

Divided at the Cross

August 13 and 14, 2022

Third in a Series of Five, “Our Life Together in Christ”

Luke 12: 49 “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! 51 Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. 52 For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. 53 They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Dear Friends in Christ

Perhaps you’ve heard the story about a couple of stubborn German Lutherans whose preferred method of resolving conflict was giving the silent treatment. One week in particular, they had argued, harsh words were spoken, and neither of them were willing to apologize. The silent treatment had gone on for two days, now into the third, and as they drove to town, they saw two goats by the side of the road butting heads, neither one of them budging. The husband broke the silence with a question, “Relatives of yours?” To which the wife replied, “Yes, on my husband’s side.” And back into silence they went.

We laugh, but in fact, many of the silent treatments in our families aren’t funny at all. Whether the conflicts be political or spiritual or emotional or ridiculously petty, the divisions are undeniable. There can be no doubt in our minds that not too far away, there is:

- Parents whose adult child denies biblical truth and has chosen an alternative lifestyle.
- A son who has cut off his family and refuses to work toward reconciliation.
- A wife whose husband has become secretive and no wants nothing to do with the Church.
- Adult siblings with opposite political views whose holiday meal discussions have been reduced to talking about the weather and all issues non controversial.
- Grandparents struggling to talk with loved ones about the social issues of the day and wanting to give a clear witness, but not offend.

- A grandmother agonizing over her grandson trapped in the darkness of addiction.

In this sermon series, we are exploring what it means to be the people of God traveling through the ups and downs of life together. Two weeks ago, our sermon theme was ***Rich Towards God***. Last week, ***Valued By God***. Next week, ***Struggling Through the Empty Door***. And two weeks from now, ***Invited to Come Up Higher***.

Today, our sermon theme is “Divided At the Cross.” Here in this sanctuary we have been given a unity by virtue of Holy Baptism, and we celebrate that unity again and again in the creeds and at Holy Communion, but we go home to our families and neighborhoods, where division seems to be rising up and increasing. Two parts to our sermon today - the first part is Law and the second is Gospel. The first is full of painful and harsh reality. The second is full of pure and sweet Good News. Part #1 is that apart from Christ, all is not well. Part #2 is that in Christ, all is well.

• ***Apart from Christ, all is not well.***

In our text for today, Jesus is equipping His disciples to be stewards of the mysteries of God. He was teaching them that hypocrisy and the love of possessions would be dangerous distractions as they waited for the Son of Man to return. Their first century ministries would be during a time of division between Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, male and female, Pharisees and publicans, and the list goes one.

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ was and is the central event of human history. At the foot of the cross, everyone is confronted with the Good News of salvation, found only in Christ. It is a fire that divides humanity into believer or unbeliever.

Jesus felt pressure to bring His ministry to its completion for at least two reasons. First, so that the excruciatingly painful experience would be over. And secondly, so that the salvation of sinners could be accomplished once and for all.

Apart from Christ, all is not well. Oh there can be all kinds of success and accomplishments apart from Christ. There can be plenty of money to pay the bills and afford a great standard of living apart from Christ. But there can be no

forgiveness of sins in the courtroom of God apart from Christ. And where there is no forgiveness, there is no true peace or lasting joy.

Over the years, I have tried to help my confirmation class students understand the importance of honoring their parents and all proper authority, that life might go well with them. The importance of confessing their sins instead of defending and excusing them. I invited them to tell stories of how they had taken a bad situation and made it much worse with a bad attitude.

One of the winning stories came from Alex, an 8th grade student who lived with his grandparents and had a habit of causing trouble and not following the rules. One morning, he left the milk out after breakfast, and after school, his grandma scolded him for doing so. Rather than admitting his mistake and saying he was sorry, he denied that he had left the milk out and accused his grandma of always yelling at him, etc. Again and again, Alex chose to argue and say hurtful things, and before the argument had ended, Grandma had grounded him and taken away his phone for a month.

All of that could have easily been avoided if Alex had looked his grandma in the eyes and sincerely repented. At which point Grandma would have embraced him, assured him of her love, and forgiven him.

I read a Christian author who suggested that if we could remove pride and stubbornness from our conflicts, most of them would be over in five minutes or less.

When Jesus says that He did not come to bring peace, but on the contrary, division, He was referring to a false peace that the prophets in Jeremiah's time were proclaiming. The basic problem of those false prophets is that they wanted to be popular with the people by bringing them a word of good news instead of the word of judgment for their sins. The temptation to scratch itchy ears is still with us today. A "feel good" message may make a preacher very popular among those who wish to compromise the Word of God. He may attract a large following, but our Lord has called His preachers in every generation to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His Name.

Jeremiah writes, *Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces*

The writer to the Hebrews describes the Word of God *as living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

In this sanctuary, right is still right and wrong is still wrong. The Ten Commandments are still true, and temptation is still to be resisted. The Law of God is still that mirror which shows us the harsh reality that we're not just sinners, we're poor and miserable sinners. We don't need to just clean up our old sinful adam, we need to drown it before the new man named Christ can rise up and rule in our midst. We don't come here on Sunday mornings to hear five new ideas on how to make the world a better place. We come to throw ourselves on the mercy of God, to cry out for the forgiveness of our sins, to confess our faults and failures again and again.

Two lessons I invite you to take away from the first part of our sermon today, which is that apart from Christ, life is a mess, all is not well.

Takeaway #1 is to recognize the reality that the consequences of sin will always be causing trouble in our marriages, in our families, in our friendships, in our congregation, and in our country. Know that it's not going to get better in the end times. Just the opposite is true.

Takeaway #2 is that it remains our assignment to speak truth in love as individuals, and collectively. There's an old saying that people don't care what you know until they know that you care. As we look for opportunities to speak hard truths to people we truly care about, we will do well to spend time and energy listening, helping, and befriending. Listening to broken hearts, helping those who are one setback away from throwing in the towel, and befriending those who are trying to go it alone.

. In Christ, all is well.

I've said it repeatedly in my first 42 years of ministry. I'm saying it again tonight. And I'll be saying it early and often in my time of ministry here. If we could be famous for one habit in this place, I wish for that habit to be the confession of sins. For as often as we cry out for God to have mercy, that often the peace and the joy that only Jesus Christ can give will sweep over our souls, and all will be well. As often as we apologize for our sinful words and nasty outbursts, that often the forgiveness of sins will be in charge around here. As often as we come clean and humbly seek the favor of our God, the favor of our God will be ruling in our midst.

Dear friends, darkness doesn't have a prayer when light shows up. Harsh exchanges of words have a habit of de-escalating as often as one person lowers his

voice, thinks through what could be helpful, and then responds in a thoughtful manner.

The Psalmist said it this way, ***Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.***

The kingdom of God is like a husband and a wife who are having words about the latest credit card bill. Emotions are running high, the voices are getting louder, tears of anger are beginning to flow, and the husband does something different. He takes his wife by the hand, and he offers a brief prayer, asking God to be their refuge and strength in this hour of trouble.

Jesus Himself invites us ***to come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.***

The kingdom of God is like a family gathering that was spoiled by a political discussion that went south, or as you say down south, it went sideways. Just when everybody was about to go home frustrated and upset, sweet grandma changes the subject and tells everyone how much she loves them and are glad they came home. In Christ, all is well.

Years ago my sweet mom was scolding me for one reason or another. I was about 12 or 13 years old, and instead of apologizing and promising to do better, I told her to quit yelling at me. Instead I didn't use the word "yelling." I used a bad word that starts with a b. When I tell this story to my confirmation classes, I ask them how they think my mom reacted. Some will guess that she washed my mouth out with soap, but she didn't. Others would say that she spanked or grounded or scolded me some more. But she didn't. What she did was cry. And not a soft cry with a couple of tears trickling down. It was a full out sobbing and weeping that made me sit up straight, and then she choked out the words, "O Larry, don't ever say that word again."

You see, I had broken her heart, and she corrected me with sadness instead of anger. Let me repeat that. She corrected me with sadness instead of anger.

Two takeaways from the second part of sermon, which is that in Christ, all is well.

Takeaway #1 is that in Christ, there is a new reality. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come. The Lord's

Supper in this sanctuary is pure Gospel. Christ is with us, and He is for us, which changes everything.

Takeaway #2 is that speaking the truth in kindness and patience is so much better than speaking truth in anger and frustration. I'm not saying that our family divisions will be magically solved with kindness and patience, but I am saying that more often than not - a broken heart will accomplish more than an angry heart.