

Ash Wednesday
St. Matthew 6:16-21
February 18th, 2026
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald P. Dulas

When Thou Fastest

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head, and wash thy face; that thou be not seen of men to fast, but of thy Father Who is in secret: and thy Father, Who seeth in secret, shall recompense thee.”

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, our penitence should not be for show. This is what our Lord + Jesus is telling us in the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. People who make their repentance a cause for show are looking for a pat on the back. They are looking for praise from their fellow man. Our Lord + Jesus commends us to not store up treasures in this life. That treasure being the praise of other people. Our treasure is in heaven. That means that our treasures are spiritual in nature. Our treasures are not of this life and world. True treasure comes from heaven. It comes as a gift from our Lord God. He desires us to look to Him for our treasures.

The treasures of this life are fleeting and pass away. The treasures of heaven are eternal and last forever. Which would we rather have? A treasure that will be taken away, that will be eaten up by moths, or destroyed by rust, or can be stolen by thieves. Or, do we want the treasures which do not pass away, that last forever. The answer to the question determines where our heart is. Is our heart fixed on the things of this life, or is our heart fixed on the things of the life of the world to come? Our Lord is getting at a question of faith. It is a First Commandment issue. Who is our God? What is our God? Our God is that in which we place our faith and trust; it is in Whom our hearts cling to in all times of trouble and woe, and to Whom we give thanks when we are showered with blessings.

Do we have a false god, or do we look to the One, True Triune God for all that we need to support this body and life? This is where fasting comes in. The purpose of fasting is shunning the things of this life, so that our focus is on the Lord God. Fasting has been called a spiritual exercise. Physical exercise is that kind of exercise which promotes health in our physical bodies. Physical exercise can build strength, cause weight loss, and promote a healthy heart and mind. Spiritual exercise does the same thing for our spirit. It builds our faith and trust in the Lord God. It strengthens our faith in times of trouble and sorrow. For the methods of spiritual exercise lead us into study of the Word of the Lord God, and into prayer with the Lord God. We build up our faith by having a conversation with the Lord God. He speaks to us in His holy Word, and we respond to His holy Word by giving Him thanks, by

praising Him, and by our general conversation with Him about His holy Word.

These benefits of strengthening our faith and our spiritual life from spiritual exercise is why our Lord + Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount does not say *if* you fast, but *when* you fast. He is assuming that it will already be a part of the Christian life. He certainly fasted Himself. We will hear about that in the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday, when He fasted forty days and forty nights, and then was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. Our Lord wants us to fast, or rather, He wants us to grow in faith and trust in Him and in His heavenly Father. This is done when we delve ourselves into study of His Word, and spend time with Him in prayer. When we are not eating, as is done in fasting, we have more time to dedicate to spending time in His Word and in prayer.

But fasting should not be used as a means to gain favor from our fellowman. It should not be done as a show. Doing this makes our faith and our religion all about us. It makes our Christianity a means to garner favor with our fellow man; to receive the pat on the back. People who do this certainly have their reward. But their reward does not last. Their treasure will not merit them eternal life. This is why everybody loves to have ashes put upon their foreheads on this day. It is a means to show the world that they did something special. They went to church. I can guarantee you the world is not impressed. The imposition of ashes only brings praise to the person wearing them, usually from other people who are wearing them. It does not bring praise to the Lord God.

Further, it is not what our Lord + Jesus told us to do to grow in faith towards Him. He gave us the Sacraments. He gave us the means of grace. Through hearing and believing the pure Word of the pure Gospel, our hearts are strengthened in faith. For through the pure Gospel, we hear that our sins have been fully paid for by the Lord + Jesus. We hear that our works and merits do nothing toward gaining the forgiveness of sins. We hear that our sins have been covered over by the suffering and death of our Lord + Jesus. In the pure preaching of the Gospel, we are given the Christ for our atonement one hundred percent. We need to do nothing for our salvation.

Moreover, we learn that our Lord + Jesus has instituted for us the Blessed Sacraments wherein He distributes to us the gifts that He won on the tree of the holy cross. In this Divine Service we have already been presented with these Sacraments. We were reminded at the beginning of the Service that the Lord God has placed His Triune Name upon us, when the minister turned toward us and blessed us by placing the Name of God upon us which we received at our Holy Baptisms. The minister further offered us the forgiveness of sins, when we came to this altar and received the Absolution from him, as if we received it from the Lord God Himself. During the rite of the Order of the Confessional Service the minister also exhorted us to come to this altar to receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine for the remission of our sins. We will do just that in a little while.

All these things we learn from the Word of the Lord God. We learn what He has done for us, and how in His love for us, He suffered and died for us so that we might have forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. This is why we fast, so that we may have time to learn these things from the Word of the Lord God.

But our fasting should never be done for show. Nor, should it be done so as to replace the Sacraments that our Lord + Jesus instituted for us. This is why fasting among Lutherans has always remained free. One may fast as strict or as liberal as one desires. One may fast with all due astringency, or one may fast not at all. Although, our Lord + Jesus does not say, "*If* thou fastest," but "*When* thou fastest." He is telling us that all due diligence should be taken to ensure that through study of the Word of the Lord God and prayer, our faith in the Lord God may be strengthened. Do not let our laziness and indolence destroy and harm our faith. For we have enough external attacks upon our faith, that we do not need to add to that with our own laziness and indolence. The Old Adam in us would happily let us fall into pride or despair. For the Old Adam loves the things of this life. It loves the praise of mankind. It

loves the treasures of this life.

When thou fastest store not up treasures that rust, and mold, and can be stolen. Rather, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Let us, my dear friends, store up the spiritual gifts that last forever. Let us strive daily to strengthen our faith in the Lord + Jesus, the Christ. And during this Lenten season, let us take the time to remove those things in our life which war against our faith; those things which make us cling to the rotting treasures of this life, and which draw us away from the eternal treasures our Lord + Jesus has won for us by His death on the tree of the holy cross. When thou fastest, use it as a means to build up your faith in Him. For the treasures which He gives do not fade away. His treasures last forever. 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!