

“In the Name of Jesus”

As I read and study the Scriptures I’m constantly shaking my head at these disciples. How can they do and say what they do? They’re like the Three Stooges, constantly bumbling everything – off track, getting lost – a little thick in the skull. And then, I remember, I’m just like them.

I don’t know if you noticed it or not – but there is a glaring contradiction here in our text – and yes, the disciples play a leading role. John, speaking for all the rest of them, comes to Jesus and says – “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

Did you hear it? “In your name” and “following us” is the glaring contradiction! The disciples are trying to stop what is being done in JESUS’ name – because the man is not following US!

This man casting out demons is doing the Jesus thing – as a matter of fact, “in Jesus’ name” shows us that it is actually JESUS who is doing the work – through this man. The disciples’ beef is really with JESUS – Jesus is not following US – He’s not doing things the way we think things should be done! They just don’t get it.

The Augsburg Confession – one of our confessional writings that we as Lutheran subscribe to – confessing that it properly teaches what God teaches in His Word --- speaks of obtaining justifying or saving faith in this way.

“To obtain such faith God instituted the [preaching office], that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit, who works faith, when and where he pleases, in those who hear the Gospel. And the Gospel teaches that we have a gracious God, not by our own merits but by the merit of Christ, when we believe this.” (AC V, Tappert.31)

God works “when and where He pleases” – not according to the way we think He should work. He’s God, we’re not. He’s the One who rules and reigns – we don’t exercise control over Him. We shouldn’t tell Him what to do – or try to stop what He is doing.

God works “when and where He pleases” might make some people nervous – but this is not some free-for-all – as if anything goes simply by attaching God’s name to it. No, it has to be according to His will – and He has told us what He desires.

The Lord has instituted His means of grace so that we can trust and depend on them to do what He says – to deliver His grace. That’s why He gives the Gospel, institutes the Sacraments, and ordains pastors to deliver His goods.

But there’s more. He institutes Holy Marriage – He uses a husband and wife to bring forth life – and parents to nourish and sustain that life – also by bringing their children to Christ for Baptism, speaking the Gospel to them, and bringing them up in the Christian faith (nourished and sustained by Christ’s Holy Supper).

The Lord gives His authority to governors – an authority to be used in His name – and for His purposes. By such means, the Lord Himself is at work so that there might be peace amongst us – as He punishes the evildoers through the governing authorities – and commends those who do good.

But this is where we often balk – where, like the disciples – we don’t like the way Jesus is doing things (and even go so far as to try to put a stop to it).

The Gospel, that is, God’s Law and God’s Gospel – are peached – but people don’t come to church. Or, they come to church and hear the Gospel, but they live sinful lives – they abandon their baptism into Christ and fall away from Him.

God’s Word is proclaimed into the ears of all – but one hears and believes, and another doesn’t.

Marriage vows are made – and then the “for worse” happens and what God has joined together is separated.

Parents raise up their children in the way they should go – and they go their own way. The governing authorities seem to be creating chaos, not peace. “Come on, God! This isn’t working! There has to be a better way!” And sinful man, WE step in and put a stop to what God is doing – and demand that people follow US.

This Gospel – the way God has revealed to us that HE is working – is foolishness to our sinful nature. He hangs out with “those people” – worse than that, He dies for them and promises that He has taken all their sin, and by faith they are saved. “That’s not the way I’d do it,” the sinful nature responds. “I’d make them earn His grace, to prove their repentance.”

Do you see the glaring contradiction? We make the Gospel into Law. We make man to be his own Savior – to make himself worthy of God’s grace first. In so doing, we make ourselves God, and complain that HE is not following US.

“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God,” Jesus says. (Mark 10:16) He speaks these words to the Twelve who were once again trying to hinder God. He speaks these words to us. For this, WE must repent. God, forgive us for getting out of line – for denying you and playing God.

Jesus continues to seek and to save the lost. He not only desires our repentance because of the way we treat others – but warns us of the stumbling blocks we place in our own lives.

There are things in your life that cause you to stumble – that get in the way of what God is doing “for you” – getting in the way of faith, trusting God’s Word, and following Him. Whatever that might be – cut it off and throw it away! You “belong to Christ” – and He does not want you to perish either.

In repentance and faith, receive what Christ has done, and is doing “for you.” All your sin is cleansed in the blood of Jesus Christ. Drown the sinful nature and his desire to be God by daily contrition and repentance. Jesus forgives you – and resurrects you to live a new life, as a new man, one who hears, believes, and lives by His grace.

He gives you His very own Body and Blood in the Supper. Don’t let anything prevent you from receiving His grace – or denying it to others who believe in Him. To use the language of the text, Jesus is salting you – purifying you from all evil desires – casting out the devilish desires from you – and leading you out of sin, through death and the grave, into the life that has no end.

Dearly beloved, live at peace with God, and with one another. Do not “stop Him” – because He is at work for your good, for the good of your neighbor – for your life, and the life of your neighbor – not just life here in this world, but life with Him for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.