

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Quinquagesima Sunday, February 11, 2018**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 391, 226:4-5, 364, 291, 48.

Lessons: Isaiah 29:13-21, 1 Corinthians 2:1-16, Matthew 18:1-5.

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:25-27.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

After denouncing the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (See last Sunday's Ministry By Mail) for their lack of repentance and their unbelief, Jesus praises his heavenly Father. His reasons for praising his Father at this time may seem unusual in the context of our sermon text until you remember who has been talking to him.

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law, who are also called "the scribes", had, on the previous Sabbath and now again on this Sabbath day tried to confuse him, tempt him to sin and lead him to do things contrary to what they had been teaching the people. These religious leaders of the Jews considered themselves to be the custodians of the wisdom and understanding of the Law in all its applications. To them the Gospel is hidden, because they deliberately close their hearts and minds against its message.

These things, the mysteries of the kingdom of God, are hidden from all those who think of themselves as wise, who believe themselves to be above the revelations of God's eternal wisdom in His Word. Today we hear

**JESUS PRAISING HIS FATHER**

- 1. God has revealed the truths of salvation to "little children", and hidden them from the wise of this world.**
- 2. The "children" of God have learned the way of salvation.**

Discipleship requires faith in God's Son, not great human wisdom or works

In our Gospel lesson you heard how Jesus said *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* Matthew 18:3 (KJV) The teachers of the law and the Pharisees, vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds, and having their foolish hearts darkened, refused to submit to the righteousness of God. They rejected God's method of saving man through Christ's works and were going about establishing their own righteousness. This was their own method of saving themselves. They rejected God's counsel and wisdom.

God sent the peace and salvation of the Gospel to others, called here little children, that is, his disciples, simple-hearted persons, who submitted to be instructed and saved in God's own way. These became Jesus' disciples. Jesus thanks the Father that he had revealed his wisdom to these simple believers.

It was right that the heavenly wisdom, despised, rejected, and persecuted by the scribes and Pharisees, should be offered to the simple people, and afterwards to the foolish people called "the Gentiles". Such people brought forth that fruit of the Gospel of which the Pharisees refused to receive even the seed.

The teachers of the law, who should have been guiding the people to do the will of God, had been leading them astray with man-made rules. Jewish commentaries list 4,187 specific rules which people must follow, as if they are what God demands!

Think about the wise of the world:

Some of the greatest scholars and the greatest statesmen and leaders in the world have been the greatest strangers to gospel mysteries. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *"For since in the wisdom of God the world*

*through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”* 1 Corinthians 1:21 (NIV) Paul also warns Timothy: *“Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you.”* 1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NIV) Those who are most expert in things sensible and secular, are often least experienced in spiritual things. Men may dive deeply into the mysteries of nature and into the mysteries of philosophy and earthly wisdom, and yet be ignorant and totally mistaken about the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.

God in his good pleasure had hidden the great mysteries of his wise dealings from the wise and learned, as in our text today, the leaders of Jews, but had revealed them to little children. This was possible because God the Son and God the Father know each other perfectly in the intimacy of the Trinity. Thus the only ones who can know the Father and the things he has revealed are those whom the Son chooses. Jesus tells us: *“As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* John 10:15 (KJV) On another occasion, Jesus *“looked toward heaven and prayed: ‘Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.’”* John 17:1-2 (NIV) And what does he give his followers? He assures us again: *“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”* John 10:28 (NIV)

The Father makes it difficult for those who see themselves as wise to understand; but makes it clear and simple for those who are open to and subject to learning from him. The religious leaders of the Jews led them astray. They didn’t teach what God says.

Is that all so different from today? Are leaders in all churches that consider themselves “Christian” teaching what God tells us in the Bible? Are preachers pointing only to Jesus Christ as the only Savior from sin? Are church bodies always saying “thus saith the Lord”? Are they always honestly telling people “This is what God says”? You know enough about what many churches are teaching and practicing to answer NO to all those questions.

In what way did the Father hide spiritual truths from the wise and learned and reveal them to little children? Jesus is speaking of worldly wisdom, which is hostile toward God’s truth, both the law and the gospel. Those who cling to such human wisdom and judge all things on the basis of such wisdom exclude themselves from the kingdom of God. Paul tells us: *“For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’”* 1 Corinthians 1:19 (NIV) He is quoting Isaiah: *“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish.’”* Isaiah 29:13-14 (NIV)

In our epistle lesson today, which follows the lesson from last week, we heard about the simplicity of the Gospel message.

In our sermon text, scripture has just recorded situations in which Jesus had been saying and showing how wrong the religious leaders of the Jews were. That is why he praises God for having *“hidden these things from the wise and learned.”* Then he says *“and revealed them to little children.”*

Think about the so-called “wise” in the churches today. Your pastor doesn’t have a doctor of divinity degree. He doesn’t have a master of divinity degree. He doesn’t have a doctor of philosophy degree. He just has a diploma that says he attended a school that taught the Bible, and he has a divine call to preach to you *“this is what God says”*.

How much knowledge, how large an IQ, how much earthly wisdom does it take to say and believe that “Jesus died for my sins”?

First there must be the knowledge of sin. That comes from the Law of God. And who can’t learn right from wrong? How old must children be before they can be taught – from Scripture, from the Ten Commandments – about what is wrong behavior and right behavior and wrong words and right, God-pleasing words? Secondly, there must be the message of the Gospel. That was given to the simple, the teachable, the humble. That is what his disciples were.

Saving faith is not an accomplishment possible only for the educated people of the world. Even a little child can believe and be saved. This is the gift of the Holy Spirit through the power of the Word and sacrament. Worldly wisdom may be an obstacle to such faith, but little children don't have that problem. We should thank our heavenly Father that he is pleased to deal with us in this way.

It doesn't take a genius IQ to know – or to teach what Jesus did for you. We don't pretend that you need a college education to learn what Jesus did for you and to believe it.

Even faith is not something we must do or decide by ourselves. The Holy Ghost works faith.

But to babes, those who are as ignorant of this world's wisdom as little children, God has revealed the glory of the Gospel.

If someone is really going to learn and know the beauties of God's message of salvation to all men, he must get rid of all pre-conceived notions of moral and religious subjects and be willing to accept and believe everything God says in his Word, as Paul did in our epistle lesson.

This is what Christ glorifies his heavenly Father for, through whose power the hearts are made ready to receive the Scriptures with all humility. That is the Father's good pleasure, although it also shows his glory if the proud and wise of this world reject the Word of grace. So far as the Bible with its glorious and saving truths is concerned, especially that truth that a man is saved, not by works, but by grace through faith alone, it must always be the anxious goal of every Christian, aided by the strength from above, to avoid the doubting and doubt-instilling wisdom of this world, and always offer such a heart that has a childlike trust and faith in Jesus and his merits. The child of God must trust only in all the revealed truths of Holy Scripture. There are two things here that Jesus is rejoicing about. The first, that God has hidden such mystery from the worldly wise. The other, that he has revealed it to the little ones, the simple, the babes. Those are the children and babes – regardless of their ages – that do not talk against the Word of God, that do not murmur against God's will, but, as he deals with them, they are well pleased with it. This includes all those who are not wise in their own knowledge, nor let reason evaluate God's work and Word.

Jesus said ***“I and the Father are one.”*** John 10:30 (NIV) No one knows God the Father better than his only-begotten Son. And no one knows the Son better than his eternal, almighty Father. Not the Pharisees. Not the teachers of the Law. But that leaves the people who have heard Jesus and seen him. Although we haven't seen Jesus in person, we hear him – in our Sunday School lessons, in our sermons, in our personal Bible reading.

And to whom has Jesus revealed the Father? We know God because Jesus, the Word, has revealed him to us. We must realize that we can find Jesus – and the eternal Father – in all of Scripture. Luther said that if he couldn't find Jesus in a particular book of the Bible, that book is probably not inspired. The Roman Catholic Bible of his day, just as today, included the Apocrypha.

We don't need to know much to be saved. But don't let your faith be like what one illustration called a “coal miner's faith”. The story goes that when a coal miner – a common, simple man, was asked “what do you believe?” He answered “What the church teaches.” Then he was asked “What does the church teach?” He answered “What I believe.” He wasn't able to confess what he did believe. Don't stick your head in the sand and think that you already know enough to be saved and don't have to learn any more. There is always more of God's will to learn.

Peter concludes his second letter with these words: ***“Therefore, dear friends, since you already know this, be on your guard so that you may not be carried away by the error of lawless men and fall from your secure position. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.”*** 2 Peter 3:17-18 (NIV) Grace is named first. Let God fill you with his grace. That comes from immersing yourself in what God says to you. That comes from his Word! And when you do that, you will grow in knowledge, in the knowledge of everything that is eternally important! Amen.