

The Ember Wednesday in Lent
St. Matthew 12:38-50
February 21st, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

We Would See a Sign

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 to 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.

My dear friends, the Prophet Jonah was sent by the Lord God to the city of Ninevah to declare its destruction. As you remember from our yearly reading of this book at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday, the Prophet Jonah did not go as the Lord commanded, but got on a ship bound for Tarsus. While he slept on the ship a violent storm threatened to destroy the ship. When it was discovered that he was the cause of the storm, he told the crew to throw him overboard. The sea calmed and the Prophet Jonah was saved by the Lord God by being swallowed by a large fish. He was in the belly of the large fish for three days. He was spit out again on dry ground and was saved alive from the sea to continue his calling to preach repentance to the city of Ninevah. Certainly, this being in the belly of the great fish is a foreshadowing of our Lord + Jesus in the belly of the earth for three days after His crucifixion and death. On the third day He rose again from the dead, fulfilling the prefigurement of the Prophet Jonah.

The scribes and Pharisees wanted to see a sign by the Lord + Jesus. He, however, had just performed a sign. He had cast out a demon who was blind and dumb. We get to hear that narrative on Oculi Sunday, the Third Sunday in Lent, from the Evangelist St. Luke. After He had cast out the demon some of them complained that He was casting out demons by Beelzebub. After He refutes them with the analogy of a kingdom divided against itself and the ability of a stronger man defeating a strong man, they immediately begin to ask our Lord for a sign. The sign that they would get—the only sign they would get—was the sign of the Prophet Jonah who was in the belly of great fish for three days.

The only sign they would receive is the Lord + Jesus being raised from the dead after being in the belly of the earth for three days. If the casting out of demons would not lead them into repentance, truthfully no sign would. This is why our Lord rebukes them in their unbelief. They had hardened their hearts against Him. They did not want Him to be the Messiah. He did not have the right pedigree. He

was from Nazareth. He was born to poor and lowborn parents. His birth was not a grand birth. The fact that He did miracles was not a factor to the scribes and Pharisees. They had already made up their minds about Him. He was not the Messiah. In truth, they and their ancestors did not believe any of the prophets that had been sent to them. Now here was one greater than the Prophet Jonah, greater than all the other prophets sent before Him, and they did not believe Him, either.

Our Lord + Jesus rebukes their unbelief by teaching them that others did repent and believe with even less evidence than which they were presented. Our Lord reminds them about Ninevah, how after hearing the preaching of the Prophet Jonah, the whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes. Ninevah was a great city. The Book of the Prophet Jonah tells us that it was a three-day journey from one end of the city to the other. For each day that the Prophet Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, he preached destruction to the city of Ninevah. For three days he preached a simple five-word sermon, "Forty days, and Ninevah destroyed." That was all the sign that the entire city and people of Ninevah needed to repent and believe on the Lord God. They repented in sackcloth and ashes after hearing a simple five-word sermon for three days. The scribes and Pharisees witnessed the miracles of our Lord + Jesus; they witnessed the casting out of demons, and still did not believe.

As it was with Ninevah, so it was with the Queen of Sheba. The only sign she received was the wisdom of King Solomon. She had heard of his wisdom concerning the Lord God in the ends of the earth, as our Lord says. Only having heard about his wisdom did she come to test him with hard questions. She came to "Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones; and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart." She shared with him all that troubled her and learned from him all that he could teach about the Lord God. And she only needed to see the kingdom and household of King Solomon, and hear his wisdom from his lips for her to repent and believe on him. And she returned to her own land trusting in the Lord God.

The people of Ninevah, and the Queen of Sheba, and everyone else who had less signs given them and yet still repented and believed on the Lord God, would rise up and condemn them on account of their unbelief. Our Lord + Jesus even says in the previous chapter, regarding the unbelief of Capernaum, that if the signs and wonders that were being done in that city were done in Sodom and Gomorrah, the city would still be there in His day. The scribes and the Pharisees had the signs and wonders of the Lord + Jesus and still did not believe on Him. They reject Him because He casts out demons and yet they also demand a sign from Him. The only sign which they would receive is the sign of the Prophet Jonah who was in the belly of the great fish for three days.

This the same sign which we have. Our Lord + Jesus suffered and died on the tree of the holy cross after perfectly fulfilling the Law of God. He then rose again on the third day, destroying death once and for all. He atoned for our sins and the sins of the whole world, so that all who see the sign of His death and resurrection as the atonement of sins for mankind might believe on Him and be saved. Like the people of Ninevah, and the Queen of Sheba, we only have the preaching of the Word as a sign of the greatness of our Lord and Savior. We only have the Word of God as a testimony that the Lord + Jesus is the Messiah; that He is the Christ, the Anointed One of the Lord God sent to redeem us poor sinners. Having only the means of grace, our Lord's Blessed Sacraments and the pure preaching of the Word of God, we have repented and believed on Him for our forgiveness, life, and salvation.

The scribes and Pharisees had the signs of the Lord + Jesus, they had the signs of someone greater than the Prophet Jonah, and someone greater than King Solomon, and yet still did not believe on Him. Their hearts were like a swept and garnished house. They would see the sign and cast the demons out of their hearts, but on account of their unbelief their swept and garnished hearts would welcome in even more demons. Such it is with all those who live in unbelief, who hear the Word of God,

and for a moment believe, but that belief is soon quashed. And the state of their hearts is worse than before. For they reject the preaching of the Lord God. They reject the signs that have been given to us that we might hear and believe.

Let us therefore, my dear friends, hear and believe. We would see a sign. That sign has been given to us. It is our Lord's death and resurrection on the third day. By it He destroyed death and sin and the power of the devil. We are now the Lord's mother and brethren. For we do the will of our Father Who art in Heaven. His will is that we hear and believe on His One and Only Son, the Lord + Jesus, sent to redeem us from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He has shown us the sign of our salvation in His Son's death and resurrection. Through this sign we have the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. To this great sign we cling in faith with all our hearts, for by we will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Lord, grant this unto us all. 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 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!