

The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost – 2020

Isaiah 51:1-6

Romans 11:33-12:8

Matthew 16:13-20

This is a beautiful space. There is more here than meets the eye, a great deal more. That is by design. Not my design, not any architect or contractor's design – God's design. Learning to see with the eyes of your heart is the Christian enterprise, a lifelong pursuit. One day all will be made visible, prehensible, obvious to every chap, every lad, every senora, every seniorita. When the Lord Christ returns, all that is now hidden to the eyes in your head will be undeniably visible. But now, in this present time, you are to learn to see with your heart what Christ proclaims about Himself, about His kingdom. You are to learn to see it and confess it.

This is a beautiful space. There is more here than meets the eye, a great deal more. There is an intersection here. Two avenues, two real-life boulevards intersect here. One street is the contemporary street of our lives – our lives as a congregation of believers, travelling together on the street of this moment, this year, this era together – members of Christ the King Lutheran Church. On this street we gather in the name of our Triune God (Father, Son +, and Holy Spirit). On this street, the crucified and risen Savior comes into our midst and we greet Him. He serves us on this contemporary street, affording us all the bounty of His death and resurrection. His Word is proclaimed, the sacrament of His body and blood is distributed, the Holy Spirit invades our hearts and we are elevated above our sinful poverty. That is one street. The other street is the historical events of the Bible, the interactions our Lord had with various people recorded in Holy Scripture. That street of completed action is still alive and that street intersects with us in this place.

I have attempted to impress on you that the Bible is not a dusty, antiquated record of events that are cold in history but a window into what is happening now. Our contemporary road and the ancient Bible road intersect, they blend into one another, coalescing and merging into one. As Jesus was greeted by those holding palm branches as He made His Triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, so we greet Him with our hosannas as He enters our worshipping assembly in His body and blood in the Eucharist. There are no spectators to Christianity in this place. You are a participant in an ongoing symphony of salvation – the Lord Himself is here and all that He has done, all that He is becomes present for us to participate in. You are not detached from the text – what Jesus did and said to His disciples in that reading from St. Matthew. You are in the action and the action is *now*. See it; with the eyes of your heart, see it. See it and embrace it and revel in it.

Jesus asked His disciples who people were saying He was. “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” Do you think that Jesus asked the question because He didn't know, because He needed information? Hardly. OK, so then why does He ask? He is teaching them, leading them down a road of discovery, leading them to discover something that was hidden – hidden, at least, to the eyes in their heads. Who do people say that the Son of Man is? The disciples responded with the wacky word on the street regarding Jesus. He had been doing miraculous things and the crowds knew that He was no ordinary fellow – He taught as one who had authority. But the crowds couldn't pin the Messianic title on Jesus. “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah,

and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” Three rumors regarding Jesus; three strikes for the word on the street.

Let me ask you this: Is there a lot of religion out there, in the world? Lots of different religion? Yeah? Do you know why? Because people can't (refuse) identify who Jesus is. Who is He? That is the defining line for religion. Get it right or get it wrong. Get it right and everything begins to fall into place. Get it wrong and off you go, who knows where. Has that changed in two thousand years? Will it ever change? Identify *this* Man. Who is He? It must have seemed rather curious for the disciples to repeat the scuttlebutt going around. **What about you?** Who do you say that this Man is? That's precisely what Jesus did – He honed in on the disciples. It is a moment that is relived over and over. Look at Him – He's so ordinary, so commonplace, so nondescript. And yet... He orchestrated a miraculous catch of fish, He heals the sick, He calms storms, He walks on water, He gives the blind their sight... who is this Man?

At that moment, a crescendo was coming. For the world, for the future, for the kingdom of God – a crescendo was building, growing in scope and force... what about you, who do you say that I am? Peter! Peter the magnificent, Peter the bold, Peter the believer, the confessor, the one who sees with the eyes of his heart. “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” What a moment! What a beautiful moment! What a priceless statement! How blessedly accurate, how perfectly succinct! Jesus Himself luxuriates in the crescendo and then He speaks about us, not just Peter; us. We live in that moment, over and over. That biblical street intersects with August 23rd 2020 in this place – a divine intersection. Jesus lays out some theological truths that are to break in on your mind. Knowing these truths makes you stronger, better equipped for the living of these days.

Here's the first theological truth. Jesus doesn't praise Peter – He calls Him blessed. God the Father blessed Him. God the Father worked in Peter to open his eyes, the eyes of Peter's heart. “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.” What a comfort! What a reassurance! God at work to reveal His Son and Peter simply saw it and spoke what he saw. That is you. That's us! **You** are blessed! God has revealed His Son to you and you confess His name, the Savior's name! That's what the church is – believers who confess the name of Christ – the Son of the living God.

Here's the second theological truth. On your own, you don't see very well. On one occasion I was dumped into a pool of mud. Seriously – soupy, brown and invasive – a big pool of mud, head to toe. I popped up and opened my eyes and what did I see? Nothing. Weirdest thing ever – opened my eyes and all my life I had been able to see when I did that – not this time. Brown – everywhere. Why? There's mud in your eye. You are a sinner – born that way. There's mud in your eyes. The world's in your ear, speaking its heresy about religion without shame. If you listen to it, there's mud in your eye. You are a sinner and frankly, you like it. You justify the most ungodly behavior. The poverty of your heart and mind you brush off with callous indifference. Oooh, more mud in my eyes please. I like seeing brown. The world, your sinful flesh, and the devil – those things love sticking mud in your eyes. You allow it. You don't protect your sight/faith as you should.

Here's the third theological truth. You repent. God's Word convicts you of your sin and you repent. You acknowledge your lack of sight and you rely on God to show you what is hidden. You hear His word and the mud is vacated, washed away. You receive the absolution from the pastor and your sight is refocused on Christ. You receive the King's body and blood and your vision grows sharper still. Having the eyes of your hearts opened by the Spirit of God, you then desire to present your body as a living sacrifice. You endeavor to be chaste, modest, and pure. You endeavor to put to death the misdeeds of the body. You put others above yourself and strive to reflect Christ's love to all. Restraint, charity, love – you are transformed by Christ.

Here's the fourth theological truth. The Lord has built His church on this confession of faith, what Peter confessed and what you echo. This church is a powerhouse. Nothing can stop it. What makes this a powerhouse is the forgiveness of sins. Christ is present with His completed work of salvation and He gives it to sinners – we are saved by grace. The Lord was crucified for us, bearing the muck of our wretchedness and taking it away. Blood streamed from Holy body, blood that both pays our ransom and makes us holy. The living Son of the living God died – and He rose again. Forgiveness, life, salvation – that is the intersection of streets – Good Friday and Easter intersect with Christ the King and that makes this place a powerhouse. You are forgiven. On earth and in heaven – forgiven and free from sin and death. We identify Christ aright here. Ergo we identify ourselves correctly, forgiven sinners, loved of God.

Here's the final theological truth. The gates of hell shall not prevail against Christ's church. Gates are not an offensive weapon, but a defensive one. Hell is being besieged by Christ's church, not the other way around. Why, then, are we so timid, defensive, apologetic about the gospel? We have a divine battering ram. We are on the march. Each and every Lord's Day we have the privilege of taking another swing. We don't use sentimental pap. We don't use wadded up Kleenex. We use the pure Gospel, the life-giving Word of Truth. Courage and hope are born of this Word and the kingdom of heaven advances. That is the street you live on here, heaven's golden street. I pray that your eyes see it!