

“Revealed to Infants”

Did you hear what Jesus said? “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.”

Don't you just love a mystery? Aren't you curious to find out what “these things” are that have been hidden by God? In the simplest of terms, “these things” that are hidden are the Gospel – how God, in Christ Jesus – is at work for the salvation of sinners.

But when Jesus speaks of “these things” – He's talking specifically of how God had been at work through Himself, and through John the Baptist who is the forerunner of the Christ. To uncover these hidden things – we must look at the context of Jesus' words in St. Matthew's Gospel.

Looking back in St. Matthew's Gospel, you could say that Jesus has been laying down the Law. It begins with His instructions to the Twelve disciples as He authorizes them and “apostles” them (that is, “sends them out” to preach the Gospel).

He warns them that they will face sufferings and persecution – from governors and kings – and even from members of their own household. Though hidden – even this suffering – God is at work for the salvation of sinners.

Next, with John the Baptist in prison, Jesus addresses the ministry of John as it relates to Himself. The question hanging in the air is this – “Are you [Jesus] the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

The answer is clear – Jesus is the One. So why don't people believe that? Part of the answer is that they did not believe what John the Baptist preached. They were expecting something else.

John was no “reed shaken by the wind” or “a man dressed in soft clothing” – he preached the full strength of God's Law and Gospel – calling sinners to repentance, and to be baptized for the forgiveness of their sins.

But John was rejected – or, as Jesus says – “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.” God’s reigning over sin, death and the devil – through the Gospel of forgiveness that is by God’s grace, through faith” – was attacked, and rejected.

The violent, like King Herod – try to take away God’s reign by force – arresting John and putting him in prison, and then having him executed. What looks like the impotence of God – is really His reigning, His saving of sinners – hidden, though it be.

Many in those days were the “wise and understanding” that Jesus refers to in our text – the ones from whom “these things” are hidden. The wise and understanding are like “little children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their playmates: ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.’”

Like little children, they want to call the shots – and pout when John and Jesus don’t do what they demand. John and Jesus don’t live up to their expectations. John is “too harsh” and Jesus is “too liberal.” They complain that John didn’t eat or drink and accuse him of having a demon – and when Jesus comes eating and drinking they call Him a glutton and a drunkard.

In other words, “God can’t be at work” through the ministry of John or Jesus. God’s work, His Gospel – is hidden.

Then, immediately before our text today, Jesus “began to denounce the cities where most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent.” “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!” Your impenitence has “brought you down to Hades.” “But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”

Throughout all of these examples – the suffering and persecution that comes upon the apostles – the rejection of John the Baptist and Jesus – the impenitence of those who had seen God’s mighty works and ignored His call to repentance --- in all of “these things” the Gospel, God’s reign over sin for the sake of sinners – is hidden.

This instruction and warning of Jesus is not just for the people of His day – but for every generation. The question is – are you “wise and understanding” or a “little child”?

A “little child” is an “infant.” An infant is the opposite of the “wise and understanding” ones that Jesus refers to. As Dr. Gibbs says: “Jesus is not here commending those who have responded in faith to his ministry for some positive quality in themselves. Instead, he is saying that the divine revelation comes to those who (are led by the Spirit to recognize that they) are ignorant, impotent, and incapable of saving themselves, just as a helpless infant relies completely on his parents for food, warmth, safety, and life itself.” (Concordia Commentary on Matthew, 11:2-20:34, p. 585)

Folks, it’s a deadly thing to think of ourselves as self-sufficient when it comes to the Lord and His Gospel. As soon as we try to go beyond Jesus for our salvation, like little children who will put anything in their mouth, we are in danger. So, if you will, it is God’s will to “child-proof” the Gospel.

Dearly beloved, it has been revealed to you today that God Himself is at work for your salvation. His Gospel gives rest to those who are unable and insufficient in themselves to accomplish anything good – rest to those who are ignorant and impotent – rest to those set free from pride.

As infants, we latch on and are nourished by the grace which the Lord offers to us in His holy meal – He bathes us in His forgiving flood, and clothes with the righteousness of Christ. He snuggles us into the warmth of His love, shown to us in His Son. We live in Him – because we have no life apart from Him.

Listen up “little children” – for Jesus is speaking to you – “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Amen.

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