

“The Sabbath comes”

It always amazes me when those within the church (often the leaders) minimize pure doctrine, if not outright despise it. The claim is that purity of doctrine is being emphasized at the expense of making disciples. Yet, the two cannot be separated.

To make disciples is to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – and to teach His doctrines, His teachings, His truth. Without God’s Word of Truth, what do we have to offer to the world?

Set aside Christ’s doctrines and you are left with the teachings of men. Now, for sure, that is highly desired by some. Some are proud of the various teachings and opinions offered at their church. But the teachings of Jesus Christ are not mere opinions, based upon the wisdom and understanding of men. The Holy Scriptures are God’s truth – pure and unadulterated – relevant and effective in every age and every culture.

Christ’s doctrine is very much in focus in our Gospel reading for today. Jesus comes teaching – and the people are “astonished at His teaching” – because His teaching is not like that of their scribes. Which leads me to wonder – “What were their scribes teaching?”

In St. John 5(39-40), Jesus chastises the Jews, saying: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.”

Their teachers, their scribes – no doubt studied the Scriptures – but their scribes didn’t testify of Jesus. It sounds like their scribes only offered the opinions of men. When those in the synagogue heard Jesus teaching – they declared that it was “a new teaching with authority.”

As we heard last week – Jesus came preaching the good news of God, and saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Of course, this teaching is not new – it’s what John the Baptist, and all the prophets before him, taught. The message is the same because the Gospel is the same. Jesus Christ is, and always has been, the Gospel – for all people in every generation.

What was “new” or different about Jesus’ teaching was that His teaching had authority. His teaching was not “about” God, “about” the forgiveness of sins, “about” new life – as if His teaching was nothing more than a road map to be used in searching out God and discovering His treasures.

NO! Jesus is God – He is forgiveness – He is life. He doesn’t come to “talk about” these things – He comes to deliver what He promises and says. He opens eyes to see that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. He puts the sinner to death, and breathes new life into them through His Word. His doctrine, His teachings – are pure forgiveness, pure life, pure salvation.

The authority of His doctrine is seen in the miraculous casting out of the unclean spirit from this man in our text. His Word that has power to muzzle demons – has the power to give peace to the troubled soul, and eternal comfort to the sinner.

Isn’t it ironic that the demons know what their scribes did not know – that Jesus is the Holy One of God? “Have you come to destroy us?” they cry out. They know that the Son of God has taken on human flesh. They know that His suffering and death, the sacrifice of His body and the shedding of His blood on the cross – destroys sin, death, and the power of the devil (and all his demons).

As His own name declares, Jesus came to save His people from their sins. Jesus comes to “forgive” – which literally means, “to loose” or “set free.” He comes to this man who is possessed by demons, and He “looses” him, by the power of His Word.

Sin had wrapped itself around him – choking off his life – dragging him towards despair and the grave. Jesus opens His mouth and authoritatively commands the unclean spirit to “be silent, and come out of him!” Jesus muzzles the demons, and sets the man free --- Jesus has delivered this man from sin and death.

You know what it’s like to be bound by sin – how Satan is always digging up your sins and parading them before your eyes – placing the yoke around your neck, hitching you to the wagon full of your trespasses, a burden that saps your strength – a merciless guilt that will not go away. Satan, the accuser – night and day – will let you have no rest ... no Sabbath.

“The people that in darkness sat” we sing in the hymn. The people are sitting in darkness in their synagogue, listening to teachings that had no authority, no power to provide the rest they so desperately need – and in comes Jesus, into their synagogue, into their teachings – for He is their Sabbath rest.

Jesus is the source of rest for all who are burdened by their sin – who are accused by Satan (who, by the way, thrives where Christ’s doctrine is not preached or taught). Jesus comes into our gathering today – to teach His pure doctrine – muzzling the demons and casting them out.

In His presence, Satan has nothing to say to you about your sin, and its punishment and death – because Jesus has the last word, and He says – “It is finished,” your sin is forgiven! With your sin paid for, your death destroyed – Satan has nothing to work with.

When he tries to accuse you, wrap you up again in guilt and despair – he is muzzled, because you are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. If the devil wants to antagonize you with your sin – tell him to go and take it up with Jesus – because He has taken all your sin as His own. It doesn’t belong to you anymore – it belongs to Jesus – and He has buried it once and for all. “It is finished.”

This is the rest Jesus gives to you, so easily entangled with sin. Though the demons daily nip at your heels – Christ’s Word of forgiveness silences them. He comes into our presence today, and He gathers you to His Table to receive His Body and Blood given into death, defeating the enemy – so that you might have rest, and live in peace.

Dearly beloved, this is no opinion – it is the pure doctrine of Jesus Christ. This is no talk “about” peace – for by His forgiveness, Christ creates peace for you. His is the final, and authoritative Word. “I forgive you all your sin.” You are free. Go in peace. Amen.

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