

...as follows in Jesus' name:

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Him they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So He left them and departed. ^(ESV)

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

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God,

As we near the end of the Trinity season, we are hearing readings that are more and more chosen to help us prepare for the end of our life and the end of the world, whichever comes first.

In today's text, we hear Jesus speak to His adversaries about **interpreting the signs of the times**.

This is the connection between the appointed Gospel that we heard a few minutes ago, where Jesus, bemoaning, said, "**Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.**"

Interestingly, the father left believing Jesus had healed his son, even though he had not seen it.

But in this text from St. Matthew, we can assume that they had seen Jesus perform miracles...

it wasn't as if Jesus hid the signs from people.

He had just fed the 4,000 men (+ women and children) & not too long before that had fed the 5,000 +.

And yet, they were demanding from Him, now...right now...on their mark, another sign from heaven.

As if John the Baptist coming in the spirit of Elijah, and pointing to Jesus as the Messenger of God (from Malachi 4) wasn't clear enough ^{John 1...}

As if the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the mute speaking, the lame walking, the dead living, and the gospel being preached to the poor and the masses, didn't fulfill any prophecies from Isaiah.

As if the feeding the 5K&4K with bread in the wilderness, like happened w/ Moses, wasn't sufficient.

But the reality is that no amount of signs, no timing of signs, not even the greatness of signs'd be enough.

Signs do not cause faith.

Pharaoh proved that in Egypt with Moses during the 10 plagues, which he knew were from God.

The Israelites proved that as they were wandering in the wilderness, seeing the pillar of fire and cloud each and every day, being fed with manna, watching water come out of a rock and so on, yet constantly rebelling and disbelieving God's love and ability to care for them.

So signs do not cause or give faith. **An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.**

And notice how Jesus does not give into their demands... which were all for a pretense anyway.

Had He given into them, they would have despised the sign anyway,

just as they did His Word to which His signs pointed.

And to despise His Word is to despise the Father's Word... which is to despise His means of grace.

But Jesus does leave them with a sign, albeit, one that would come (for them) in the future;

He left them with "the sign of Jonah," which St. Matthew records also in an earlier chapter [12],

as Jesus was talking to another group, (of scribes and Pharisees) who were also demanding a sign.

The sign of Jonah ultimately was Jesus' own resurrection from the dead.

**"For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish,
so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."** Matthew 12:40

| This is the greatest sign there is! A man bringing Himself back... raising Himself... from the dead.
Of course, that would mean that He would also have to die first.

And what was the reason for Jonah being thrown into the sea to be swallowed up by the fish?

It was sin, wasn't it? He had rejected God's Word and done the very opposite.

Instead of going to Nineveh, he fled for Tarshish.

... Jesus would be swallowed up by death on account of sin, though not any sin of His own.

In fact, He would suffer and die for the sin of this group of Sadducees and Pharisees.

He would be scourged and nailed to the cross for their despising of His Word,
their unbelief, their pride, their hypocritical demands for a sign.

And yet, Jesus would do it. He would do it all for them, so that sign would happen for them.

...

Did you notice that the sign in the weather (that they could understand) was the same sign?

The sky was red, but it meant something different if it was in the morning or in the evening.

The red sky in the evening meant calm and fair weather.

The red sky in the morning carried with it the threat of stormy weather.

Of course, Jesus wasn't teaching about weather.

A point they could take from that lesson was that the same sign could mean two different things.

Jesus' resurrection is the greatest thing, IF you believe He died to pay the price for your sins.

But His resurrection could also be a threatening, a terrifying sign if one rejected Him.

Of course, both the Sadducees and the Pharisees were in danger of this judgment.

Another point they could take away was that the sign of the resurrection
was really a sign of something greater to come.

As the red in the heavens signaled the weather they could expect,

Jesus' resurrection signals the final resurrection of all flesh, some **to the resurrection of life**,
and the rest **to the resurrection of judgment.** John 5:29

And this would have been a point that should have especially awoken the Pharisees in the group,
because they should have recognized that belief in the resurrection was something

that separated them from the Sadducees, who didn't believe in a resurrection at all,

So why were the Pharisees joining with the Sadducees against Jesus?

But the real, the ultimate question for them was: which sign would Jesus' resurrection be for them?

Would they heed Jesus' Word when they saw that sign, or heard about Jesus' resurrection
and, in humility, repent of their former unbelief?

Or would they continue to despise and ignore it as they had been doing, proud and unrepentant?

...

Of course, we don't just meditate on this text just to hear about how others responded to Jesus, do we?

We meditate on it so that His Word can have its way with us,

so that we may be able to know and understand the signs AND interpret them for our eternal good...

so that He can give and strengthen faith in each of you, and all the more as the day draws near.

Today, we already have the resurrection recorded. We aren't waiting for Jesus to rise from the dead.

His suffering and death has already taken place.

The wrath of the Father was poured out on Him for the sin of the world,
and Jesus' blood was shed as the price for all unbelief, all pride, and all hypocrisy.

But we do await the resurrection of all the dead, and on that day we will face the judgment of God.

Will that day be red and threatening for you? Or will it be the red of fair weather for all eternity?

This account is for us; for you. We need to see, know, and **interpret the signs of the times**,
just as much as the Sadducees and Pharisees needed to.

Like us, they had God's Word.

Perhaps much better than us, they knew God's Word — great swaths of it... by memory.
So it wasn't that they despised reading it or learning it.

It's that they did not understand it correctly.

They read the Law and thought they could fulfill it, at least well enough.

They read the Gospel and they interpreted it through their own very worldly eyes.

Now you might argue that we have been blessed to have clarity in these areas, after all,
properly distinguishing the Law and the Gospel is one of Lutheranism's greatest blessings.

And that is indeed the case, however...

does our pride in that distinction lull us into complacency,
laxity or laziness in learning more and more of God's Word, or even smugness over other Christians?

Do you find yourself despising God's Word, not come in the form of misunderstanding it,
but rather in that you don't read it and meditate on it regularly and often?

You have the pure Word and right understanding, but is it gathering dust as it were?

an app on your phone's home screen that rarely gets opened?

... a book that you have learned from, but now it sits as if it were merely a resource book,
to be referenced only when a passage needs to be looked up.

!What a blessing we have in that it can be looked at so readily for such purposes,

but if that is all it is used for, if it is not read regularly and often, isn't this too,

a despising of God's Word, ignoring it, neglecting it?

...Like a father wanting to speak to his child, to teach him, encourage him, and bless him,
but the child only comes to the father when he needs something?

How else will you know the signs to look for? How else will you interpret them correctly?

When disasters or tragedies or plagues or financial losses or illnesses or death rock your faith,
cause you to question if God really loves you or anyone else...

when the thought of Judgment Day causes you fear or anxiety,

then recognize the signs of the times, and consider the sign of Jonah once more, that it is a sign of hope.

Jonah knew his sin. He knew he could not escape God's judgment. He was guilty.

And so, after confessing his faith in the God of the heavens, earth, and sea,
he told the men on the ship to throw him overboard.

Jonah was drowning, until the Lord sent a fish to rescue him, and inside that fish,

Jonah prayed chapter 2 of the book of Jonah, a prayer acknowledging and confessing his sin,
as well as confessing, "**Salvation belongs to the Lord.**" Jonah 2:9

... **And the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah out upon the dry land.** Jonah 2:10

Jonah's sin of despising and neglecting God's Word was forgiven,
and the Lord called him once more to do what he had been called to do.
You do not need to seek after a sign. It has already been given to you... poured out on you.
As you confess your sin, you return to the waters of your Baptism and drown you old Adam.
The Lord has made for you a way of escape from death through that water.
It is a sign that you would do well to recognize and cherish,
that in Baptism, you have been united, not only to Jesus' death from all sin, washing them all away,
but also that you have been united to His resurrection from the dead, to a new and eternal life.
As sure as Jesus rose from the grave, so will you.
And through Him, believing in the Word and promises of God, on the last day,
you will rise to a fair sky in life everlasting.

Thanks be to God.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria