

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Last Sunday in the Church Year, November 22, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 294 (238:1) 605, 606, 53
Lessons: Psalm 85:8-13; 1 Timothy 4:4-11; Matthew 10:24-33
Sermon Text: Matthew 16:1-12
Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

We have just sung these words:

*“The world is very evil,
The times are waxing late;
Be sober and keep vigil, The Judge is at the gate.”*
(The Lutheran Hymnal 605)

With these words the Christian poet reminds us that we are living in the last evil days. This is what we think of as the church year is nearly to an end.

Peter reminds us, ***“The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray,”*** 1 Peter 4:7. This admonition was timely when Peter first wrote it by inspiration of the Holy Spirit and it is timely now. It will be a timely warning until Christ comes to judge the world on the Last Day. The reason why this is a timely admonition is evident from Jesus’ words, ***“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father,”*** Matthew 24:36. (Even Jesus in his state of humiliation did not make use of the knowledge he had as the Son of God.) Jesus also tells us, ***“You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him,”*** Luke 12:40.

We do not know what day Jesus is coming, but we do know from the Bible that on that day all the dead will be raised from the grave and Jesus will judge everyone. With that in mind let us hear,

WARNINGS FROM OUR SAVIOR IN THESE LAST EVIL DAYS

- 1. Occasioned by the evil demand for a sign by Jesus’ enemies;**
- 2. Having to do with dangers confronting our faith.**

“The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.” The Pharisees and Sadducees were both enemies of Jesus, but with different beliefs. The Pharisees were self-righteous Jews who were concerned mainly with such works as fasting, giving alms, and tithing and long prayers. They also were hypocrites who themselves often did not do what they commanded others to do. The Sadducees were Jews who were skeptics and freethinkers. They rejected such doctrines as the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and the judgment on the Last Day.

On this occasion both these enemies of Jesus joined forces to ask him to give them a sign that he truly was the Messiah. They did not ask this to learn the truth, but to test Jesus. No matter what Jesus told them, they would reject it in unbelief. So their ***“testing”*** of Jesus was malicious and hypocritical. They should have known that many things had been foretold of Jesus to prove that he was their Messiah. The prophet Isaiah had foretold, ***“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel,”*** Isaiah 7:14.

When Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, Matthew's Gospel says, ***"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet; 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' – which means, 'God with us,'"*** Matthew 1:22-23. John the Baptist later on pointed out Jesus to his followers and said, ***"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** John 1:29. Besides this, Jesus in his ministry performed many miraculous signs in public, healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and feeding thousands with a handful of food. All these signs the Pharisees and Sadducees had rejected and they stubbornly remained in unbelief.

Therefore Jesus told them, ***"A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."*** Jesus then left them. As the all-knowing Son of God, Jesus knew what was in the hearts of these wicked men. They were unfaithful to their Lord, and so were guilty of spiritual adultery. Jesus rejected their demand for a sign from heaven. Only one sign was yet to be given, ***"the sign of Jonah."*** This is explained by Jesus in another passage, ***"As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,"*** Matthew 12:40. In other words, the only sign to be given yet was Jesus' resurrection from the dead. What an amazing sign that was! Jesus' resurrection from the dead proves conclusively that he is the Son of God. Paul writes that Jesus ***"was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord,"*** Romans 1:4. Jesus' resurrection from the dead also proves that his doctrine is the truth, for he rose from the dead as he said he would. The angels at the empty tomb of Jesus told the women, ***"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said,"*** Matthew 28:6. For our wonderful comfort Jesus' resurrection assures us that God the Father has accepted Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our justification. ***"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification,"*** Romans 4:25. Finally, Jesus' resurrection assures us of our resurrection on the Last Day. Jesus says, ***"Because I live, you also will live,"*** John 14:19. No greater sign has ever been given to man than Jesus' resurrection. But these enemies of Jesus also rejected this sign in unbelief. And because of this Jesus left them in their unbelief and went away.

Considering what Jesus said to his enemies and how he also warned his disciples in the words of our text, let us learn **what these warnings have to do with dangers confronting our faith.**

2.

Jesus had told the Pharisees and Sadducees before he left them, ***"When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret (judge) the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."*** Jesus' enemies understood very well the signs of fair or foul weather according to the appearance of the sky. But all the signs Jesus had given them in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the miracles he performed, and the testimony of John the Baptist, that they failed to understand. That is why Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem and said, ***"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes,"*** Luke 19:42.

Can we interpret the signs of the times in which we live? We in our age are very wise about weather forecasting and many other sciences. In many ways we have become wiser with regard to our work or business. But do we see that the days are increasingly more evil so far as spiritual matters are concerned? Are our eyes open with regard to what is happening in the churches? The words of Paul with regard to the great antichrist are being fulfilled more and more. Each succeeding pope does what Paul says, ***"He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, and even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God,"*** 2 Thessalonians 2:4. The pope says that he is ruling over the Church, that he is taking Jesus' place as the Head of the Church, calling himself the Vicar of Christ. He is deceiving more and more people.

What is historical fact recorded in the Book of Genesis and what took place at the beginning of time is now called a myth. The silly theory of evolution is taught in the public schools as though it were a fact. The Gospel of Christ taught in the Bible is not taught in many pulpits. In place of this a Social Gospel is taught teaching people how to help solve the world's economic and political problems, become Christ-like, and by their good works earn salvation in heaven. The problem is that God's Word is rejected. Many churches no longer ask, "What does the Bible say?" In a survey taken years ago already, only a small percentage of pastors in what is now the ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) still believe that the Bible is God's Word and that the Bible contains no errors or contradictions. Only a small percentage of pastors still believe what the Bible teaches in Genesis 3 about the fall into sin. So what is foretold in the Bible is happening. ***"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons,"*** 1 Timothy 4:1.

Our Savior warns us what we must do when false prophets come with their false teachings to rob us of our faith. Our text tells us, ***"When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 'Be careful,' Jesus said to them. 'Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"*** The disciples did not understand that Jesus was not talking about the yeast in a loaf of bread, but about the yeast of false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. ***"Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, 'You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."***

The Bible says, ***"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough,"*** Galatians 5:9. Just as yeast permeates the whole batch of dough, so one false teaching results in many more false teachings over a period of time. This is what is happening in many so-called Lutheran churches in our country, even in church bodies that once were called conservative like the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). One little error if it is tolerated, will soon affect many more teachings and hurt more people. That's why Jesus says, ***"Be on your guard!"*** That is an emphatic warning! To yield even a little in teaching may indeed be the beginning of complete surrender of the truth! A Missouri Synod professor wrote in 1932 regarding our text, ***"We repeat the warning of Jesus and apply it to our times. Beware of false teachers. Beware of jumbling creeds. The only safe course lies in being altogether separate. The least compromise means incorporating leaven, which tends to pervade the whole mass of doctrine. An apparently harmless concession may ultimately mean a corruption of all Christian views, with nothing left but stark, naked unbelief in all its hideousness. May God preserve us from such an end."*** The liberal Lutheran churches are troubled severely, not only with one false teaching, but also with many, and the end is not yet. The deadly yeast is doing its evil work today!

We pray that our readers may now understand better than before why we have separated from larger church bodies because of one false teaching. We suffer persecution and are called "separatists" and a "splinter group". May the Lord give us the strength to hold to the true doctrine of the Bible and never yield to any false teaching. May he give us the will and the strength to keep on teaching God's Word of truth to the glory and honor of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

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