we do, that God will make something out of all our labors, no matter what they are or what that is.

“20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” Paul loops us back around. It doesn't matter what the world believes. What matters is the facts, and the facts are simple and straightforward. Christ has been raised from the dead, there is simply no other explanation for the Christian church. If that is so, then Christ has managed the ultimate act of reversal and atonement. Adam, one man, introduced sin when he listened to the voice of his wife and ate the fruit, since that day everyone must live under death. Christ, one man, undid that damage by living the perfectly obedient life that Adam never did, living the perfectly obedient life that you and I cannot live. Adam died, we die, Christ died, but none of those deaths are in vain, because Christ ensured that all shall be made alive again.

We lose in this life, we Christians. We lose things and we do not get them back. One day, we will lose our life too. Sin takes, it always takes, and it never stops taking until it takes you for good. Christ came to give back. He came to give back the lives we lose, the things we forsake in His name, the price we pay. Truly I tell you, Jesus says, no one who has left house, home, father or mother for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold in the life to come. Jesus came to give us back life, not just existence, but life. Real life. Life we cannot conceive or imagine. That is what we deliver our loved ones into when we bury them. Not an uncaring grave that will swallow their body, but a life eternal that will glorify their bodies and make them undying and immortal like Christ's body. That is what we receive when we receive Jesus, when we hear His words, when we eat and drink His crucified flesh. We receive life, not just up there in heaven, but down here on earth as well. Sin takes, but Christ always gives far more than sin could ever take.

May the Lord give us all eyes to see the many beautiful gifts He gives.

Amen