

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

The Third Sunday of Lent
Saturday, March 10, 2012 at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, March 11, 2012 at 8:30 a.m. & 10:15 a.m.

“Zeal for Your House Will Consume Me”

John 2:13-25

I have mentioned on numerous occasions in sermons and Bible classes, we have principles of Biblical interpretation (called hermeneutics), that is, the guidelines that we use to interpret the Bible. Such as, we do not allow people’s opinions or any outside evidence to stand in judgment of God’s Word. Therefore a person would not be allowed to say, “I don’t care what the Bible says, this is what I think” or “Socrates says, or my science teacher says, ‘this’ therefore the Bible must be wrong.”

There is ample outside evidence which supports the Biblical story and shows that these were real people and real events in history, but, as I mentioned in my Quincy Bible Institute presentation, even the best archaeological evidence will be interpreted in very different ways depending on the interpreter’s agenda.

We often get into this discussion of how Christian people who all read the same Bible can have such differing views of what the Bible says. One of our hermeneutical principles, and one that I find particularly important is, “How did the original audience understand these words?” If the apostles believed and taught a certain way, then the church established by the apostles should teach the same way. If the earliest Christians universally believed and practiced a certain teaching and had no debate, we must assume this is what the apostles taught. And this is what we must teach, as we are the heirs of the truth which Christ taught His apostles.

For example, the early church universally practiced infant Baptism,

without debate, and universally understood that sins were washed away in the water and the Word. Since the 16th Century, there are churches that say there is no forgiveness of sins offered in Baptism, it is just an initiation ritual. There are many which do not baptize infants. In my conversation a couple of weeks ago with two of the pastors from The Crossing, (we did finally get together and we had an enlightening conversation), I asked what their practice would be for a mentally handicapped child. I used our own Sophia Brown, who I baptized at St. Louis Children's Hospital as an example. Presuming she would always have the mind of a small child, "When would you baptize her?" I asked.

I was dumfounded by their answer. They said they would never suggest she be baptized, and I quote, "Even if she were 45 years old." Because they said that someone like her would automatically be under God's grace because she would not yet know the Law of God. That is utter foolishness. The problem is that their foolishness can have eternal consequences, since the Law is written on all men's hearts, as Scripture says. Age restrictions or IQ thresholds are not found in the Word of God. This is man's opinion

With the somewhat public debate which we have had with the pastors from The Crossing concerning Baptism, it has been asked, "Do we need to emphasize other church's weaknesses or differences?"

I believe that it is important to make it very clear that as long as a church confesses the One True God to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and salvation coming through the death and resurrection of Christ, they are God's people. And when we point out that a person or a church may be teaching something that is contrary to God's Word, we do not do it with hatred, malice, contempt, or with the intention to harm that person or institution.

When we point out a false teaching, we need to do it in the same spirit in which Christ cleared the temple. You may say, “Wait a minute. We are supposed to act the way that Christ did in the temple? But I thought you said we are supposed to love our fellow brothers and sisters in the faith.”

Isn't that what Christ was doing? Christ's anger was not the result of hatred. It was righteous anger born out of love. Just like when St. Paul harshly criticized the Corinthian church for bad communion practices, he did not do it to punish them, but he did it to protect them and to help them. The people in Corinth were eating and drinking judgment upon themselves and were therefore doing great harm to their spiritual well-being. It would have been a selfish, unloving act for Paul to take the easy road and look the other way.

The people who were in the temple changing money for a tidy profit and selling animals above market value were desecrating the temple of the Lord and were therefore also doing great harm to their spiritual well-being and the well-being of their “customers”.

Christ sees this and is deeply grieved. He is concerned about preserving His Father's house and the truth of the Word of God. He is concerned about the poor people who are being led astray and thus are being robbed of their salvation – let alone their money.

Christ did not treat the evil of the desecration of the temple in the way that we tend to treat evil and sin in our life. In following the way that we tend to treat evil in the world, we would have Christ walk into the temple and say to His disciples, “They should really stop doing this. This is a house of prayer.” And then go on His merry way and feel good that, at least He knows what is best, but after all, there was nothing that He could do. That's just the way things are.

Christ tells us that He came into this world to wield a sword and cut

away all that is evil so that what is good may remain.

When Christ rampaged through the temple, the people witnessed what was meant when God told Moses on Mt. Sinai: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God.” Our Lord is very jealous of anything or anyone that steals the hearts of His people.

For the love of His people, Christ did everything that He could to preserve the integrity of His Father’s house and to preserve His people from being led astray from the truth.

All around us there are people who will tell us that “every single point of God’s Word isn’t all that important as long as you get the big stuff right. As long as you believe in Jesus, then you are OK.” But what do we believe about Jesus? I believe we should never be ashamed of any part of the truth of God’s Word. And I believe the souls of children like Sophia Brown are worth fighting for.

But when we are confronted with people who hold different beliefs, especially when dealing with Christian people, everything that we say and do needs to be done out of love. Paul tells Timothy to “Preach the Word...correct, rebuke, and encourage” but always with “patience and careful instruction.” That message is not just for Timothy. We need to ask, I need to ask, God for patience and for the wisdom to know when to overturn the tables of the money-changers and when to remain silent before our accusers and say nothing except “Father forgive them for they know not what they are doing.”

Therein lies the challenge for us as we preach Christ crucified amid the stumbling blocks and foolishness of this world. Amen.