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As they began their journey to Emmaus, Jesus' disciples viewed His crucifixion as a big mistake. They had believed in Jesus, but without understanding His purpose. They had put all their hope in Him as the One who would redeem Israel by a glorious conquest of their enemies, so they didn't know what to do with His death. Even these faithful disciples stumbled over the cross.

The risen Lord Jesus raised them up, but He insisted on doing it through His Word, hiding Himself in the Scriptures, so that faith may ever be tied to hearing and not to seeing. As He walked them through the Old Testament, He unfolded the story of Redemption from sin, death, and the devil, a redemption to be made with the holy, precious blood of Christ. Only after suffering would the Christ "enter into His glory." Only in that way could sinners be saved.

Let us not stumble over the cross, but let us rejoice in God's ancient plan of redemption through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Christ. Let us recognize and joyfully receive the body of the risen Christ in the greater breaking of bread: the Sacrament by which we proclaim His death until He comes.

We pray: Lord God, heavenly Father, who revealed Your Son to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, enlighten our hearts also by Your Word and Spirit, that we may become strong and established in the faith, hold fast to Your Word, delight to speak of it, and diligently use it, so that although, according to the example of Christ, we must suffer much evil on earth, we nevertheless may have and retain a sure comfort in Your Word, until, after this life, we shall be raised unto eternal life. Amen.

In this text the scribes and Pharisees, who were always seeking to trick our Lord Jesus into some error or sin, finally think they have a way to silence our Lord. They bring before Him a woman who was caught in adultery. Her sentence according to Moses was death. But they cared neither about the Law of Moses, nor the truth; they did it only to try to deceive the Lord. The Jews reasoned to themselves, "If he says 'Let her be stoned,' we shall say to him, 'Aren't you the one who says 'Your sins are forgiven you?'" But if he says, 'Let her go,' we shall say, 'What has become of your coming to fulfill the law and not to destroy it?'"

Our Lord Jesus sees through their deception and only responds, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first." This is more than just a deflection to put the onus on them. It was not His office to judge such things. It was their office; it was their responsibility. Our Lord is only putting the authority of the matter on the shoulders to whom it belonged—the keepers of the Law.

It appears, however, that the keepers of the Law are just as adulterous, even if only spiritually, as this adulteress, for they all went out one by one, "being convicted by their conscience."

Here comes the crux of this narrative, for the woman remains there waiting for some response from the Lord, for if there is One Man without sin it is certainly Him. By His own words, He has every right to condemn her, but He does not. For in His kingdom, if One Man is righteous, all people are declared righteous, even this adulterous woman, and even you.

Luther says regarding these verses, “This is not a physical thirst, such as is felt for beer or wine, but a thirst of the soul, a spiritual thirst, a heartfelt desire, yes, a distressed, wretched, terrified, and aroused conscience, a despondent and frightened heart which longs to know on what terms it is with God. Such is the timid, fainthearted conscience: it feels its sin; it is conscious of a weakness of spirit, soul, and flesh; it is aware of a menacing God; it fears God and sees His Law, wrath, judgment, death, and other penalties. Such anxiety marks the proper thirst. It is natural that people who live in fear, amid temptation and distress, are athirst by reason of their anxiety. For at such a time the tongue becomes parched, we grow feverish, our distress consumes the humors of our body, and this creates thirst. How much more will our soul grow thirsty from spiritual temptation, when sin and God’s wrath stare us in the face!

These words are for the spiritually thirsty, those who languish under their sin and the weight of the Law. No longer do their spiritual lips need to remain parched and dry, but by the Word of God and the work of the Holy Ghost dwelling within them, rivers of living water well up in them and quench their thirst. The Holy Ghost proclaims into their hearts the promises of God and produces faith and trust to cling to those promises—of forgiveness from their sins and deliverance from the weight of the Law through the works of Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ has obeyed the Law that we were unable to obey perfectly, and He suffered our punishment on the Cross so that we might be free and have our spiritual thirst quenched.

The account of Jesus’ resurrection is told so simply: the faithful women go looking for their crucified Lord in His tomb, expecting to find His lifeless corpse, convinced that death has won yet another victory. But the stone is rolled away. The tomb is empty. And the angels are the first messengers to confirm the meaning of these signs: “He is not here, for He is risen, as He said.” “As He said”—that makes Jesus’ resurrection absolutely unique in all of history. He not only predicted His death, He foretold His resurrection. He said He would rebuild the temple of His body in three days, that He would lay down His life and take it up again by His own power. As always, Jesus was true to His word.

The One who rose from the dead is the same One who died as the sacrifice for the world’s sins. He is the same One who was born our Brother that He might redeem us, His brethren who were once captive to sin and death. Now death has been overcome by our Brother, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. Now life is guaranteed to all who trust in Him, and death has lost its iron grip, for He was delivered for our sins and raised again for our justification. “Do not be afraid,” Jesus says. May His words ring in our ears at all times and comfort us in our final hour.

We pray: O risen Lord Christ, drive out all fear from our hearts as we contemplate Your glorious resurrection, and cheer us with Your promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation to all who trust in You. Amen.

On the night before He laid down His life, Jesus prayed, “And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). How hollow those words must have rung in the ears of Jesus’ disciples as the events of Thursday and Friday unfolded. If ever a prayer seemed to have gone unanswered, this was it. Instead of glory, Jesus received shame and abuse, a cross, and a tomb.

Mary Magdalene wept in despair, unconvinced by the empty tomb. But then Jesus called her by name, and His Word spoke faith into her heart as she beheld the glory of the Risen One in the reality. He who was crucified, died and buried now stood before her living and breathing. She beheld His glory in the truth of His life.

Seeing the empty tomb simply isn’t enough, for Mary or for us. Seeing the empty tomb wouldn’t cause us to believe in Christ. But He has given us His Word, called us to faith and called us by name in Holy Baptism, and so He has given us the right to be called children of God. Like Mary, we are not allowed to cling to His resurrected body, except in the one way He has given: in the Sacrament of His body and blood. There we are given a glimpse of our ascended Lord in this life. After this life, we have the promise of sharing in our Brother’s inheritance in our Father’s house forever.

We pray: Lord Jesus Christ, comfort us, as You once comforted Mary Magdalene, by the assurance of Your glorious resurrection, and help us ever to cling to You in faith until we see You face to face. Amen.

The Messiah was clearly identified in Holy Scripture. From it the Jews knew that the Christ was to come from the seed, blood, and lineage of King David. They also knew definitely that the Messiah was to be born in the town of Bethlehem. This much they did know. It was common knowledge. On this the prophecy concerning the Christ was clear. According to Luther, “a rumor circulated among the Jews that the Messiah would appear secretly.” Therefore they say, “However, we know where this Man is from; but when the Christ comes, no one knows where He is from.”

This rumor was more than likely circulated by the scribes and Pharisees, who had rejected the Lord Jesus as the Messiah. And if He is not the Christ, then He must be killed. They sought to lay hands on Him, but because it was not His time yet, they were unsuccessful. To these desires of harm and death to our Lord Jesus, He responds by proclaiming His death and resurrection, “I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”

What a glorious response from our Lord and Savior! They seek to kill Him—those who are undeserving of His love and grace—and He proclaims the means by which He will redeem the whole world from sin, death, and the devil. He will be crucified, dead, and buried, and on the third day rise again from the dead and sit on the right hand of the Father, to judge both the quick and the dead according to those who have faith in His perfect obedience and His sacrifice for them on the holy Cross.

The Jews understood, unlike many people today, that nobody had the authority to speak for God unless God sent him. The person who spoke according to his own authority was simply not to be heard. This is why the Lord Jesus presents such a problem for some of the Jews. Clearly there was something about Him to marvel. “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” However, this same Man had healed on the Sabbath and appeared to break the Law. How could His authority be from God?

Luther says, “He who fails to seek God’s glory sincerely and earnestly, but speaks of himself, cannot possibly be upright and proclaim God’s Word in its purity. A servant who speaks his own mind and not his master’s command is lying. He disgraces his master with his pretense and refuses to say what his master has commanded...He who ‘speaks on his own authority’ is covetous of honor; he is idolatrous and despises God. He is God’s enemy and an idolater. He preaches what he wants, and he strives only to be regarded as a learned man and to be richly remunerated. He alone wants to be heard; he desires all power; he wants to command and bluster like a tyrant. He cares neither about God nor about the souls of men.”

A true preacher of the Word points to Christ, gives Him the glory, and proclaims God’s Word in its truth and purity and administers the Sacraments according to Christ’s command. Such was the preaching of Our Lord Jesus. He proclaimed the Christ, the One Who had come into the world to save the world from sin, death, and the devil. He preached Himself, and all those who believe on Him receive forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Luke makes a play on words in his resurrection account. The Greek word for “tomb” is related to the word for “remember.” A tomb is a place of remembrance. But it was at that very place of remembrance that the faithful women forgot.

They didn’t forget everything. They remembered their beloved Teacher whom they had followed faithfully wherever He went. They remembered His agonizing death two days before, which they beheld from a distance. They remembered seeing Him buried in the tomb and seeing the stone rolled in place.

What they didn’t remember was what Jesus had told them ahead of time about His tomb: on the third day it would be empty! Even the sight of the empty tomb didn’t remind them. Only the word of the angels caused them to remember.

Now let’s remember why the Lord’s resurrection matters. He was put to death for our sins. Death is the punishment for sin. But if the punishment is removed, then atonement for the sins has also been made, and forgiveness is guaranteed to all who believe. So remember Jesus’ words: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life.” “Because I live, you will live also.” “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.”

Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead. Remember Him when you see the baptismal font. Remember Him in His holy Meal. Remember Him when you pass by the cemetery, or when you visit the grave of a loved one who fell asleep in Christ. Remember Him when death comes close to you. Remember, and rejoice!

We pray: O risen Lord, keep us always in remembrance of Your death and resurrection, and remember us always before Your Father in heaven, even in our final hour. Amen.

Even seeing the risen Christ wasn't enough to fully convince the disciples of His resurrection! It took signs: touching the nail prints, watching Him eat. More importantly, it took words. And not just any words; it took the words from the Old Testament that connected the dots between what the Christ would do and what Jesus had done.

As He had done for the Emmaus disciples, Jesus walked His apostles through the Old Testament. There was the promise made to Eve of her serpent-crushing Seed. There were the promises to Abraham, the sacrifice provided by the Lord in place of Isaac, the stairway shown to Jacob, the Passover Lamb, the Day of Atonement, the ark of the covenant, the sufferings and ultimate victories of David, and of David's greater Son, the institution of the New Testament, etc. All of it pointed to Christ. And the apostles absolutely needed to see and understand, because they would be the witnesses of the resurrection by whose witness the Holy Spirit would build the Church catholic until the end of time. Even that preaching of the Gospel was prophesied in the Old Testament, that "repentance and the remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Again, the Word of God does everything. It convicts. It convinces. It absolves, and it strengthens. We don't have the benefit of seeing Jesus. But we do have the benefit of His Word, which is more powerful than sight.

We pray: O Father, we praise Your name for fulfilling Your promises throughout the ages. Grant us Your Holy Spirit to open our hearts that we may understand Your holy Word, live in daily repentance, and support the preaching of Your Gospel in all the world; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

St. John says our Lord's brothers did not believe in Him. They loved the world and spoke as the world would speak. Therefore, our Lord says, "The world cannot hate you." They were good Jews, they listened to the scribes and Pharisees, did what they told them to do, and spoke as they told them to speak. Therefore, they would receive no persecution or hate from the scribes and Pharisees.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, called the Jews to repentance; He spoke the truth. And on account of this He was reviled and hated, and killed.

Nobody likes having their sins called out. We at first prepare for a fight, but then repentant, like King David, St. Peter, and others, hearing the admonishment we confess our sins. We humbly accept the call to repentance and acknowledge it as the love and admonishment of the Lord God. And therefore, grow in faith and love toward God. The impenitent, however, rail and harass those who would call them to repentance. They fight tooth and nail against the Law and those who speak it. They lash out with personal attacks, and refuse to listen to the admonishment. They attempt to strengthen their own defense by justification and appeals to what other people have similarly done.

The world and all the impenitent in it hate the Lord, for He only speaks the truth. The Jews of His day hated Him speaking the truth so much that they crucified Him in shame for it. But, thanks be to God, it is our redemption in this crucifixion that the repentant cling to in faith; it is this throne of grace to which all those who are harassed by their sin cling in faith for forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Luther says, “Christ does not want to give you the right to run to and fro in search of the Spirit, to say: ‘I have this by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.’...He binds us solely to His Word. He does not want to see the Holy Spirit divorced from His Word...Christ does not bind you to anything but His mouth and His Word. He does not want to leave you wandering aimlessly about; He wants you to hear His Word. He declares: ‘The words which I speak are spiritual. Therefore if you want to obtain the Holy Spirit, you must adhere to My words; for they are spirit and life.’”

This is why our dear Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Office of the Holy Ministry, so that men might feed His people through the pure preaching of the Word of God and the right administration of the blessed Sacraments for the enlightenment of all those who receive them in faith. It is through these means that the Holy Ghost works to create and sustain faith, and therefore life eternal, in those who receive them. The Holy Ghost works through means to bring us into the Church.

As Luther says, to separate the Holy Ghost from the Word of God is a dangerous thing, for then our salvation is left up to our emotions, or our own interpretation of how the Lord God is acting in our lives. Such things lead us away from Christ, to Whom the Holy Scriptures continuously point us. When we remain in the Word of God, the Holy Ghost continues to point us to our Lord Christ, and thereby strengthens our faith in Him and His promises of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The disciples didn't believe Mary Magdalene's account of Jesus' resurrection. Nor did most of them believe the account of the two Emmaus disciples. In fact, it seems that, of all Jesus' disciples, not one believed that Jesus had risen from the dead on the testimony of another. Each one had to see at least some piece of evidence for him or herself. And these were the believers! How would unbelievers ever be converted if even the believers were so slow to believe!

As always, the Word of God does everything. In His mercy God continued to send His Word to His doubting disciples, until finally the Lord Christ Himself appeared to them and rebuked them for their unbelief.

Even the Christian heart is slow to believe God's promises, and we easily allow hardship and afflictions to drive out God's Word from our thoughts. For this reason, we will never stop needing the Holy Spirit's help in this life, to enlighten us with His gifts, to sanctify us and keep us with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. The Lord showed great patience toward His disciples and finally confirmed them in the faith. Let us hold fast to His Word in every trial and hardship, that the Spirit of Christ may continually admonish, guide, and comfort us, until we see the risen Christ for ourselves.

We pray: Lord Jesus, we believe. Help our unbelief. Be patient with us in our weakness, and grant us Your Holy Spirit to keep our eyes ever firmly fixed on You, our risen Lord and Savior. Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodogeniti Sunday

SATURDAY, APRIL 25: JOHN 6:41-59 MISERICORDIAS DOMINI

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

"The Jews then complained about Him." There seems to be a lot of that going around when we read the Bible. But isn't that just how sin works. We need only go back to the Garden of Eden. God confronts Adam with his sin, and Adam complains to God, "The woman You gave me." The very people whom Jesus had fed of the five loaves and two fish are now complaining about Him because He told them that He is "the bread of life."

Like their forefathers, they were in the wilderness and God fed them. Jesus had compassion on them, yet they choose to complain and murmur at His teaching. Jesus only wanted the best for them, that best being Him. He wishes to give of Himself, to give them life. But the more He preaches, the more they complain about Him.

As Christians, we need to always be on guard that the troubles we encounter in our daily lives do not turn into murmuring and complaining against God. God is always there for us. God the Father has given us to Christ. Every day the Holy Spirit leads us to seek His kingdom and His righteousness by bringing us to repentance and the forgiveness of sins, even the sins of murmuring and complaining against Him.

"Lord Jesus, think on me and purge away my sin; from earth-born passions set me free and make me pure within. Lord Jesus, think on me with many a care opprest; let me Thy loving servant be and taste Thy promised rest." Amen

The crowd who followed Jesus had seen many signs. However, they demanded yet another sign. We need only stop and think for a moment how arrogant and ignorant these people were. They demand a sign and quote the scripture, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” One has to wonder about the crowd: Aren’t these the very people who were there yesterday when they “ate of the loaves and were filled?” So it is with unbelief.

Unbelief continues to make demands of God in order to believe but is never satisfied with anything that God has done. Unbelief wishes to put the blame on God, “If only God would (fill in the blank), then I would believe.” This is just another way of saying that since God doesn’t do what I want, He’s the problem. The crowd that followed Jesus demanded a sign. They wanted to see a work of God. So, Jesus shows them, “I am the bread of life.” He directs them to Himself and yet they do not believe.

This encounter between Jesus and the crowd serves as an example for us in the Church today. The Church can do works of charity by feeding, clothing, and caring for people. But such charity will never satisfy unbelief. We are God’s hands in this world and just as the crowd would later abandon Jesus, we, too, will find that many of those whom we help will simply walk away. So be it. The Church must never forget that its real work is always to direct people to Jesus. The Church must understand that is all it can do and trust the Holy Spirit will work where and when He pleases to create faith. “Jesus, Savior, come to me; let me ever be with Thee.” Amen.

On Sunday, we heard Jesus speak of things pertinent to the disciples then and ministers of His Word today about their calling. It involved forgiving and retaining sins/living by faith and not by sight. That task involves holding to the message of God taking on flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, how through His life, death, and resurrection, He has made it possible for all mankind to have the same peace that Christ announced to His disciples who were hiding for fear of the Jews.

In today’s reading, Jesus further emphasizes the need of this message of Jesus Christ through those commanding words, “feed” and “tend” my lambs and my sheep, so they too may know that the Good Shepherd had rescued all mankind from sin, death, and the devil. To show how powerful the Word of Jesus is when proclaimed, He performs the miracle of 153 fish caught in an odd time of the day, simply by switching to the other side of the boat; all of which produced a confession of: “It is the Lord,” and a great desire to be in the presence of Jesus Christ. God’s powerful Word still works today when proclaimed in its truth and purity, men’s hearts are converted to confess, it is the Lord, with a desire to be in His presence.

We Pray: Christ the Lord is risen today; Alleluia! Christians, haste your vows to pay; Alleluia! Offer ye your praises meet; Alleluia! At the Paschal Victim’s feet. Alleluia! Amen.

Remember that text which says how all things are possible with God (Matt. 19:26)? It is also spoken for our benefit to see that without Christ, nothing is possible as we see in today's reading.

Going to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with His disciples, Jesus enters the Temple only to find Jewish money-changers doing business instead of using His Father's House as a Place of Prayer. Angrily, He drives them out, to which they ask, "What sign do you show us for your actions?" "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Of course they could not understand Jesus' words? And why not?

Like many others, these Jews had rejected how God chose to reveal Himself in the person of Jesus Christ to be the promised Messiah. We see that rejection from His birth, His miracles, and where His authoritative Word was taught.

With no Christ, there can be no faith. With no faith, there is no way to understand the deep things of God. All of which led to their comment how a 46 year old Temple could possibly be rebuilt in three days! They had no way of comprehending that Jesus was talking of His death and resurrection.

Thank God for blessing you with the gift of faith through Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, as He enables you to remember how all things are possible with God, including believing that He is risen from the dead...He is risen indeed!

We Pray: For the sheep the Lamb hath bled, Alleluia! Sinless in the sinners' stead. Alleluia! "Christ is risen," today we cry; Alleluia! Now He lives no more to die. Alleluia! Amen.

In today's reading, we need to take special note of the signs which Jesus performs. Today's reading immediately follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 and tells us of even more miracles. After Jesus had fed the multitude, He went to the mountain to be by Himself. Later that night, the disciples got into the boat to make the 6-7 mile journey to Capernaum. They only made it about half way when they saw a miracle, Jesus walking on the water. And if that weren't enough, He no more than steps into their boat and "immediately the boat was at the land where they were going."

Jesus did many signs which established Who He is: God in the flesh come to save His people. Yet, the people who followed Jesus and the disciples to Capernaum weren't interested in Jesus for Who He is. Their only interest in Jesus was in the sign itself: "you ate of the loaves and were filled." There are many charlatans who try to convince people they speak for God because of the signs and wonders they perform. It is not too difficult to see them for who they really are. Their supposed signs only serve to direct people away from Christ and Him crucified.

We know the real miracle, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." We can give thanks that God has miraculously opened our eyes to see the meaning of the signs, to see Jesus crucified for our sins.

"O Holy Spirit, grant us grace, that we our Lord and Savior in faith and fervent love embrace and truly serve Him ever, so that when death is drawing nigh, we to His open wounds may fly and find in them salvation." Amen.

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the Words of eternal life.” These words of Peter, recorded later in John’s Gospel, fit quite well with today’s reading. The Jews were enamored with Moses. As Jesus said, “Moses, in whom you trust.” But for all their love of Moses they missed the One of Whom Moses wrote: Jesus. Every Word of God recorded in Holy Scripture points to Christ. If we wish to know anything that God is wanting to tell us, we need only look to Jesus.

As Lutherans, we have been instructed to always rightly divide Law from Gospel. For the Jews, Moses was seen as the lawgiver. The Jews thought they understood all that Moses had written. Thus, they spent their time trying to keep the Law, but failed. What the Jews missed was the glorious Gospel recorded throughout the writings of Moses. They missed Christ. From Genesis through Deuteronomy, Moses was pointing people to Christ. From the Gospel spoken to Adam and Eve recorded in Genesis, “He shall bruise your head,” to Moses’ word of blessing in Deuteronomy, “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord?”, Moses was pointing to the God who saves.

All that was recorded by Moses pointed to Jesus’ work, including the fulfillment of the Law. How could they even begin to think they could do the impossible, that is, keep the Law perfectly? Yet, that was the delusion under which they lived because they failed to hear all the Moses had written. Thus, they stand accused by the very person they invoke, Moses.

“I am content! My Jesus liveth still, in Whom my heart is pleased. He hath fulfilled the Law of God for me, God’s wrath He hath appeased.” Amen.

Today we have a text which elaborates upon the age-old question, “how is man saved?” Our question surfaced when John’s disciples ask him about the One Who was with you before, is now baptizing, and everyone seems to be running after Him! “We’ve followed you, how can this be?” they are asking. John quickly clears the air for them by saying, “A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven.”

With these words we see that if anything that is right, pure, and salutary in the sight of God must come from God. For what saves, must be commanded by God. Immediately John sees that the end of His ministry—of pointing to Who the Christ is—has come to an end. Therefore, his joy is fulfilled, which means all things must now point to Christ and away from John.

Today we are still faced with the question within the Church regarding salvation. Here we must remember and follow after John the Baptist’s example, and remember that if something is in dispute, ask whether it has been given by God in Christ. Has it been instituted by God, practiced by God, delivered by God for the sake of purifying mankind? If not run in the opposite direction. For if a teaching is not from Christ, it is from Satan, who is the father of lies.

So how is man saved? There is only one answer: Christ!.

We Pray: Christ, the Victim undefiled, Alleluia! God and man hath reconciled, Alleluia! While in strange and awe-full strife, Alleluia! Met together Death and Life: Alleluia! Amen.

Today we see how Jesus wants all to be saved and come to the knowledge that He is Messiah. We have before us a Samaritan woman who is steeped in sin, but not condemned. She is approached by Jesus and sees the need of receiving the water that quenches everlasting thirst: the water of life; the forgiveness of sins. Having this forgiveness and being into a relationship with Christ we are enabled to worship Him, not in Jerusalem, nor on some holy Mountain, but in spirit and in truth.

In these last days as believers of Christ, we also have the opportunity to share this same water of life with whomever we approach. Like Jesus, it is important not to allow barriers such as nationality to hamper our speaking; but to remember everyone has fallen short of the glory of God, and in dire need of hearing that Christ does not condemn anyone. He simply has come to announce that He is the Messiah, the Savior of sin; whose desire is to be everyone's Prophet, Priest, and King.

As our Prophet, He shows us how Jesus knows all things, that His Word is truth, and worthy of following. As our Priest, we see that Jesus is the ultimate sacrifice, dying on the cross for the sin of the world. As our King, He rules our lives with peace, enabling us to trust that sin, death and the power of the devil are destroyed once and for all.

We pray: Christians, on this happy day; Alleluia! Haste with joy your vows to pay. Alleluia! "Christ is risen," today we cry; Alleluia! Now He lives no more to die. Alleluia! Amen.

Jesus wasn't through with the Jews. After all, it was the Sabbath and the proper keeping of the Sabbath, as we heard yesterday, is the preaching of the Word. Jesus "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," so He preaches to them.

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Had the Jews listened to the Word of the prophets, they would have recognized the signs Jesus did as testimony of His deity. Had they listened to the voice of the prophets, they should have shouted praises to Jesus for healing the man who lay next to the Pool of Bethesda. They would have recognized Jesus for who He is, "Immanuel...God with us." Rather, the prophecy of Isaiah held true for those Jews, "Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive."

There is no middle ground when it comes to the True God. You either believe in Him or you don't. You will either face the judgment of Christ or pass "from death to life." That simple fact ought to bring great peace to every Christian. We need not fear Judgment Day. Judgment Day only exists for the ungodly. We who have been baptized into Christ simply pass "from death to life." No more should our consciences bother us for "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

"Though great our sins and sore our woes, His grace much more aboundeth; His helping love no limit knows, our utmost need it soundeth. Our Shepherd good and true is He, Who will at last His Israel free from all their sin and sorrow." Amen.

Our text for today is the account of Jesus healing of the man who was lying near the pool of Bethesda. One would think that such a miracle would be received with much praise by everyone who knew the condition of this poor man. Yet, we are told that the Jews “sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.” Why such anger toward Jesus?

Both the Jews and Jesus knew the Third Commandment: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. The Jews thought Jesus had broken this commandment by healing on the Sabbath. Furthermore, by telling the man to carry his bed Jesus had, in the minds of the Jews, caused the man to sin. We know Jesus didn’t break the commandment nor would He lead someone else sin. The essence of the commandment isn’t found in the amount of work we do or don’t do on the Sabbath.

Luther wrote in his Large Catechism concerning this commandment: “At whatever hour, then, God’s Word is taught, preached, heard, read or meditated upon, there the person, day, and work are sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all.” The key to keeping this commandment and any commandment is not found in how well we think keep them or how hard we try to keep them. Instead, we keep the commandments by confessing we have broken them and by putting our trust in the One Who has kept the whole Law for us.

We give thanks to Jesus that He never stops working in us by the Holy Spirit who through His Word brings us to confess our sins and to trust in Him. “Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word. Amen”

Our text continues with the woman at the well. Having received the water of life, we see that it has the same effect in her as it does in anyone when Christ is not rejected: she bears witness to others about the person of Jesus Christ.

The woman must have been convincing about this Man at the well Who knows all things about her; as the men of the city go immediately to see for themselves. As the disciples return to give Jesus food to eat, He reveals to them that He is not concerned about life here, but only about the food which gives life to all men, for it is the Father’s will that all men believe that He is the promised Christ and be saved.

Still today, it is our Father’s will that we are more concerned about the food that lasts for eternity, Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life, than life here! Like the woman at the well, we can tell everyone how this Man Jesus Christ knows all about our lives and theirs, and still does not condemn us; but that He is the promised Savior Who traveled into Jerusalem to suffer at the hands of sinful men and die for the sins of world and then rise victorious on the third day. Yes He has done the laboring and we are reaping the benefits. May we be strengthened to tell others of this Messiah as did the woman at the well.

We pray: Christ, Who once for sinners bled, Alleluia! Now the First-born from the dead, Alleluia! Throned in endless might and power, Alleluia! Lives and reigns forevermore. Alleluia! Amen.

Today we are privileged to see the results when a person is not afraid of offending someone with the voice and the message of God; but in all boldness bears witnesses to His omniscient power in the God-man, Jesus Christ; others are drawn into the presence of God where our Lord creates faith in the heart of man to confess their sin and rejoice in the fact they too believe in the Christ! In fact, so much did they believe in the promised Savior, that they urged Him to stay with them, and others were saved as were they.

Hence we see from this text what is possible of occurring when just one person is not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the Father has the opportunity to sow seeds of faith, so that others also might be in a relationship with the Triune God and be saved.

In these last days when so many voices are seeking to be approved as coming from God the Father, we must ask several questions, “What is the purpose of that message?” and “Does it point to the truth that Jesus Christ, is true God and true man?”; “Did He come into this world to condemn mankind because of his sin, or that through His, life, death and resurrection, mankind has been redeemed from sin, death and the power of the devil once and for all?”

We pray: Hail, eternal Hope on high! Alleluia! Hail, Thou King of victory! Alleluia! Hail, Thou Prince of Life adored! Alleluia! Help and save us, gracious Lord. Alleluia! Amen.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us. —The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1–2