

“Salvation from the Outside”

Last week Jesus made distinctions between that which is “by divine law” (*de jure divino*) and that which is “by human law” (*de jure humano*). This week it is the distinction between that which is “outside ourselves” (*extra nos*) and that which is “inside ourselves” (*intra nos*).

Today, Jesus says – “Hear me, all of you, and understand: There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that comes out of a person are what defile him.”

To be “defiled” was to be “ceremonially unclean” – which means that you were not able to enter into the Temple – that you were cut off from God – that you could not dwell in His presence.

The unholy cannot be in the presence of the Holy One – the sinner cannot stand before God. It’s like the bug that flies into the backyard bug zapper – dzzt!

Today, you come into this sanctuary – into the presence of the Holy One – to stand before God. You’re sitting there in pious reverence – and someone’s cell phone goes off. “How dare they bring that into the church,” you think to yourself (checking, just to make sure it isn’t your phone).

But let me ask you this – how dare you bring the things that are on your cell phone into the presence of God – the harsh words on Facebook, the lewd pictures on TikTok, and we don’t even want to go into your browser history. How dare you bring such foolishness into this holy place?

Didn’t you hear the Old Testament reading? “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is near to us, whenever we call upon Him?” The Lord our God is near to us – even as Jesus promises that – “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

And you dare to bring your wicked, sinful, heart into the presence of the Holy Lord – not only today – but on the Last Day?

In the Epistle reading for today the Apostle Paul says that – “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

And it’s true – that it’s not our fellow man who is our chief antagonist – but the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. However, the danger is not just “out there” – “outside ourselves” (*extra nos*). As the Small Catechism teaches us, our three great enemies are “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature.”

It is from within – in my heart – that the danger lies. “What comes out of a person is what defiles him,” Jesus says. “For from within, out of the heart of man, come ...” all sorts of evil and wickedness – defiling us, making us unclean.

If our focus is simply on the *extra nos* (that which is “outside ourselves”) – then, like the Pharisees – it’s a matter of “what do I do” and “what do I refrain from doing.” Do I wash my hands when I come back from the marketplace? Do I steer clear of touching a dead body? And so on ...

Such a focus is based upon what I do and do not do – in order to make myself clean. As one theologian has observed – we spend all of our time running around cleaning up the cesspools in our lives, but we don’t go to the source of sewage.” We busy ourselves with that which is “outside ourselves” – and ignore the unclean heart within.

To use the words of the psalmist – “I lift up my eyes to the hills, from where does my help come?” Well, if defilement comes from within – I can’t look there for cleansing. When the sinner looks within – he see’s his sin, his unworthiness, his defilement.

Like Peter at the miraculous catch of fish – when he realized that he was in the presence of the Holy and Sinless Son of God – said, “depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” He feared for his life. He feared he would be consumed by the holiness of the Lord – dzzt!

Where does my help come from? The psalmist continues – “my help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

It is from “outside ourselves” (*extra nos*) that our help comes – our rescue, our cleansing, our salvation. The Gospel is external to ourselves – it comes from outside – from God, “the source of all that is just and good” – from the Holy One of Israel.

If someone preaches a Gospel to you that makes you look inward – run away! That’s not good news. There is no rescue or salvation from within. From within comes defilement – and separation from God. We must repent of looking within for our rescue.

God, however, has not separated Himself from sinners. Rather, He has sent His only-begotten Son into our flesh. God takes on our humanity – God becomes man – so that God may come near to us.

In the incarnation, the God-man Jesus Christ comes to take your place – to fulfill the Father’s will, to “do” what God commands you to do, and to refrain from what God commands you “not to do.” He does this “for you” – in your place, and on your behalf.

God takes on our human flesh so that the Holy One of God might be pierced for our transgressions – to shed His holy, precious blood – and with His innocent suffering and death, “to redeem me a lost and condemned creature.”

All this God does “for you.” It is the Gospel of His salvation – poured out on you in His Holy Baptism – set apart by His Holy Absolution – sanctified with His Holy Supper.

Faith looks outside ourselves for the Lord’s help. Notice how the psalmist says it in the Introit for today. “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”

Dearly beloved, the Lord your God has come near to you – He has drawn you into His presence this very day – consuming your sin and all that defiles you – so that, in Christ Jesus, you are holy, and live and dwell with Him – today, and for all eternity. Amen.

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