

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 7:15-23
July 21st, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Ormond Beach, FL
St. Bartholomew Ev. Lutheran Mission, UAC
Fort Myers, FL
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Beware of False Prophets

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves.”

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Almighty and gracious God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hast commanded us to pray that Thou wouldest send forth laborers into Thy harvest: of Thine infinite mercy give us true teachers and ministers of Thy Word, and put Thy saving Gospel in their hearts and on their lips, that they may truly fulfill Thy command, and preach nothing contrary to Thy holy Word, that we, being warned, instructed, nurtured, comforted, and strengthened by Thy heavenly Word, may do those things which are well-pleasing to Thee, and profitable to us; through, Jesus Christ, our Lord. 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 last time we were together you heard a sermon from the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, from the fifth chapter of the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew’s Gospel. Today, we get to hear a sermon from the end of our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount from the seventh chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Our Lord + Jesus tells us to “beware of false prophets.” How do we know someone is a false prophet? Our Lord tells us that we will know them by their fruits. That is, we will know a false prophet by his word. What he preaches, and what he does not preach against.

In the Old Testament, a false prophet was determined by whether or not his prophecy came true. If he prophesied that there would be rain, and there was not, he was a false prophet. Many false prophets lived during the time of the Prophet Elijah, who prayed that there would be no rain and it did not rain for three years. Many false prophets tried to contradict his prophecy. The same was true during the time of the Prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. They prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the impending exile into the land of Babylon on account of the unbelief of the Jews. Many false prophets tried to prophesy that there would be peace. But there was no peace in the end.

The false prophets in the time of Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, all led those who listened to them into a false sense of peace and comfort. The people wanted to hear these things, for they ignored the preaching of the law by the true prophets. They did not want to believe there would be destruction and drought. The false prophets prophesied to them what their itching ears desired to hear. They told them

exactly what they wanted to hear. For the people's unbelief did not want to hear the truth. They did not want to repent of their sins. They wanted to remain in their unbelief, manifest sinning, and false idolatry. They worshiped false gods, and listened to false prophets. For bad trees only produce bad fruit.

The true prophets preached the truth of what the Lord God desired the people to hear. And the true prophets endured exile, hatred, and imprisonment. Some of them even were killed on account of what they prophesied. The people hated to hear what the Lord God had to say so much that they silenced the true prophets once and for all.

But the Word of the Lord endures forever. The truth that He desires to be preached and prophesied will not remain silent. A good tree can only produce good fruit. His Word will go forth into those hearts which will receive it. The Epistle reading for today from St. Paul's epistle to the Church at Rome makes it plain to us. We either live according to the flesh, or we live according to the Spirit. Living according to the flesh is the equivalent of letting our Old Adam have free reign in our lives.

The Old Adam—our sinful flesh—does not want us to hear God's Word. It does not want us to hallow the Lord God's Name. It does not want the Spirit to change our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. It rejects the Word of the Lord God. The Old Adam rejects the Law of God which teaches that it cannot save itself by its works. The Old Adam clings to its works trying to find some foothold with which it can prop itself up in pride over accomplishing some good thing. It rejects the notion that it is corrupt from conception, that no good thing can come from it. The Old Adam rejects the notion that it is a bad tree from which no good fruit can come. And since the Old Adam rejects the Law, it also rejects the Gospel, for if it clings to its works as a means of its salvation, it cannot have any room for the true source of salvation in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, alone. The Old Adam will continue to listen to false prophets.

This is why the Holy Ghost continues to send out to us faithful pastors and ministers to preach the true Word of the Lord God. For by the pure preaching of the Word of the Lord God and the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments the Holy Ghost works to change our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. He works to destroy the Old Adam and create in us a New Adam. He works to turn us from bad trees that produce bad fruit into good trees that produce good fruit. As St. Paul tells the Church at Rome, He turns us from flesh into Spirit. He fills us with His life-giving Spirit so that we no longer wish to entertain the falsehoods of the Old Adam, but desire to listen to the pure and true preaching of the Lord God.

This is why, my dear friends, we must beware of false prophets. For, false prophets—false preachers—do not lead us into the truth. Their works are easily seen. Their fruits are readily visible. For they preach what the world wants to hear. They are praised by men and exalted by the world. They teach not the truth but the lies of the world. They spread the lies of the devil. Our Lord + Jesus would have us preach repentance toward the forgiveness of sins. False prophets and preachers preach that we are basically good people, that we need no repentance. They preach that what the Lord God condemns, He has not in fact condemned but embraced. These false preachers lead men down the pathway into Hell. Just as the false prophets of the Old Testament preached peace when there is no peace, just as they preached there was no cause for concern or repentance, the false preachers of today do the same thing.

Therefore, my dear friends, let us beware of false prophets. We can know them by their fruits. False prophets prop up sinners in their sinfulness, they prop up unbelievers in their unbelief. True prophets preach the Law into our ears so that the Holy Ghost can work through the Law to change their heart of flesh into a heart of spirit; so that He can change their heart of stone into a heart of flesh, and thereby they can cling in faith not to their own works, but to the works and merits of the one and only Savior of the world, the Lord + Jesus, the Christ. True prophets always point us to the Christ and to His

works of redemption for us. They point us to the cross of our Lord + Jesus. They point us to the fulfillment of the Law of the Lord God by the Lord + Jesus, and to His atoning sacrifice upon the tree of the holy cross. For this is the Word that our Lord + Jesus would have us hear, for it is the Word that leads us into salvation.

And this is how the Lord + Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount. He reminds His hearers that everyone that hears His Word and does them is like a wise man that built his house upon a rock. True preachers lead us to build our house upon the firm Rock of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ alone. They lead us away from the sinking sand of false doctrine and idolatry. True preachers produce the fruit of faith in the Lord + Jesus. False preachers produce the fruit of faith in our own virtue, pride, and works. Let us beware of false prophets for they will lead us down the path to the fires of Hell.

Let us instead hear the true preachers who preach into our ears that we are saved by the works and merits of the Christ alone. His tree of the perfect fulfilling of the Law and His sacrificial ransom for us on the tree of the holy cross produces the fruit of faith in all those who do not resist the Holy Ghost, but hear the Word of the Lord God and have Him produce the fruit of faith in us, so that our hearts of sinful flesh are turned into hearts of spirit and life. May the Lord Almighty continue to work in us to bring us into the truth and lead us into the gates of Heaven. 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!