

Wednesday of Ember Week in Lent
St. Matthew 12:38-50
March 1st, 2023
Sts. Peter and Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Sign of Jonah

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

Then certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we would see a sign from thee." But He answered and said unto them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given it but the sign of Jonah the prophet: for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

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.

Just as it was this past Sunday, our Gospel reading begins with the word "then." "Then" when? In the previous section a man who was possessed by a demon; a mute and blind demon is brought to the Lord + Jesus to be healed. When our Lord casts out the demon, so that the man could now see and speak, the Pharisees accused the Lord of casting out demons by Beelzebub. He then relates to them the narrative that we will get later in Lent from a different Gospel that a house divided cannot stand, and that a good tree cannot bear bad fruit, just as a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. In response to the Lord's words the scribes and Pharisees ask our Lord + Jesus for a sign.

First of all, what need is there of a sign from the Lord? Did He not just provide a sign? He cast the deaf and blind demon out of that poor man. He was now able to see and speak. What further sign is needed. Indeed, after our Lord casts the demon out, the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew records that the multitudes were amazed, and wondered, "Can this be the Son of David?". The multitudes understood the power and authority of the Lord + Jesus. They saw the miracle for what it was. It was a sign that this Man + Jesus was the Son of David. He was the Messiah. He was the Anointed One of the Lord God. No further sign should have been needed. But the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees—the impenitent ones—asked our Lord for a sign to prove His authority to cast out demons.

Our Lord + Jesus responds by telling them that no sign will be given except the sign of the Prophet Jonah, who was in the belly of the large fish for three days and three nights. By this sign our Lord shows that this event prefigures the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. More will be said about this in a short while, but first it must be pointed out that our Lord is making an even greater connection to the Old Testament than just the sign of Prophet Jonah. For, how did the Prophet Jonah end up in the belly of the large fish in the first place? Remember, he was sent by the Lord God to proclaim the judgment and destruction of the city and people of Nineveh on account of

their wickedness and perverseness. The Prophet Jonah refused and boarded a boat heading to Tarsus; in the opposite direction.

After the Prophet Jonah was cast into the sea on account to the violent tempest that sought to destroy the ship that he was on, he was rescued by the Lord God by causing him to be swallowed by a large fish. Then the Prophet Jonah was spit back up on the land, and he then did as he was originally commanded to do: he went to Nineveh and preached that in forty days Nineveh would be destroyed. What did the people of Nineveh do? How did they react to the preaching of the Prophet Jonah. They repented in sackcloth and ashes. The king of Nineveh even made a decree that everybody should repent and beg the Lord God to spare them. And the Lord God did spare the people of Nineveh.

This is the connection that the Lord + Jesus is making to the scribes and Pharisees by bringing up the Prophet Jonah. The people of Nineveh repented when they heard the preaching of the Lord God through the mouth of the Prophet Jonah. The scribes and Pharisees, when the Lord + Jesus instructs them about the devil's kingdom and good and bad trees, remain in unbelief; asking for a sign when a sign was already performed by Him. He already had given them proof of His authority over the kingdom of Satan. But they refused to believe it. They refused to believe on the Lord + Jesus. They would eventually be the ones who would plead with Pontius Pilate to crucify the Lord + Jesus. On account of their unbelief the sign of Jonah would be given by the Son of Man. He would be in the tomb for three days and three nights, and then He would rise again on the third day.

The Ninevites repented when they heard that the Lord God had determined to destroy them in forty days. Our Lord had relented from His destruction when He saw that they had repented. They heard the servant of the Lord God, and still repented. Now someone greater than the Prophet Jonah was standing among them, and the scribes and Pharisees refused to repent. Therefore, the people of Nineveh would rise up on the Last Day and be the accusers of the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, because they rejected the Anointed One of the Lord God. The Ninevites had believed the Word of Lord spoken by the servant of the Lord and repented. The scribes and Pharisees heard the voice of the Lord Himself and still did not believe. They saw the signs He did and still did not believe.

The Queen of Sheba would also stand as an accuser of the scribes and Pharisees—of all unbelievers—on the Last Day, for she traveled from the ends of the world to hear the wisdom of King Solomon. The wisdom of King Solomon was the preaching of the Lord God. This is why we retain his wisdom in some of the writings of the Old Testament. But someone greater than King Solomon stood in their midst, and they did not believe. The Queen of Sheba, like the people of Nineveh heard the servant of the Lord, and believed. But the scribes and Pharisees did not believe when they heard the voice of the Lord God in our flesh Himself. All those who are like the scribes and Pharisees; all those who do not believe on the Lord + Jesus will be cast into the eternal fires of Hell with all those bad trees who cannot produce the good fruit of faith.

This is why our Lord + Jesus points us to His grave; to His resurrection. For He has already shown that He has authority and power over the devil and his angels. He casts out the demon at His word. Our Lord + Jesus has authority to give up His life, and He has authority to take it up again. He has the power to go into the grave, and descend into Hell and proclaim to the devil and his angels that their kingdom has been divided and broken by the crucified Body of the Lord + Jesus. And our Lord + Jesus has the power to rise from the dead, and burst open the gates of death for all those who believe on Him; for all those who bear the good fruit of faith having been grafted by faith into the good tree of the Lord + Jesus.

We cling in faith to the sign of Jonah which the Lord + Jesus provided for us to atone for the sins of the whole world, so that all those who believe on Him might have forgiveness, life and salvation. By this sign we can marvel with the multitudes who witnessed our Lord + Jesus cast out the deaf and blind

demon. They wondered if He could be the Son of David. We know that He is the Son of David, for we have heard the preaching of the servants of the Lord God, who have preached this wonderful good news to us ever since our Lord + Jesus sent out the Apostles to teach all nations the good news, and baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. The servants of the Lord + Jesus preached what our Lord preaches into our ears today. That the sign of the Prophet Jonah will win for us salvation. We cling in faith to the death and resurrection of our Lord + Jesus, for His death and resurrection shows us that we will also rise again from the dead on the Last Day. All those who believe on the Lord + Jesus will live with Him eternally in Heaven with the multitudes of Heaven who proclaim forever that the Son of David has conquered sin and death, and has given us an eternal Kingdom in which we may remain undivided for all eternity. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever One God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!