

“The Intents of His Heart”

Why would one who claims to speak for God – not speak His words? Oftentimes its because God’s Word reveals sin – AND – it reveals God’s wrath at sin. “Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked” – our text for today says.

But we want people to like us – whether family members, friends, or strangers. We are afraid to say what God says because of the blowback. We are afraid of being persecuted – for what God has to say.

The Introit for today (take from Psalm 55) – are words that Jesus could have spoken concerning Judas. “Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not yourself from my plea for mercy! For it is not an enemy who taunts me – then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me – then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my family friend.”

Fearing the betrayal of those closest to us – we speak our own words, rather than God’s Word.

The Lord our God warns us about prophets who would claim to speak in God’s name. “They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you.’”

He warns us about those who follow their own hearts – who covet being liked by others, and fear rejection – “to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”

To speak in this way is not only to despise God’s Word and stubbornly follow the desires of our own hearts – but it is to fill those who listen to us with “vain hopes” – empty hope. And that is not good. God will not stand for that – to leave you without hope – and so today, He sounds the warning.

The Lord desires that His Word would be faithfully proclaimed – for it is like fire that consumes the lies proclaimed in His name – and like a hammer that destroys the dreams of all false prophets (and those who would follow in their way).

That is what Jesus talking about in the Gospel reading for today. He has not come “to give peace on earth” – to say to those who despise God and His Word – “it’s all good” – or to say to those who stubbornly follow the desires of their hearts – “peace be with you, no disaster shall come upon you.”

NO! He has come to bring division – and notice – He speaks of how this takes place within the family – with those who are closest to us. His Word brings division – between what is true and what is false – between what is good and evil – between the lies and dreams of man, and “the intents of [the Lord’s] heart.”

Rather than “vain hope” – the desire of the Lord’s heart is that you would have true peace. Simply put, the Lord desires repentance – and for that to occur – His Word must be faithfully spoken, heard, and believed.

The fire and hammer of His Law exposes our wicked desires and deeds – it crushes any hope that we have of standing before the Lord, blameless in His sight. His Law says that it will NOT go well with you – it screams, “disaster”!!!

This is where our desire to be liked, and fear of rejection kicks in. We skip over the fire and hammer of God’s Word to get to kinder, gentler – more likely to be accepted words – telling those close to us that “everything’s good” and “no disaster” shall come to you – that it’s okay to continue on with their evil ways.

“But if they had stood in my council [the Lord says], then they would have proclaimed MY words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their deeds.”

This is what the Lord desires for you, and for all – that we would repent – that we would turn from our sin and trust that Christ’s blood forgives it all, cleanses us from all unrighteousness, and makes us to be holy and blameless in God’s sight.

Folks, that is the peace that Christ has come to bring on earth – true peace. He gives hope to sinners – resurrecting them to a new life – a life of faith, which trusts that the Lord speaks His Word into our ears for our good. That is what He desires for you – that is “the intent of His heart.”

When looking at what the future holds for us – I've often said that it looks pretty bleak – that I expect Christians and the holy Christian Church to be persecuted more and more – all because we dare to speak God's Word – in church, in our homes, and in the world.

Not only are we surrounded by the "great cloud of witnesses" (fellow believers who have come before us and suffered for the sake of Christ and His Word) – but we are also surrounded by those speak lies – who despise God's Word – who give empty hope, running around proclaiming peace and saying "all it good."

God's Word concerning the marriage of one man and one woman – of being created male and female in His image – of the dangers of the love of money – of not hurting or harming our body, or that of our neighbor --- His Word on these and many other truths are despised – and man has better words than the Lord – words that sound good, that promise peace but no peace is given.

You may be faced with such persecution this week. By virtue of your union with Christ in Holy Baptism – may your visons, dreams and lies be put to death – and His words be spoken – words that give life and hope.

The Lord knows what surrounds you – so, this very day, He comes to you – He gives you His very Body and Blood – to strengthen and preserve you in true faith – bringing true hope and peace to you.

Your faithful Lord continues to fill you with His life-giving Word – giving you "the intents of His heart" – the good that He desires for you --- repenting you, forgiving you, and resurrecting you – so that you may have genuine hope, now and forevermore. Amen.

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