

“This is the Work of God”

John 6:22-35

In the Gospel of Matthew, we are told that a rich young man came up to Jesus and asked the question: “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” To which Jesus replied, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” “Which ones?” the man asked. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.”

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. [Mt. 19:16-22].

The Gospel of Luke records that, on another occasion, an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

To which Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” The man answered, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus replied, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.” The question is: “How do you do this?” Jesus goes on to tell this so-called expert in the Law the story of the Good Samaritan. Jesus then basically tells him that what you must do to inherit eternal life is treat every person you meet with the same selflessness as the Good Samaritan demonstrated to the man he found lying in the road. Jesus simply states: “Go and do likewise” [Luke 10:25-37].

Complete and utter selflessness is the only way that we can even approach doing what is pleasing in God’s sight, if we go it alone (and we know that this is impossible for us). Therefore, in today’s Gospel lesson, when the crowd asked Jesus, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus simply answers: “This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent.” There is nothing else that you can do that will improve your relationship with God. Believing in the forgiveness won for us on the cross, trusting in Christ, the suffering servant sent by God, who was pierced for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities; that is our only hope to do the works God requires.

But what kind of work is believing in the One who was sent? Doesn’t Luther’s catechism very correctly state: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith.”

If believing is not done by my own reason or strength, but I am called to faith by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, what kind of work or works

is Jesus talking about. With the rich young man, who lead an impeccable life by the world's standards, or the expert in the law who undoubtedly was an outstanding citizen and pillar of the community; clearly their lifestyle and works were not enough.

We need to look closely at Jesus' answer to the people's question. He says, "This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent." What do you know, Jesus agrees with Luther. Faith is the work of God. It is God who has begun this good work in you, and it is God who brings this work to completion. It is Christ who is the Author and Perfecter of your faith. It is His Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth.

It is always human nature's inclination to seek salvation through your own effort. But as the rich young man, the expert in the Law, and the crowd, who followed Jesus after the feeding of the 5000, found out, salvation is not possible apart from faith in the mercy and forgiveness of God which we receive only by grace.

The people understood the concept that if a man does not work, neither shall he eat. That is why they asked the question: "What must we do to be doing the works of God?" The Lord answers, "Partake of the bread of life, and receive the gift of faith. The question is not 'What must you do?' but rather is 'What has God done for you already?'"

Our faith is a gift. We are not believers in God because we are smarter or wiser than other people. Our faith is not the result of us being better than those around us. We are a people of faith, and we are the

people of God, because God chose to love us and offer His Son as the ransom price for our sins. Our relationship with God is a gift. Our faith is a gift. We have done nothing to deserve it. All that we do is receive it.

Yet this greatest of all gifts is an object of scorn and shame, or at least an object of indifference, among the majority of the people in this world. Sinful man craves to fill his belly with temporary, perishable food. People become so concerned with acquiring things which only crumble into dust or get lost in the attic, or risk all they have to experience the flash of joy that the world offers. And partaking of the Bread of Life becomes a matter of little concern. They despise what is imperishable and eternal and rate it lower than that which is perishable and is quickly rotting away.

Our sinful nature is very foolish indeed. Our sinful nature tells us to be like the rich young man, the expert in the Law, or the crowd who followed Jesus, and desire a relationship with God based on the misguided notion that, even without Him, deep-down we are good at heart and God is pleased with us.

Being sinful is not something that we do. Being sinful is who we are by nature, and only by the grace of God has anything been done to change our situation.

We cannot do enough good to make us pleasing to God. You are God's people because He chose You to be His people; He loves you; He forgives you; He feeds you with the Bread of Life. As Jesus says, "This is the work of God: that you believe in him whom he has sent." Amen.