

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Two weeks ago, we heard another portion of the Sermon on the Mt. from Mt.5^[20-26].

There we heard Jesus preach with authority **"You have heard it said..., but I say to you..."**

What He was doing there was correcting the false teachings that they had been taught.

And He didn't stop at that. He continued with multiple statements like:

when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you,

as the hypocrites do in the synagogue...^{6:2}

When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites.^{6:5}

When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites.^{6:16}

Here, Jesus was correcting the false practices that they had been given.

In other words He was un-catechizing some of what they had been taught by instruction & example so that He might re-catechize them in the true teachings and practices of one doing the will of His Father in heaven.

So as He starts to wrap up His sermon, we hear these words of warning from Matt. 7:

We read a portion of the Gospel, as follows in Jesus' name:

[Jesus said:] "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. ..."Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven."^(ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* ^(John 17:17)

Notice that Jesus does not warn you against false politicians, or lawyers, or cops, or doctors, or other occupations where public trust should be the default position.

We know that there are swindlers and crooks in each of these offices of public service.

And as much as we would like to imagine that we can trust the people

or trust the process that puts them in these important roles,

it is wise to listen and watch to see that they are performing their tasks dutifully,

and, if they are not being faithful in their tasks, to take orderly measures to correct them.

But while these offices and jobs serve an important role in the lives of God's people,

Jesus considers it more important to teach His people to beware of false prophets:

those who would claim to teach you the things of God,

but whose teachings and lives point you away from Jesus.

This is of special concern for Jesus because in His infinite, divine, and merciful wisdom, the Lord has given His Word to men to preach and teach to his fellow man... ever since Adam.

And He would have you trust those who preach/teach His Word & administer His Sacraments rightly.

Why? Because they bring Jesus to you.

As His ministers preach, Jesus is born into your heart by the Holy Spirit,

and the Triune God comes to make His home with you. ^{John 14:23}

Jesus' perfect life of love is given to you as your own righteousness before His Father in heaven.

Jesus' doctrines are given to instruct you in **the will of the Father**,
so that you may know what things displease Him and so that you may confess your sins,
in order that they would be forgiven and washed away in Jesus' atoning blood.

His teachings are proclaimed to you

so that you may avoid those things that would burden your conscience further,
and so that you may glorify your Savior in this world.

His Sacraments are given to you so that you may live in Christ.

By Baptism you are united with Him as you are *drowned and die with all sin and evil lusts,*
and your new man daily comes forth and arises to live before God in righteousness and purity. Sm. Cat.

By Holy Communion, Christ comes with the price of your salvation, His very Body and Blood,
to unite Himself to you, to *confirm unto you the forgiveness of all your sins,*
and to strengthen you for the daily battles and temptations that come upon you in this world.

This is the way of life, the only way to life...

The only way out of this life of sin and guilt and corruption and hardship and illness and death.

The only the way to eternal life and paradise with Him.

So when there are those who would come to you and teach you something other than Jesus,
or who would use Jesus' name, or use God's name for something other than to bring you life,
that prophet is a false prophet, a wolf, who would only bring you death... even if he is sincere.

But notice how these wolves are clothed.

They look harmless, like another sheep of the Good Shepherd.

While teachers of other religions are certainly false prophets,
you can see that they are plainly wolves — while some may include Jesus as a holy man,
they do not pretend to ascribe your salvation to Him.

But the false prophets are those that look and smell and sound very similar to the true prophets,
just as the scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites did in Jesus' day.

And so, Jesus continues to teach His people to beware of false prophets.

Simply because someone has the office of a minister,

doesn't mean that he will faithfully teach the Gospel and faithfully administer the Sacraments.

So Jesus calls upon us to constantly be listening and watching for Him.

Listen to the sermons, not for how dynamic the pastor is or is not, not for how relational/sincere he is,
but for what he says and what he practices.

Is your salvation through Jesus the main point of his sermons?

Is Jesus presented as your one and only Savior who died to take away your sins?

Is Jesus' perfection/righteousness presented to you as the only righteousness that satisfies the Father?

And is that righteousness presented and given freely to you in the sermon, Bible Studies,
counseling sessions, and in the Sacraments?

Does the pastor urge you to Baptism or to remember and cherish your Baptism

or urge you to the Lord's Supper so that you may receive Christ's forgiveness and righteousness?

Watch the pastor. Does he administer the sacraments faithful according to Christ's command

so that you may be absolutely certain that they give you the promised righteousness of Christ?

Or does the pastor downplay the importance of the Sacraments, minimize them,

or administer them begrudgingly or rarely, as if they were simply something that needs to be done.

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In our youth catechesis, each year, we assign 5 service/sermon reviews to them

partly in an effort to teach and train them how to listen to a sermon, and for what to listen.

This practice is beneficial, not only because it shows the pastors what the catechumen heard, but also what they may not have heard.

And it gives the pastors an opportunity at that young age to teach them to be listening for Jesus, for both the teaching of righteousness that God demands of us and that Jesus fulfilled for us, and for the teaching of redemption that Jesus had atoned for all of your sins and has made peace between His Father and you.

This practice of critically listening for Jesus is good for us to do in the Divine Service, but in these days of multi-media, when you are constantly inundated with all types of messages, and you are able to pull up just about any service or minister or spiritual or secular teacher, it is also important that you analyze everything that you hear and watch.

Does it point to Jesus and your salvation through Him alone?

Or does it lead you to look to yourself, to your own piety for your comfort?

Or does it lead you to look for worldly pleasures, regardless of God's Word and your conscience?

Does it comfort you with the declaration of your sins forgiven by His blood?

Or does it treat Jesus' death and resurrection as something that you just need to know & believe, but then you need to get to the real Christian teaching of how to live a moral life?

Or does it minimize or even neglect the Sacraments, as if they are just outward signs that the Church does simply in obedience to Jesus to show that we are the Church?

Asking yourself such questions every time you hear someone present a "gospel message" is not an empty, busy-work task.

It is a matter of your comfort, as it would have been for the people of Jesus' day.

The false prophets among the Pharisees sucked the comfort of God's forgiveness from His Word and would have left the people only to look to themselves and their own piety, leading them either to pride in their own works, or despair of their inability to please God.

This is still the goal of the devil: to distract you from Jesus, even while using God's Word.

While the politicians, lawyers, doctors, police and others certainly have bad apples in their ranks who can make your life here in this world intolerable and a living hell, none of them compare to false prophets who would lead you away from Jesus, the only true comfort, both in this life and in the life to come.

These false prophets instead would lead you to the real and eternal hell.

So be on guard, beware of false prophets, mark and avoid them.

Your Savior will always call you to Himself.

He will always point you to His death and resurrection and give Himself to you in His Sacraments that your joy may be full and completely in Him.

In Jesus Name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria