

Ash Wednesday
St. Matthew 6:16-21
February 26th, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Lay Up for Yourselves Treasures in Heaven

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Into the Garden of Eden, the Lord Triune God placed our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were given to eat of any tree in the Garden, but of the tree of the knowledge good and evil they were not to eat. Our first parents were deceived by the devil, the serpent in the Garden. The same devil who will tempt our Lord + Jesus Christ in this coming Sunday's Gospel reading from St. Matthew. Whereas our Lord + Jesus resisted the temptation of the devil, our first parents, Adam and Eve did not. They were without sin, but instead of conforming their will to the will of the Triune Lord God, they chose to follow their own will. Our first mother, Eve, took of the fruit of the forbidden tree in the Garden, and gave some to her husband, who was with her. Adam, our first father, not only watched this scene unfold without expressing any opposition or stopping his wife, Eve, from partaking of the fruit, but he also willingly took some of the fruit offered to him by his wife.

Since then, mankind has been plunged into sin. This sin of Adam and Eve has been passed down to us. We inherited this transgression of our first parents, because we are their children. We daily sin much. Our every thought, word and deed are soiled with sin. On account of this inbred sin in us, this original sin, we are often rude, angry, and hateful. We curse and lie. We desire the things of our neighbors. We hurt the ones whom we are to love. Even more, our hearts are often far from loving our Lord God. We easily blame Him for things that happen to us. We neglect to hear His Word. We neglect to talk to Him in prayer. We misuse His Name, using it to call down curses upon other people, and neglecting to use it to give Him praise and thanks. We also chase after other gods continuously; seeking help from all sorts of false gods to the exclusion of our Triune Lord God.

It is said that the apple does not fall far from the tree. We are not much different from our first parents, Adam and Eve. They sought to do the desires of their own hearts, with no consideration of their Creator. We also daily seek our own will to the exclusion of both of our neighbors, whom we are to love; including even our neighbors who are closest to us: our spouses and children. We also seek our own will to the exclusion of the will of our heavenly Lord God. For all this we deserve the same punishment that the Lord God placed upon the city of Nineveh: to be overthrown and destroyed.

Our Triune Lord God is a merciful God, however. The inhabitants of Nineveh repented in sackcloth. They proclaimed a fast for every man, woman and child. Even the animals were not allowed food or water. They rent their hearts and their garments. They sought the forgiveness of the Lord God.

They turned back from their sinful ways and clung in faith to the Lord's grace and mercy. This is why we begin this season of Lent with these words from the Prophet Jonah. For in it we see a pattern that we may follow in our daily lives. Our lives are racked with sin. Daily should we remember our Lord's grace and mercy toward us in that He baptized us and put His holy Name upon us. He killed the Old Adam in us by His washing of regeneration and the renewal of His Holy Ghost. Whenever we daily remember our Holy Baptism, and remember that we are His child, the Old Adam is once again drowned and killed in us.

We cling in faith to our Lord's mercy and grace; we cling in faith to His forgiveness. During this season of Lent, as is the case every year, it is our time to rededicate ourselves to those things which we have forsaken. The people of Nineveh put on sackcloth and declared a fast. The Church also fasts during this time. Our Lord even instructs us in the Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew that we are to fast. He says, "When you fast" not "If" you fast. But fasting is not done to observe some requirement of the law. It is not to be done just for the sake of fasting; to just fulfill the requirement of fasting. The people of Nineveh certainly fasted outwardly; they gave up food and drink until the Lord relented from the disaster placed upon them. But more importantly their fasting was from the heart. They changed their hearts. They repented.

Our fasting should be the same. We should rend our hearts and not our garments. This is the point that our Lord + Jesus makes in the Gospel reading. Do not fast to show people how great of a Christian you are; how good you can observe the regulation. Fast for your Father in Heaven. Fast because you want to be closer to Him, and show your love for Him even more. Fasting to show other people your fasting is like laying up treasure that will be eaten by moths and rust. Our treasure should be found in Heaven. It should be found in the things of Heaven.

Our treasure is the Word of God and the Blessed Sacraments. This is why we treat them with such respect. This is why we desire to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity, and administer the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. For we know when these things remain pure, there can be no doubt in our minds that our Lord God is feeding us with that which we need for salvation. We can place our trust and faith in the Word and not doubt that it will give us the forgiveness, life and salvation that we desire.

When we have the Word of God; when we respond in pray to the Lord God after hearing His Word; we have no doubt that our Lord God heavenly Father hears us, and is storing for us treasures in Heaven. This is how much our Triune Lord God loves us. We are His creation after all. He loves His creation, even when we do not show our love for Him by our actions, words and thoughts.

If you need further proof, consider this. What is our Lord's response to the sin of our first parents? He certainly lays down some judgment. They, and we, have to face the punishment of our transgressions. But what does He also do? He provides for them a means of salvation. That means is the Beloved and Only-Begotten Son of the heavenly Father, our Lord + Jesus Christ. The Lord + Jesus would come down from Heaven and be born as a man, and would fulfill the Law of God for us. He would keep the Law perfectly; the Law which we are unable to keep even a little. Then He would suffer and die in our place on the tree of the holy cross. This is why we do not shun the crucifix in our sanctuary. In it we continuously see a picture of our redemption. We continuously see the cost—the price—that was paid for our transgressions. We see what we deserve on account of our manifold transgressions. We see our Lord God—our Creator—redeeming us and atoning for the sins of all mankind.

When we fast, this sacrifice for us should be our focus. It is the promise of our salvation found in His holy Word. Our salvation is found in our Lord + Jesus and His sacrifice for us. This is truly a treasure that will not be eaten by moths or destroyed by rust. When we give up food or drink, we do not do it to give people a show. We do it so that we might turn our focus away from our earthly needs, to

our spiritual needs. We do it so that we might focus on the means of our salvation. For our salvation is not found in any other person than in our Lord + Jesus Christ. In Him alone is our salvation found.

Our Triune Lord God gave our first parents a promise of salvation after they sinned and transgressed against Him. He continued to send forth prophets to proclaim that promise of salvation. The people of Nineveh, on account of their sin, were set to be destroyed. They repented because our Lord God sent to them a prophet, a preacher, to proclaim to them repentance. From the Prophet Jonah's proclamation that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed, they heard the Law and repented in sackcloth and with fasting.

The Lord God is gracious to you today as well. For He sends His ministers to preach to you that on account of your sinfulness, you deserve God's eternal wrath and displeasure. He sends His servants to proclaim to you to not lay up for yourselves treasures that rust and will be destroyed by moths—that is, all the earthly pleasures and stuff. But we are to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven. In His holy Word and in His Blessed Sacraments our Lord God is creating and sustaining faith in us. He is calling us to repentance. Rend your hearts and not your garments. Look to the cross of our Lord + Jesus, for in it our Lord and Savior suffered and died for you so that you might enjoy the treasures of Heaven. May the Triune Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!