

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday after Easter, May 13, 2012

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

Hymns: 201, 38:4, 341, 293, 644.

Lessons: Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, Revelation 2:1-5, John 21:1-14.

Sermon Text: John 10:17-21

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In Christ our Crucified and Risen Savior, Fellow Redeemed:

According to the church year calendar we are in the Easter season which consists of Easter Sunday and five Sundays following Easter. In this season of the church year, the emphasis in our preaching is on the resurrection of the crucified Savior.

There are many things to preach about, for the Bible is a big book with many teachings. But that which is absolutely fundamental and essential as the subject matter for all Christian teaching is the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus. We can see this by studying the Book of Acts, the history book of the early Christian Church. The first chapter speaks of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection, and gives this reason for choosing an apostle to take Judas Iscariot's place: He *"must become a witness with us of his resurrection."* (Acts 1:22) In the second chapter of Acts we have Peter's sermon on Pentecost which said this about Jesus: *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."* (Acts 2:23-24) In the third chapter of Acts, when Peter and John healed the crippled beggar and the people gathered around them, Peter preached: *"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead."* (Acts 3:13) When the apostles were brought before the Jewish high court after the miracle, they spoke of doing the miracle in the *"name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead."* (Acts 4:10) The fourth chapter of Acts also tells us: *"With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus!"* (Acts 4:33)

Since the death and resurrection of Jesus are so essential to our Christian faith, it is important that we learn all we can about it. For that reason also our text is important, for we hear:

OUR SAVIOR'S TESTIMONY ABOUT HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

- 1. He spoke of His voluntary obedience to His heavenly Father; and,**
- 2. His testimony resulted in a division among those who heard it.**

Our text is taken from that precious chapter of John's Gospel where these words of Jesus are recorded: *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."* (John 10:11) In His testimony about His death and resurrection in our text Jesus said: *"The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

Jesus received this command from His heavenly Father because this was God's plan of redemption for sinful mankind. It was God's plan from eternity, for the Bible speaks of God's *"eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Ephesians 3:11) The Bible also says that Jesus *"was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake."* (I Peter 1:20) According to the Father's eternal purpose He gave His Son Jesus a command to do what was necessary for man's redemption. Jesus was commissioned to lay down His life and to take it again. That's why Peter on Pentecost told the people about Jesus: *"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge."* (Acts 2:23)

Jesus the holy Son of God, who became also a true man for our redemption, was perfectly obedient to His heavenly Father's will. Just before He suffered and died, Jesus told His disciples: ***"The world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me."*** (John 14:31) All his earthly life until He died Jesus humbled Himself as a servant of His heavenly Father. In His state of humiliation He was subject to the Law of God and was required to fulfill all its demands. Not only did Jesus keep all of God's holy commandments perfectly, but His obedience also included that He suffered and died for our disobedience to the Law of God. As Isaiah foretold: ***"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities ... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*** (Isaiah 33:5-6) So the Apostle Paul wrote: ***"He humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross!"*** (Philippians 2:8) This was done for our salvation. Paul wrote: ***"Through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."*** (Romans 5:19) Just as all people have become sinners through the disobedience of Adam, so all people have been made righteous through the obedience of the one man Jesus.

All that Jesus did by keeping the Law and suffering and dying for us in obedience to His heavenly Father was good and perfect. But it had to be followed by His resurrection from the grave. The resurrection of Jesus had to follow because this, too, had been planned by God the Father from eternity and was foretold in the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, on Easter Sunday evening Jesus appeared to His disciples and told them: ***"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day.'"*** (Luke 24:44-46) We see, then, that Christ's resurrection also was according to the will of the heavenly Father.

There is also another reason why we say that Christ's resurrection had to follow His suffering and death. The resurrection is the Father's Amen to His Son's work of redemption. It is God's declaration that all His Son did for our redemption was acceptable to Him, and, therefore, He pronounces us free from sin and holy and righteous in His sight. In other words, we are justified. Christ's resurrection assures us of that. ***"He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."*** (Romans 4:25)

In addition to all this, our text teaches that both Christ's death and resurrection were voluntary acts on Jesus' part. Jesus repeats this truth often: ***"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ... I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay down my life - only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."*** Jesus was the humble servant of God and He was also the almighty Son of God, with all power in heaven and on earth. He suffered deep humiliation when He was nailed to the cross, but He also died on the cross when He wanted to die. That's why He died before the others who were crucified with Him, and why Pontius Pilate was surprised to hear that He was already dead. Jesus laid down His life of His own accord. No one took His life from Him; He voluntarily gave it. Likewise, Jesus of His own power and will came to life again in the grave. It is a truth of Scripture to say that the Father raised up His Son, and it is also a truth of Scripture to say that Jesus raised up Himself.

These truths of Scripture are based on the fact that Jesus and His heavenly Father are one God. Jesus testified: ***"I and the Father are one."*** (John 10:30) Earlier in His ministry Jesus had testified: ***"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by Himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*** (John 5:19) What the Father willed and what the Son did was always in perfect harmony because both are one God, different as to their person, but one in essence. That is also why Jesus says in our text that the Father loves him. Being one God with the Father, Jesus could only do what was in accord with the Father's will.

Now our text tells us what happened after Jesus gave this important testimony about His death and resurrection. We learn that it resulted in a division among those who heard it.

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"At these words the Jews were again divided. Many of them said, 'He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?' But others said, 'These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" Our text says the Jews were divided again. This was something that happened repeatedly. On the one hand, some people accepted Jesus as God's Son, the Christ, their promised

Messiah. On the other hand, some people rejected Him in unbelief and wanted to kill Him. Just before our text we are told how Jesus healed a man who was born blind. He did this on the Sabbath day. The people were divided in their reaction to this miracle: ***"Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.' But others asked, 'How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?' So they were divided."*** (John 9:16)

This division is always the effect of Gospel preaching. Some will believe the good news in Christ and others reject it in unbelief. In fact, Jesus Himself said this would happen: ***"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household'"*** (Matthew 10:34-36) Such a division among the hearers has always resulted when the Gospel is preached. The apostles experienced this when they preached. A few people accepted the Word of God, but most of the people rejected it in unbelief. The Apostle Paul spoke of this in this figurative language: ***"We are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life."*** (2 Corinthians 2:15-16) Paul also said this of the preaching of the Gospel: ***"The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*** (I Corinthians 1:18)

The important thing is not to think about how other people receive the Gospel of Christ, but how we ourselves receive it. Yes, we should actually make a self-examination in this matter. Each one should ask: How do I receive the Gospel of Christ the crucified and risen Savior? It is a matter of eternal life or everlasting damnation. The Bible says: ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."***(Acts 16:31) And it also says: ***"Whoever does not believe will be condemned."*** (Mark 16:16)

God grant that the words of the Christian poet may be our response to the Gospel: "I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, Trusting only Thee; Trusting Thee for full salvation, Great and free." Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal 428, v. 1)

(This sermon has been edited and reprinted from the April 17, 1983, Ministry By Mail.)