

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday in Lent, March 1, 2020

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

Hymns: 154 (247) 295, 326, 50

Lessons: Deuteronomy 26:5-10; Romans 10:8b-13; Luke 4:1-13

Sermon Text: Matthew 11:20-24,

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ,

How precious is the message we hear from Jesus' lips in these words: ***"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life,"*** John 3:16. How comforting to hear Jesus say: ***"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,"*** John 11:25-26a.

But what do we expect our Savior to say when people do not believe these precious truths of Scripture? What do we expect our Savior to say when his marvelous grace is proclaimed and he invites sinners to come to him, trust in him, and find rest for their souls, but they despise God's grace and do not repent?

We learn from our sermon text that our kind and loving Savior can also speak words of holy indignation and terrible words of condemnation. This he does as the holy Son of God who cannot regard the despising of God's undeserved loving kindness lightly. Neither does he want us to regard it as an unimportant matter of little consequence. This we will learn as we hear how

CHRIST PRONOUNCES JUDGMENT UPON SINNERS WHO DO NOT REPENT.

- 1. The sad example of three cities in Galilee;**
- 2. The application to ourselves.**

"Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent." The three cities mentioned are Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum. What do we know about these cities? All three were situated in one general area on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. The first city, Korazin, is not mentioned in the Bible except in our text where Jesus pronounced judgment on it. It was situated about two miles from Capernaum. Bethsaida is mentioned in other Bible passages. It is referred to as the home of Peter, John and Mark. Of Capernaum we have the most information. Of particular interest is the fact that Jesus spent much time here during his ministry. At the beginning of his ministry we are told, ***"Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum,"*** Matthew 4:13a. The entire area around these three cities was a prosperous and flourishing area. Its inhabitants were highly favored with material blessings.

More important is what our text says about these three cities. They were ***"cities in which most of his miracles had been performed."*** The prophet Isaiah spoke of such miracles. ***"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shout for joy,"*** Isaiah 35:5-6a. In this area Jesus had calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee. ***"Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm,"*** Matthew 8:26b. In this area ***"Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons,"*** Mark 1:34a. In this area Jesus raised from the dead the daughter of Jairus. (Matthew 9:18-26) In this area Jesus miraculously fed ***"five thousand men, besides women and children"*** with ***"five loaves of bread and two fish,"*** Matthew 14:17,21.

Furthermore, Jesus had preached the Gospel in this area, just as Isaiah the prophet had foretold, (chapter 61). The Gospel of Matthew tells us, ***"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people,"***

Matthew 4:23. It surely is true, then, that many blessings came to the people of this area through Jesus. They experienced the grace of God in special measure because Jesus was among them and especially because they had the opportunity to hear his Word. For then faith could be worked in their hearts and they could be saved.

However, our text says that Jesus had to ***“denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.”*** They did not believe what Jesus had preached to them. So Jesus had to speak words of scorching reprimand upon these people. ***“Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! ... And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths.”*** (In the Greek ***“depths”*** is Hades, meaning hell.) Jesus was angry and had a right to be angry. He was filled with holy indignation because a people so highly blessed did not show any signs of repentance. Jesus’ pronouncement of judgment upon these people reminds us of what God said to Israel in Psalm 81: ***“I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. But my people would not listen to me, Israel would not submit to me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices,”*** v. 10-11.

To show how terrible their impenitence was, Jesus compared these three cities with other very wicked cities. To Korazin and Bethsaida he said, ***“If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”*** To Capernaum he said, ***“If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.”*** Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom were very wicked cities. The sins of worldliness, materialism, and sexual immorality are what make these cities places the world remembers. Even these wicked cities, Jesus said, would have repented if they had had all the spiritual blessings the three cities in Galilee had. And Sodom would have remained instead of being destroyed. The Bible says, ***“The LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities – and also the vegetation in the land,”*** Genesis 19:24-25. Even the ancient city of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached to them.

Jesus now pronounced judgment upon the three cities in Galilee. He told them that ***“it will be more bearable*** (for Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom) ***on the Day of Judgment than for you.”*** Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom did not have all the blessings of Jesus’ miracles and his preaching as did these three cities of Galilee. If the Lord brought such terrible judgment on Sodom, think of how much more terrible it will be when people are lost in hell! To all those who remain in their sins and do not repent and believe the Gospel, Jesus will say on the Last Day: ***“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ...Then they will go away to eternal punishment,”*** Matthew 25:41 and 46a.

Let us now apply to ourselves the lesson to be learned from the three cities in Galilee.

2.

As we have now heard of the special great blessings the people of the three cities in Galilee had when Jesus was among them, we cannot but make the comparison that we too have received great blessings. We do not have Jesus with us **visibly** to perform miracles in our day as he did in his earthly ministry. But the Lord has done great things for us. He has blessed our country with great material blessings, beyond many other countries. And of far greater importance, we have the blessing of being able to still hear the Gospel of Christ Crucified today. The Lord has blessed us with a government that protects our right to worship God as we choose. If we are not impressed with this blessing, let us take a moment to think of all the countries where the religion of Islam is the state religion and the Gospel of Christ is unknown to the majority of the people.

If we don’t appreciate all that the Lord has done for us, let us remember all the blessings we in our church have yet today because of what Martin Luther did in the work of the Reformation. There are many churches that have the name Lutheran, but in their teachings and practices they are not Lutheran, for they no longer teach what the Bible teaches. In the largest Lutheran church in our land, there are now women pastors and women theological professors. That church even tolerates homosexual clergy! In that church there are many other Bible teachings that are now rejected. Yes, that church, the ELCA, has a large membership, about three million in our country. As for us, we are small and despised because we refuse to worship and do church work with those who hold to false teachings. In doing this, we are simply following God’s command. ***“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there***

may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought,” 1 Corinthians 1:10. *“I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them,”* Romans 16:17. God has given us this blessing that we teach what the Bible says and reject whatever is contrary to the Bible. We have this blessing without any merit or worthiness on our part.

Above all, let us think of how precious it is that we can still hear what the Gospel tells us of our salvation in Christ. *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ... When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son,”* Romans 5:8.10. We sinners have the comfort of hearing about *“Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world,”* 1 John 2:1-2. This is a precious gift of God, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast,”* Ephesians 2:8-9. However much we are looked down upon by others, and whatever tribulations and sorrows we have on this sinful earth, we have this comfort: *“We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose,”* Romans 8:28. We can also say with Paul, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us,”* Romans 8:18. We can confidently look forward to going to heaven and being with our Lord Jesus in eternity.

As a people who have been so highly favored by the Lord, let us also bear in mind these words of Jesus, *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked,”* Luke 12:48b. In sincere appreciation for all our blessings, let us praise the Lord and serve him by bringing forth fruits of faith. Jesus says, *“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples,”* John 15:8.

We pray:

*“Let me never, Lord, forsake Thee,
Even though bitter pain and strife
On my way shall overtake me;
But may I through all my life
Walk in fervent love to Thee,
In all woes for comfort flee
To Thy birth, Thy death, and Passion
Till I see Thy full salvation.”*
(The Lutheran Hymnal, 401:2)
Amen.

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