

Trinity VIII, 2006
Text: Matthew 7:15-23
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✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

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

Relax. God is nice. He just wants you to be happy. He wants you to follow your bliss and find personal fulfillment. He wants you to have your best life now. He doesn't want you to worry or fret. So relax. If you think it will make you happy to shack up with your boyfriend before you are married, go ahead; everybody's doing it after all. And while we're on the sixth commandment - If you grow tired of your wife and your heart is strangely warmed by thoughts of running off with your secretary – well, God just wants you to be happy, so relax and just do what feels right. Yes, there's always a loophole with God's Law – he doesn't really mean it to be all that serious. When it says “Don't Gossip” all it means is “Don't let the person you're gossiping about know you're gossiping.” And when it says “You shall have no other gods” what it means is, all paths lead to the same place, so don't worry.

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm a man of wealth and taste – I've been around for a long, long year, and Stole many a man's soul and faith. I'm a false prophet. A wolf in sheep's clothing telling sinful men what their itching ears want to hear.

Repent. Such falsely comforting words are the things of hell. You can dress them up however you like – you can even cover them in the Church's vestments if you like, but they are words of falsehood that lead to damnation. So heed the Lord Jesus' warning: Beware of false prophets who preach falsehood. Such false prophets are often well disguised, these wolves can say baa with perfect pitch and cover their silvery hair with the whitest wool. Listen to Jesus again when he describes just how well-disguised they are. On the last day they will say to him: “Did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do mighty works in your name?” That is, to all outward appearances, to what our eyes can see, these false prophets look like real prophets: they use the name of the Lord and do all the churchy stuff. But Jesus sends them away saying he never knew them, for they are preachers of falsehood and iniquity.

So beware false prophets – even when they look like sheep. In this country today there are places of worship that call themselves churches whose insurance plans pay for abortions. There are others who bless unnatural homosexual unions and ordain so-called clergy who live lives of open sodomy. Others still will tell you that sex before marriage is no big deal. You could walk into any one of these places of worship and, if you plugged your ears and just looked with your eyes, you could easily mistake those places for this place – the Church where the Word of God on the sanctify of life and the holiness of matrimony and the mystery of humanity as male and female is upheld. They have the same pews, the same cross up front, and in most cases the same vestments on the folks they call 'pastor.'

But they are not the same at all. So do not be fooled by appearances – you must not look at the appearances but listen to the words they say and the things they preach: that is the fruit of a prophet, what he says and what he says we should believe; and by this, their fruits, you shall know them. This is deadly serious business – for it is the Lord's business. It is our Lord who told his Apostles and their successors to go into all the world baptizing and “teaching all that I have commanded you.” Jesus says “all.” There is no wiggle room there. We do not get to pick and choose what we think is important in God's Word and toss the rest out.

But that is just what a false prophet does. More often than not, what the false prophets of today toss out is God's uncompromising Law. False prophets want loop-holes. God's Word says no adultery, no sex outside of marriage – the false prophet says, well, unless you're really in love. God's Word says do not harm your neighbor – the false prophet says, well, unless your neighbor's life is inconvenient to you. Jesus himself says in Matthew 5 verse 48 “You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” But the false prophet says, hey, nobody's perfect, so don't sweat it. God grades on a curve.

And when a false prophet tells these lies about God's Law he makes repentance and therefore salvation all the more difficult. The best lie is always mostly true – and it's true that we are not perfect, that we have failed to live up to God's Law. But the answer to this problem is not to pretend that this doesn't matter to God; that somehow he is not Holy enough to care; that God is just an indulgent grandpa in the sky winking away our sin; that God won't mind if we claim to have faith in him while living a life of unrepentant, continual, willful sin so long as we try our best and our good deeds outweigh our bad deeds according to our own scale. Far from it! God is holier than that – and also more merciful than that.

The good news of the one True Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ, is that God loves you and wishes to save you from your sinful fallenness, your imperfections, your weakness, and your down right wickedness. But in his holiness he will not just ignore these things. No, there must be a payment for sin so great. But in his mercy, He himself will provide the payment: God the Son himself has stepped into

our flesh, born of Mary, and suffered for us on the cross. By his stripes we are healed – on him was laid the iniquity of us all. In Christ's death there is your forgiveness. You are free from your sins, you are forgiven. You are justified – that is, you are declared to be righteous – because Christ's righteousness is given to you in place of your sinfulness since your sinfulness was laid on him as he hung on the cross.

This miraculous good news of salvation is impossible without a robust preaching of God's Law that drives us to understand that we cannot save ourselves by our efforts or works – not even “trying our best” is good enough – and indeed, we never really do try our best. As the true prophet Isaiah said, “Even all our righteous acts are as filthy rags before the Lord.” So it is the most wretched of lies to say that salvation can come to us through our own effort or works – this is the first and deadly lie that Satan told Eve and Adam – that by their own choosing they could gain a salvation aside from and in addition to that which God freely gives.

Beloved in the Lord – flee and shun such lies. In deep repentance admit that you are a sinner who is weak and in need of saving. And then in great joy know that Jesus has saved you. His sacrifice on the cross has purchased your salvation – his blood covers your sinfulness. And all this was made yours in Holy Baptism – for as St. Peter says in Acts 2 “Repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Again St. Paul says, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have put on Christ.”

This new life that Jesus has given to you in your baptism is renewed and strengthened each time you seek the forgiveness of your sins in Absolution and the Lord's Supper. For again Jesus says in John 20 to his Apostles, “Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them; whose sins you retain, the are retained.” And concerning the Lord's Supper, Jesus himself says, “Take eat, this is my Body given for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

Beloved in the Lord – cling to these treasures of forgiveness, these Gospel promises of God, these Sacraments. And do not heed the false prophets who would deny them. We have already dealt with the false prophets who deny the Law of God – but there are still others who deny his Gospel. These false prophets say things like, “How can a physical baptism, a little bath with water, forgive sin? How can a man claim to forgive sins in Christ's stead? How can this bread and wine really be Christ's body and blood?”

How, these wolves ask? The sheep who hear the Shepherd's voice know how to respond: Because my Lord says so; His promises are always sure. He has attached his promise to the Water – and it is no mere water, but a life-giving baptism that works the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. He sends out his called and ordained servants to forgive sins by the power of his Word and command – and thus what is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven. He is the God

who said “Let there be light” and there was light – so also he now says “This is my body” and it is so – and all the people of God bow in adoration.

Beloved in the Lord – heed the Word of the Lord. Listen to the voice of your Shepherd and to him alone. He alone is your salvation. All men are liars – only Christ tells the Truth for Jesus is the Truth and the Way and the Life. So know his Word and heed his voice. This is the only way you will be able to guard yourself against false prophets – by hearing his Word and receiving his Sacraments; by clinging to his grace. So come with me beloved – let us hasten to receive him again and so cling him and to him alone for salvation.

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

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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