

In Nomine Iesu

Sexagesima Sunday 23 February 2025

What does it mean to walk in the Light? – John 12:35-43

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.’ These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them. But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him. Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Light of the world.
Dear fellow redeemed in Christ”

Jesus spoke these words just days before His crucifixion and death. He knew that the hour of His great suffering was near. He who was the Light to enlighten the world and the

Glory of His people Israel was soon to be extinguished on Calvary's cross – or at least that is what would appear to happen. So, Jesus told the crowd that He would be with them for yet a “little while,” and that He desired they believe Him now, for now was the day of visitation. Now was the day of their salvation. They shouldn't presume to think that they could put off following Jesus. No, they must understand that Jesus was saying to each of them: “while you have the light, believe in the light.”

I

Earlier, Jesus knew that many following Him didn't accept what He had been saying to them: “Does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? It is the Spirit who gives life, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (John 6:61-64) John tells us what the reaction of those who followed Him was: “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” (John 6:66) It was then that Jesus turned to the few who remained and asked, “Do you also want to go away?” And Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Holt One of God.” (John 6:68-69)

Now we see much the same thing happening. Some believed Him, and others, many others, didn't. They went away. Yet, there is the interesting comment from St. John that many of the rulers believed in Jesus, that is, many of those who were in charge of the synagogues in the various towns and villages in which Jesus had taught. But what did they do? They did not confess Him because they were unwilling to go against the Pharisees. The Pharisees would

excommunicate anyone who confessed Jesus, just as they had done to the blind man Jesus healed, as John recorded in the ninth chapter. At that time Jesus said to the Pharisees: “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.” The light had come into the world, but darkness refused to acknowledge it. The rulers He speaks of decided that it was better to remain in the darkness than to confess the light. Of them John states: “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

There is a penalty to pay when we stand up for the truth of God’s word. There is a penalty, because of sin, sin in our own heart, sin in the hearts and minds of all those around us who make up our community, and sin in him whom Jesus call the father of lies, Satan. This evil trio, the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh hate the word of God, and will either run from it or try to silence it. That is the penalty inflicted on those who bring the word into people’s hearing. Practically speaking, the penalty varies according to the society one lives in. In China the penalty may be prison. In various Muslim countries the penalty may be death. In our own community the penalty may be that you will be called names, shunned, avoided. Perhaps it will mean that people you thought were friends will no longer treat you the same way. What are we willing to endure? It is tempting to “love the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

II

In today’s Gospel we heard Jesus’ parable of the Sower and

the Seed. The seed was thrown around all over, not just on the good soil. It was thrown on the path, on rocks, among weeds. God is not miserly with His word. He spreads His word generously, so that all may hear. But not all believe. Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh all work to isolate, trample under foot, or kill the seed. The seed is eaten by the birds, scorched by the sun, and choked by the weeds. In today's Gospel Jesus says: "Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you." Jesus is simply using another illustration to say the same thing He said in the parable of the Sower and the seed.

But Jesus' words may not seem to us to be as urgent in our day as we imagine it was then in His day. After all, today there are Bibles everywhere. The hard part is not in finding a Bible. The hard part is in choosing which one from the abundance that is available to us. And every Sunday we have services here. Why should we worry about losing God's Word? We have it in abundance.

Such thinking ignores what Jesus is saying by His quoting Isaiah: "He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." Isaiah was writing about the people of his day, 700 years before. Many in Israel, this nation for whom God had done miraculous things, this nation to whom He had given Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and so many other leaders who faithfully confessed, taught, and prophesied about the true God and the coming Messiah, did not listen in Isaiah's day. So many of those people, for whom He had done so much, had given up the true faith, had turned to the false gods around them. God said through Isaiah: Their eyes

were blinded and hearts hardened. What does this mean? Our Lutheran confessions explains: “For through the word and sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the Gospel.” **Where and when it pleases God.** Those are the important words.

There is a mystery here that is ignored by those who, as Jesus says, “seek the praise of men,” whether by despising God’s word or by seeking to validate the word of God by gaining great numbers and the worldly recognition that comes from such numbers. Large crowds are not the goal of preaching God’s Word. Let me say that again in case you missed it. Large crowds are not the goal of preaching. That is God’s business. He gives increase where and when it pleases Him. Rather, the goal of preaching God’s word is to proclaim it plainly, faithfully. The results of the preaching are not ours to control or manipulate. Results are given by God the Holy Spirit. Some will hear and believe the saving truth. Others will not. The eyes of some will be opened to see Him who is both the Savior of the world and their own Savior. Others will remain blind, in darkness, their hearts hardened to the truth of God’s word. But let us all beware that we cannot understand this. It is a mystery of God that is not ours to try to unravel. What we are called to do is bring the word to people, all people, to scatter it just as liberally and generously as the sower in Jesus’ parable, and, as we do, to do it just as faithfully. How that word is received is not within the power of the preacher or teacher. “The Holy Spirit works faith where and when it pleases God in those who hear the Gospel.”

What we are to know and be certain of is: that it is only by

God's grace that His Word continues in any place.

Therefore we ask ourselves, should we abuse God's grace and delay responding to Him? Should we put His patience to the test? Should we ignore Him as did the blind and hard-hearted of Jesus' day? Should we take such pleasure in the praise of men that we risk losing the praise of God? We know that none of that sounds right. Yet at the same time we know that we are sinful; we are surrounded by sin and infected with it. We are unable to stand on our own. We see that we don't love God's word as we should, that our trust is often misdirected, that our confidence is often placed not in the forgiveness of sins that God promises in Christ. And that is exactly why we continue to pray as Jesus taught:

"Hallowed be Thy name." **What does this mean?** (What do we hear in the Catechism? What are the simple words we learned?) "God's name is certainly holy in itself, but we pray in this petition that it may be holy among us also. **How is God's name hallowed?** God's name is hallowed when His Word is taught in its truth and purity, and we as the children of God live holy lives according to it. This grant us, dear Father in heaven! But he who teaches and lives otherwise than the Word of God teaches dishonors God's name among us. From this preserve us, heavenly Father!"

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Our text for this morning leads us to see the simple truth. It points us to Christ. He is the Light that shines in this dark, fallen world. He has not left us! He was not extinguished by the darkness of death. He rose the third day, in clear proof of His complete victory over our bitter enemies, sin, death, and the power of the devil. He continues to shine in the brilliance of Easter and Ascension, enlightening hearts, shedding mercy on us, forgiving us for all our wanderings, all the times we have been drawn to the praises of men

instead of valuing more the praise of God. And so, our Lord continues to lead us, **Good Shepherd that He is**, through this dark world of sin and doubt into the bright safety of heavenly pastures. God help us to remain in the Light, **counting our hearing of the Good Shepherd's voice our greatest good**. God help us to seek His praise alone and not that of any man, faithfully following the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ, trusting His word that brings us forgiveness, life, and salvation. That is what it means to walk in the Light. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria