



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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May 25, 2008

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 7:21-29

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 78

Second Lesson: Romans 3:21-25, 27, 28

Gospel: Matthew 7:15-29

God's Word Works

You are walking through a store some place and you are going into the restrooms there. There is a narrow area when you get there and a big sign on the wall says, "Don't touch, wet paint;" what is the first thing you want to do? You want to touch it, don't you? You want to see. You maybe write someone's initials in the paint or something, I don't know. You want to do it, don't you? Why? The sign is right there warning you that your hand is going to get dirty. Why do you want to touch it? Because you have a sinful nature, right? Your sinful nature doesn't like any aspect of telling you what to do. Your sinful nature hears any command and it immediately says, "Do the other thing. It will be more fun."

Have you ever walked outside some place, maybe by a door or behind a door, and there is a big sign on the door that says, "High voltage, hazard, keep away." Did you ever want to go touch that? Did you ever think that would be a good idea, really fun, show them who is boss? Probably not; it probably never in your life crossed your mind. Why? Why do you want to touch the wet paint and why don't you want to touch the high voltage? Probably your mind is sharp enough to say, "You know what, if I touch the high voltage, I am going to die. If I touch the wet paint, I am going to have to wash my hands. It's not a big deal."

Some warnings we take a little more seriously. Some warnings we can hear and it even shuts our sinful nature up, right? When the warning is about something that is so strong and so life threatening, we listen.

The words I just read to you from the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount contain warnings, don't they? Warnings that don't deal with getting zapped in an instant, but warnings that deal with the eternal welfare of body and soul. So really, you and I ought to tell our sinful nature to shut up and listen to what God has to say because evidently God thinks this is some pretty important stuff. He says when you are considering eternal life and death, listen to his Words, because his Words work. His Words are what is going to keep you from facing that "away from me, you evildoers" verdict on the Day of Judgment. His Word is the only thing, his Gospel is the only thing that is going to preserve us when that day comes. But not only that, we are reminded that his Word also works as we face the storms of this life, because as we build on the solid rock foundation of God's love for us in Christ, we have a firm foundation in life. The storms are still going to beat. The storms are still going to blow. The difficulties are going to come. But built on that rock, we will endure.

Because we are built on that rock through his Word that works, we will have confidence in the Day of Judgment. We won't have to be scared, but we can lift up our eyes as Jesus said later in one of his Gospels.

These Words that I read to you are the summary, the ending, the wrap-up so to speak, of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. If you've ever read the Sermon on the Mount, one thing you are going to discover is that it's an awful lot of Law—do this, don't do that. What I just read to you was an awful lot of Law, wasn't it? "Put these Words of mine into practice." That's a Law statement. That isn't a Gospel statement. There's a lot of Law because Jesus was speaking to believers. He wasn't telling people, "Here is how you become one with God—do this, do that, and then you will be my child." He is talking to those who already believe and now in response to God's love for them, this is how they want to act. This is how they want to do things, not that they have to, but this is what they will want to do. If you want to thank God for the gift of life, here's what you do. If you want to keep that gift of life, if you want to not lose the faith that the Holy Spirit has given you through the Word and the Sacraments, then here is what you do. "Hear these Words of mine and put them into practice." That's what he says, right?

Then he gives us a couple of builders, a wise builder and a foolish builder. The wise builder cuts through the topsoil, cuts through the sand, gets down to bedrock and lays the foundation on that bedrock so that when the storms come, the storms don't move the house. The foolish builder builds just on top of the sand and when the storms come, it goes away, right? It's pretty easy to understand the picture. If you don't hear these Words of Jesus and put them into practice, if you don't grow in the faith and immerse yourself in Word and Sacrament, the storms of life are going to come and they are going to erode away and knock out from under you any confidence that you have.

Think about that for a minute. When there aren't those storms, those two houses look exactly the same, don't they? There is no difference. If you walk by those two houses, they both look nice and pretty. They may have different landscaping, maybe different curtains in the windows, but the houses look the same. They don't look like they are going to be knocked over by a gust of wind. You and I can go through our lives and give the outward appearance to everyone else that we are wonderful Christian people, but our hearts can still be far from God. We can be like the people we are going to meet in a little bit that put our confidence in ourselves instead of in our God.

We would never do that, would we? Sitting here in church on a holiday weekend, do you think to yourself, "I'm a lot better than those people that are out by the campfire and they even have a nice weekend for it this weekend, but I'm here in church, so God must love me more." We'd never think that way, would we? We think that way all the time. We have a sinful nature, don't we? Our sinful nature wants us to believe that God loves us more than he loves other people because of who we are. God loves us because God is love, not because of who we are or what we have done. When we let that thought creep into our mind a little bit, we are getting off the bedrock, aren't we? If we start thinking God loves me because I'm me, I'm building on sand. The storms are going to come and I'm going to say, "What's the matter God, don't you love me anymore? What did I do wrong? What have I done?" And I'm going to think that God doesn't love me. Then where is my confidence if I think God doesn't love me?

The bedrock is the Gospel. Jesus loves us because he is love. He lived in our place. He died in our place to take away our sins before we could offer him anything to make him love us. While we were still his enemies, Christ died for us; the righteous for the unrighteous. You aren't the righteous side of that equation. You and I are the unrighteous side of that equation. We are the wicked part of that equation. We were loved when we were wicked. We were loved by God when he brought us down that isle, for many of us as infants, and were baptized into the faith. He is the one that did the work. All we were doing was filling our britches. We had nothing to offer to him.

God loved us when we were unlovable. God made us his own through his own love. That's what Jesus wants us to build on, that Gospel message that he is EVERYTHING and has done EVERYTHING for our salvation. Then, when the storms come, and they will come, storms are coming in this world because we live in a sinful world. There are going to be things that frighten us, things that turn our stomachs into knots that Pepcid can't touch. It's going to happen. We live in a sinful world. We are surrounded by sinners and we are sinners. The storms are going to come that shake our confidence, that shake our essence, but if we have built on the foundation of "God loves me because he is love," it doesn't matter what storm I'm facing. That truth remains a constant. That truth remains a source of strength whenever I turn to it. And what Jesus is telling us is turn to it often. Turn to it regularly. Immerse yourself in his love for you in the Word and in the Sacraments, his body and blood that takes away your sins is what he gives us in the bread and the wine.

His love is our foundation. That foundation is essential, not only for this lifetime, but also for the one to come, right? Think about that first paragraph we read. Let's just say you are in the line for Judgment Day? I don't think that's how it's going to happen, but let's just pretend. You are in the line. You hear the list of these guys, these guys that prophesied in Jesus' name. You hear the miracles that they did in his name. They say, "We did this and we did this for you Lord," and you are thinking about all the things you didn't do. You are thinking about all the times you kept silent or you denied Christ. You are thinking about all the times you wanted God to send a hammer to hell because it hit your thumb. You are thinking about all the stupid foolish sins you've committed in your life and you are hearing all these great things that these people did and then God says, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" So how is your confidence now?

Well, if you didn't sleep through the first part of the sermon you should still have your confidence, shouldn't you? Because the foundation isn't what you did, remember? The foundation is what God has done for you in Christ. What Jesus is telling us is that these people did all kinds of outward things, but evidently they began to put their trust in the things they were doing and didn't trust in God alone for their forgiveness. So if you start putting your trust in yourself, you are not on the foundation, you are on sand. These guys found the sand and what Jesus said here just washed away by an ebb tide, right? They were left flailing and kicking with nothing under their feet because they didn't build on Word, Sacrament, Gospel, God's love. They built on their efforts and their works.

When we stand in the Day of Judgment, you and I want to stand on the certain work of Jesus Christ, not on our efforts. We serve God. We proclaim his name. We give to

support the work of the church. We encourage one another. We strengthen one another and point one another to the Gospel, not so that God will love us or so that we'll have confidence in the Day of Judgment. We do all those things because we already have confidence for the Day of Judgment. We already have a Savior who has taken away our sins completely. Jesus said, "Only the one who does the will of my Father who is heaven will enter the kingdom of heaven." Remember in another place in the Gospel of John, Jesus said, "This is the will of my Father, to believe in the one he has sent. This is God's will that all might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." Doing the will of God is not something we do. It's the gift that God gives to us through the Gospel. And you and I serve in response to it because God's Word works. It touches our heart. It changes us. We hear it. We put it into practice because the Spirit is working through Gospel and Word and Sacrament. If we don't want to put it into practice, if we don't live our faith, it's because we aren't paying attention to the Spirit. It's because we think we are going to go our own way. It's because we think we are going to fix things our way and not God's way. God's way always centers in the Gospel message.

The closer you and I get to that Gospel message, the more we immerse ourselves in it, the more God will transform our lives so that we put these Words into practice. And he will do amazing things among us. He will change us and he will change those we come into contact with because the Spirit will work through us. That's our confidence!

God's Word works!