

The Sixth Sunday of Easter – 2021

Acts 10:34-38

John 5:1-8

John 15:9-17

Does anyone wake up and say to themselves, “Today, I’m going to abandon my principles”? Does anyone, after a good night’s sleep, wake up and stretch and then decide, “Yep, today is definitely a good day to deny those things that I hold most dear”?

Where do folks get their principles? Christianity is nothing less than stating that God is the Maker of heaven and earth and that man is made in His image. Christianity claims that God is the ultimate authority. There is no rightful authority that does not flow from God and His Word and we submit, in love and joy and humility, to God’s authority. Christ on the cross is God’s authority. Christ’s blood, pouring out of His body in love for fallen humanity, is God’s authority in action.

We, as Christians, both corporately and individually, derive our principles from God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Has Christ’s church forgotten this basic idea? It has never been popular with the secular world, but has Christ’s church forgotten the notion that our allegiance is 100% directed to God and His Word? Put aside the reality that you fail in this for a moment; just consider the assertion, the plain and uncomplicated assertion. Our understanding of Christian teaching, of morality, of life in this world is predicated entirely on what God has said about Himself and about us – is that something that the church still stands on? Is that part of your understanding of what Christianity is? Or do we just make up stuff to suit us? Are our principles a product of the times in which we live or the influence of the world around us?

How many of y’all believe that there is conflict in this world? Conflict. There are some pretty powerful forces out there that want to diminish Christ’s church. Let me give you but one example. A Finnish Lutheran Bishop has now been charged with incitement, a crime of no small magnitude. What did this bishop do to merit such a charge? He wrote a booklet in 2004 that lifted up the biblical portrait of marriage as being between one man and one woman. Finland legalized same sex marriage in 2017 and now the Prosecutor General is going after prominent figures who still adhere to historic Christian teaching. Do you expect this bishop to cave in the face of governmental coercion? Do you expect this bishop to abandon his principles if freedom of religion is lost, if the judiciary of Finland goes the way of the world? It’s possible. It is possible that this bishop, as honorable and faithful and strong as he definitely appears to be, it’s possible for him to cave. There is conflict in this world, there is conflict within each of us, and the good side doesn’t always seem to win.

If you have ever been to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting you will hear one constant refrain from the participants: “I abandoned my principles.” Candor and regret drip from their words. They were conflicted. Alcohol applied such force to their mind that they made the conscious choice to abandon their principles. Self-restraint, fulfilling their responsibilities, jeopardizing their relationships, adhering to God’s call to be sober-minded – those in AA meetings readily confess how they deserted what is good in favor of... something else. Alcohol can bend you to its will. It’s not just alcohol. There are plenty of forces out there that would drive a wedge

between you and what is good, between you and the principles that you, as a Christian, have adopted.

Choose this day whom you will serve. So said Joshua as he had all the tribes of Israel gathered before him. Joshua said something very close to this: Fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness, but if that seems too much for you then choose who it is that you are going to serve, the false gods of unbelievers, of which there is no shortage, (the gods of the Mesopotamians or the gods of the Amorites). Joshua made it clear which direction he would go. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). Life is going to get tight for us Christians in the near future. This last year has seen what the world is capable of doing. This last year has seen how easy it is for Christians to find themselves conflicted. The Lord Christ lifts up one principle above all others. We are to rehearse it, luxuriate in it, teach it to our children and do all in our power to fortify it in our minds so that nothing can shake it loose. The principle is holy and divine and living. What is the principle? It is love.

Christ’s love is the principle that animates His church, today and always. Your life is built on love. The Father’s love saturates this world, saturates your being, your future and your past. Are we *ever* to abandon love? May it never be! Love will never abandon us. Did Jesus go through difficulty? Was the Lord Christ ever conflicted? Did He ever even *consider* abandoning either the Father’s Commandments or His own commitment to our salvation? As the church endures persecution, it will be tempting to abandon love – love for our neighbor. As good is called evil and evil is called good, it will be tempting to abandon love for your neighbor because, you may tell yourself, *they* don’t deserve it. Christ calls us to a higher life, a higher love. We don’t merely love those who love us; even scoundrels do that. We love those who hate us, who view our demise as an advancement of society. We certainly will not lay down our God-given rights but we will not combat hate with more hate.

This house serves only Christ the King. This house will not abandon love. The love of the Father was poured into the Son. The love of the Son has been poured into you. God the Holy Spirit is the fire of love that burns within your heart. By God’s grace, you have known the sweetness of forgiveness. You have felt the love that is in, with, and under that forgiveness. You know how undeserving you are and yet how robust Christ’s love is for you. That is where you are to abide, in Christ’s love. Contentment flows from that place. Hope flows from that place. Confidence and courage and peace – they all flow from abiding in Christ’s love. It is not ethereal, by the way. Christ’s love is not abstract or in any way merely theoretical. Concrete, active, and alive, love for you is in the Sacrament that you receive. Love for you is in the Word that flows from the Scriptures. Love for you is in your brother in Christ, your sister in Christ.

I learned of love from my mother. There was a time when I was a despicable human being (more than what I am now); rebellious, dishonest, unlawful, entitled, selfish in motive and act. My mother didn’t abandon me. “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a). That is the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. I believe that God gave women a maternal instinct that is a reflection of Christ’s devotion to His sheep. Men protect, and that too is Christlike. Women, at

their very best, love as Christ loved. The world is to know us by our love. There is never any lack of opportunity for you to deny yourself and love as Christ loved. There is never any lack of opportunity for you to consider others better than yourself and love as Christ loved. His love is at work, in you.

We still have much to learn, you and I. Christ is our Teacher. Love, His love, is the subject. May the Spirit aid us in pursuit of this lofty topic. That the world redeeming Savior, who willed to render up His life as a sacrifice for us lowly scoundrels, loves us with a rejuvenating fervor. He set His face toward the holy cross and unleashed His perfect love. Sin was no obstacle to this love; the demonic was no barrier and death itself could not stop it. Father, forgive them! That is love's holy cry. The earth shook as love breathed out its dying breath. He rose again, this champion of the cross. His love brings you His resurrection. On the Last Day, divine love will sweep into this creation and breathe life into those in their graves and clothe them with a new body, tailored by death and resurrection. That same love – that Good Friday love, that Easter love, that Last Day love – it guides us *now*. In Christ's church, where the Lord is present, love is always a fruit that is in season. Jesus makes it so.