

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin R. Eden

Pentecost 5
Saturday, July 4, 2020 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, July 5, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

“Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Contentment”

Matthew 11:25-30

Two week ago, we heard Jesus say in our Gospel lesson, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Last week Christ said, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

And now today, we hear Christ say, “Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you . . . for My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

First, two weeks ago, Christ tells us that we should not be in love with our life in this world. In fact, if someone should come and threaten to kill you, preserving your own life is not your number one priority. Your confession of

faith, your family, and all those who are under your authority are to be of a higher concern than your own body – and in that order.

And last week, we heard Jesus warn us about falling into the trap that so many people do: misplacing love for the things of this temporary world over and above our love for the eternal living God. Loving the creation rather than the Creator who gave to us fathers and mothers; husbands and wives; sons and daughters – “anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me,” Jesus says. As a father, those words are a reminder of the tremendous challenge of keeping my priorities straight, and how miserably I fail to keep the Law the God – “wretched man that I am” as Paul would say.

And now Christ says to all of us who are weary and burdened with the trouble and evil of this world, “Come to Me, and I will give you rest.” Get away from yourselves, and come to Me. “My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” But didn’t Jesus say in last week’s Gospel that “If you do not take up your cross and follow Me, you are not worthy of Me.”? How is a cross an easy yoke and a light burden?

As Martin Luther explains it in the excerpt from the bulletin today, “to come to Christ and go out from oneself is the great cross, which no one dreads more than he who is seeking to wash away his sins through his own works.”

We touched on this last week. Luther is right when he says that the greatest cross we bear is the giving up of ourselves. As I said last week, the cross that we bear is not some hardship, illness, loss of property or anything like that. Those issues are real. However, the cross of which Jesus speaks is the emptying

of our self. Faith has empty hands. The only thing we can hold before Him to show our worthiness is our sin. Here are my sins Jesus. Here are the things I have done. I hate them. And Jesus says, "I have already taken those sins to the cross and grave."

Spiritually, we are beggars. The good news is, Jesus says in His Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Christ says, "Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Come to Me. Leave your self behind. We are called to be like Lot and his family. Lot was instructed to flee the wicked city of Sodom and to not look back. Lot's wife looked back. She did not want to give everything up, and it led to her destruction.

Christ says, "Come to Me, and do not look back." Do not long for the things of this world. Like Sodom, this world will soon be destroyed. Christ says, "Come to Me...My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

On Monday, as I was writing this sermon, Luther's devotional writing concerning the 3rd Petition "Thy will be done" kept running through my head. I had read a portion of it in Bible class a while back. I posted it on Facebook. It is too long to read here today. A few lines stuck out.

Luther said in this prayer, "Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will. . . . Help us to die willingly and gladly and readily accept death as your will so that we do not become disobedient to you through impatience or discouragement on our part." (AE 43:33).

Luther did not see this life as a painful cross unless you made it a painful cross by seeking to cling to this life. This is a hard message for us as we spend this July 4th weekend celebrating the gift of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Life is certainly a gift from God. But this life is not the goal. Jesus said, “Do not fear the one who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Liberty (freedom) is a gift not to be taken lightly, and as the people of Hong Kong have seen lately, it can be taken away. Thanks be to God that we can assemble and worship protected by the 1st Amendment of the Constitution. However, it is in gathering around God’s Word and Sacrament that is the sign that we have real liberty – freedom from the tyrants of sin, death, and the devil.

If I were one of the Founding Fathers, I would have argued for a slight change to the language. Instead of “the pursuit of happiness” I would have preferred, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of contentment.” Contentment is so much better than happiness. Contentment is a gift from God which gives you the “grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this God’s divine will is crucifying our will,” as Luther prayed.

Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Come to Me. Take up your cross. Leave your self behind. “Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” Amen.