

Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost – 2022

Isaiah 66:18-23

Hebrews 12:4-29

Luke 13:22-30

Is quicksand real? I've never seen it. I've never seen the President of the United States either but I assume he's real – too real. I've seen quicksand on television, mostly dramas. When I was a youngster watching the old movies, quicksand seemed to be the principal danger in the wild. If an adventurer ever stumbled into quicksand, and they *always* stumbled into quicksand, it was curtains for the character and a spine-tingling moment for the audience. "Boy, I sure hope that I never lackadaisically stumble into quicksand – I'll be a goner, for sure." That's what a nine-year-old boy thought in 1972, though "lackadaisically" probably wasn't in my vocabulary.

Is quicksand real? I've never seen it. In our over-asphalted world, I probably never will see it. I looked it up yesterday, just for the purposes of talking to you dear people. Wikipedia, the most trusted resource for information on the interweb, said this about quicksand: "Quicksand is a colloid consisting of fine granular material and water. It forms in saturated loose sand when the sand is suddenly agitated. When water in the sand cannot escape, it creates a liquified soil that loses strength and cannot support weight." Okay, so that's pretty bland. It had a picture of a shirtless guy, hands on hips, you couldn't see his face but he was clearly exasperated, up to his mid-thigh in goo. The important point was that the possibility of dying was basically nil. "It's a mucky nuisance but it's basically impossible to die in quicksand." There's one childhood melodrama obliterated by reality.

Is there such a thing as spiritual quicksand? Well, it's not in the Bible – at least when I put those two words together in my trusty Bible search app, nothing came up. Maybe it doesn't exist. Still, I'm a bit uneasy. In the book of Revelation, God speaks about being pretty fed up with the unrepentant, those who look decent enough on the outside but folks who had grown self-satisfied spiritually and thus indifferent to growing in the faith. "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold I will spit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16). That doesn't sound so good. Why do you suppose those guys in the church at Laodicea, (those are the people that God was denouncing) why were they neither hot nor cold? Blasé, disinterested, flat – had they gotten caught in spiritual quicksand?

Cause this world is a spiritually safe place, right? Nothing could ever go wrong here for a Christian, right? No one would *lie* to us, right? No one would actually lead us astray, away from Christ, away from the truth, selling us on spiritual snake oil or take advantage of our fallen nature, our lust for money, our carnal appetites, our base nature, right? No one, nothing would do ever do *that* to us, right? You are lied to everyday. The alcohol commercials are *lying* to you. Matthew McConaughey, driving his fancy Lincoln, is *lying* to you. The perfume commercials are *lying* to you. Do you like being lied to? It's spiritual quicksand and it takes more lives than the real stuff by far. Those lies are about those things supposedly making your life better, more fulfilled, and it is just the same seduction that the devil used on Eve in the Garden. Bigger, better, faster; indulgence, eroticism, and power; lies, lies, lies. And the spiritual quicksand is real. Trouble is, people don't know when they are in it. Denial is in full bloom in

America. “Oh, no – no spiritual quicksand here, mate. We’re all good. Hey, if you’re going by the fridge would you grab me a cold one and if you’re free Sunday morning come on by and we’ll watch the game – some pretty fab cheerleaders, bro!”

Jesus addresses this thing head on. Some ole boy asks Him a question: “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” (Luke 13:23). How does the Lord Christ choose to answer? He answers by talking about those who *won't* be getting in. Those folks are shocked; not just dismayed but shocked because they thought that they were totally getting in. “We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets” (Luke 13:26). What do you think of that? The first words out of the Lord’s mouth are these: “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24). Strive; what does it mean? It’s not about some moral effort by which you achieve entrance. It’s not that you have to be “good enough” to merit God’s favor and thus gain access to heaven. You do have a job to do though. Your job is to crucify the old man within you; crucify him with his sinful desires and his faithless ways. If you are not doing that, you are at risk.

Some refuse to repent. Some wallow in the mud of their preferred stall of sin. Some Christians don’t want to grow up. You remember the old Toys R Us jingle? “I don’t want to grow up. I’m a Toys R Us kid they got a million toys at Toys R Us I can play with.” A Christian who acts like a spoiled child who doesn’t want to grow, doesn’t want to mature in the faith is at risk. Are we striving to be more chaste, more forgiving, sober, merciful? Spiritual quicksand is real. Jesus is faithful to you, alerting you to the danger. Many ignore Him. To their eternal peril, many ignore Him. The book of Romans says this: “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:13). That’s what it is to strive to enter through the narrow door. We Christians are tenacious. We are an active bunch, moved by God’s Spirit to renounce and avoid those things that are filthy, empty, vain. We don’t do this to promote ourselves or some sort of abstract goodness. We do this because we are so in love with our Savior. His incarnate goodness pulls at us.

God is at work in every single one of you – to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:13). Do you know why God is at work in you? God is at work in you because He is completely, thoroughly, totally devoted to you. God is at work in you because He loves you and His love reaches out. He is patient with you (2 Peter 3:9). He disciplines you out of love, attempting to mold your character, mold your faith, keep you reliant on the merit of Christ’s blood (Hebrews 12:5-11). We look there to enter the door. Christ crucified – He is our door. The crucified and risen Christ is the door of salvation and we look to no other (John 10:9). He took my sin; yours too. All that resides in me that is rank and filthy and vain, Jesus took it. He died bearing it. That’s what a Savior is and there is only one. God doesn’t want anyone to perish but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9). His ministry to you keeps you out of the miry bog (Psalm 40:2). Spiritual quicksand is not going to go away but Jesus’ cross and empty tomb is a victory over everything that afflicts us; everything. He is the very present rock on which we stand. He does not move. Stability is in this house because He is here, through His Word and sacrament to give you something solid, enduring, unmovable, to give you His grace. Our lives are predicated on Him. Our lives are predicated on His grace.

One day you will enter heaven through the door, the One and Only Door. Resurrection; He is going to raise you and usher you by His sacrifice into the eternal banquet, the feast of His love, the feast of His victory (Revelation 19:6-9). That door is so very open to you and all who believe. A vast number of people, from every tribe and language and nation, they will be gathered before the throne and before the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 7:9). That banquet peeks through into this Divine Service. He draws near to us to feed us with Holy food and give us a foretaste of the feast to come. His body and blood renews our spiritual vigor and reorients our hearts and minds to that which is real, trustworthy. How blessed are we?! Sin will not reign in lives (Romans 6:14). Sin will not be our master for the risen King and Him alone has that right of place. We belong to Him. He said: "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:54-56). What do we say to that? We say: On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand (My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less – LSB #575, refrain).