

✠ John 8:31-36 ✠

Only one thing is needful. Jesus. The Son of God took on our fallen flesh to redeem us from sin and death. To rescue us, body and soul, from eternal death and separation from the Father. That's it. That is all that matters. Everything else is a chasing after the wind.

The Word became flesh. He took up our case in the womb of the Virgin. He let the Law do to Him what it should have done to us. He suffered the wrath of God, becoming sin for us though He knew no sin. The Lamb of God, spotless and without blemish, was sacrificed on the altar of God, giving His body and blood for the forgiveness of sin. The Word became flesh.

And that Word is the Sword of the Spirit. And it does what swords do: it cuts. It separates bone from tendon and flesh from bone. It divides. The Prince of Peace did not come to bring peace, but division. Since John the Baptist the kingdom of God has been coming with violence, and the violent take it by force.

We are the church militant. Peace is an illusion, a lie. There is no peace between the Church and the world. There is no peace between father and son, mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The Sword has not yet been beaten into a ploughshare. The fighting rages on. Anyone who says otherwise has the devil as his father, and speaks in his native tongue, lying and deceiving the nations. The kingdom of the God is not of this world, and so while it is in this world it will be at war with the world.

But the world has tried to convince us otherwise. It boasts of tolerance and equality, saying that it is at peace with the Church as long as the Church doesn't preach against her sins and infidelity. As long as the pulpits don't reign down fire from heaven and as long as the preachers only preach success in business and life, and the legitimacy of all opinions and religions, then the world would gladly leave us alone because we would sound just like it.

And this is tempting. But it is the seductive song of the siren. If only we'd ease up a little on this or that doctrine, then we wouldn't be so hated. If only we'd try to look and sound a little more like late night T.V. or the variety shows of the 1970's, then we'd be more accepted. Our numbers would swell and our pews would be full. If we'd only let sin have a little leeway, if only we'd stop saying Jesus is the only way to heaven, or at least say it less often and with less enthusiasm. And especially if we would stop saying and confessing that we have the pure Gospel, then we'd have more peace and fatter church rosters.

But most of us don't really buy that line, at least not all of the time. Most of us don't think we should give up doctrine for the world or lessen our preaching against sin. Though most of us probably do think we're too strict. Most of us don't think we would be better off if we joined the world in her appeals for tolerance. Most of us see the truth that tolerance is intolerant. Most of us really do believe that Jesus is the only way to the Father. For us, this siren's song is not all that seductive. We're wary of her titillating voice. It is easy to see and target the enemy when he looks like the enemy. It is easy to spot a fake when he doesn't even try to fit in. The real danger doesn't come from the outside.

The real danger lies within. Our Lord warns us far more about wolves dressed in sheepskin rather than wolves that don't bother to try to conceal themselves. Stay unpolluted from the world, yes, but also guard against false preachers and unsound doctrine. The real danger that threatens to overshadow the pure Gospel and Word of God and to choke out our faith, does not come from Hollywood, Capitol Hill, Afghanistan, or Al-Qaeda. It does not come from Roman soldiers or temple guards. The real danger comes from Judas.

But don't be gullible. Judas didn't look any different than the Eleven. He didn't sound any different than the Eleven. He was one of them. He was a bad fish caught in the net with the good fish.

The Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was not the Church against the world. Luther's most passionate and intense sermons and writings were not leveled at the pagan or Muslim. They were leveled at the church. The Reformation was exactly that: a re-forming from the inside. It was the church against the false teachers. The Gospel had been suppressed; faith had been rendered useless. Yet no one had set out to be heretic. Judas did not plan from the beginning to betray his Lord. No one had set out to preach and teach false doctrine. No one set out to deprive Jesus of His glory and office. No one set out to deny our Lord. Yet they did.

Like an undetected virus, false doctrine – false teaching and false living, for you cannot separate teaching from life – spread throughout the body, infecting it at every level so that eventually the preachers stopped preaching, the bishops stopped forgiving sins, and the laity stopped receiving the Body and Blood and stopped caring about the Word of God and sound doctrine.

Yet this is nothing new. The holy apostles everywhere warn their hearers of the false teachers that rise up among the people. Thus Peter writes, “there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

But do not think that false teachers only appear in the Church's pulpits and wear collars. Fathers who do not take care to instruct their children in sound doctrine are equally guilty of being false teachers. Brothers who do not correct and exhort one another are guilty of being false teachers. So also, itching ears that demand that preachers preach what they want to hear and what they are willing to tolerate, are also false teachers. For they teach those who follow them that it's okay to rebel against authority; it's okay to question God's Word; it's okay to deny the wickedness of adultery, worshiping the false gods of preference and opinion.

Today we are under attack. We are not safe from false teachers, antichrists that rise up and preach a gospel different from that of the apostles and prophets. But like before, they do not come and announce themselves. They do not stand up and say, “Here am I, preach against me.” They are most often not in pulpits or lecture halls. Most often they come in the guise of peace and love, charity and prosperity, unity fueled by compromise.

They come disguised as evangelism programs that boast big results but say nothing of repentance. They come disguised as fundraisers that preach stewardship but refuse to give to the poor. They come disguised as good Christian books written by seemingly nice, pious men that direct you to look within yourself for comfort and peace rather than to the external Word of God and His sacraments. They come disguised as altar and pulpit fellowship, claiming unity in confession, when really such fellowship demands that we sacrifice right doctrine and embrace

sin and the opinions and desires of men. They come guised as common confession, at least we all believe that Jesus is Lord, yet all the while denying that He preached against homosexuality, condemned the polluting of our children, and demanded strict adherence to His Word: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." There is no such thing as agreeing to disagree. It is a stupid position that will kill your faith.

It does matter what we preach, what we teach, what we confess. We do not have a choice in the matter. This is non-negotiable. It is not at the mercy of a voters' assembly or church councils. We are not playing a football game that can be done better next year. There is no reset button on the game of life. This is life and death. This matters. We cannot serve both God and mammon. We cannot continue in sin and expect to walk in the light.

But I am not speaking of far off places. I am not speaking of esoteric philosophies. I am not speaking to the theologically elite or to the circles of academia. I am speaking to you. I am speaking to fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, teachers and farmers, businessmen and janitors.

Repent, this is your generation. This is not left to your fathers or to your children. This is your generation. You are the ones who confess the creed. You are the ones who proclaim Christ crucified. You are the ones who preach against the perversion of society and the world. You are the ones who claim heaven as your home. Turning the other cheek does not mean looking the other way in the face of lies and compromise.

The death of our church is not going to come because of what The LC-MS does or does not do. It's not going to come because the preacher won't listen to the people. It's not going to come because we have too few backsides in the pews and too few dollars in the coffers. The death of this church will come if we deny the Word of God and take up the case for the heretic, the false teacher, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the well-spoken orator, the charlatan of compromise. People may still sit in her pews, attendance may even grow, but without the Word of God it will not be the house of God but rather a den of thieves.

The devil doesn't need us to stop coming to church. He doesn't need us to stop reading our Bibles or learning the Catechism. All he needs us to do is compromise the Gospel. All he needs us to do is give up the Gospel just a little bit, and he'll have us all.

Satan is perfectly content to sit back and let us do his dirty work for him. He is happy to have us destroy ourselves by giving in and giving up. Hell won't care if we meant well or if we were voted most popular. The devil doesn't torment the lukewarm church. The lukewarm church is his chapel, and is spit from the mouth of God.

Where are the Lutherans today? Where are the ones who refuse to give an inch even though goods, fame, child, and wife are taken away? Where are the ones who live to die and die to live for the sake of the Gospel? Where are the ones who preach against false doctrine and wicked living? Where are the ones who care enough about their children that they take pains to teach them the words and faith of the holy Christian Church?

We are at war. Not against the terrorists in Middle East or the liberal left wing in Capitol Hill, but against sin and unbelief. Our weapons are not evangelism programs or offering plates, social ministries or stewardship. We wield the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God.

It protects us from false teachers and the devil's lies. It kills heresy by cutting it off from the vine. It is profitable for instruction, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It is able to save your souls (James 1:21). It sets you free from sin and death. It makes you a child of God.

And this Word of God became flesh and dwells among us, for the kingdom of God is not in some far away place, it is in the midst of you. He is here to redeem you, a lost and condemned person, to purchase you, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death; that you may be His own.

He has set us free to be the people of God, free to worship Him without fear, holy and righteous in His sight all the days of our lives. He has given us His Spirit who leads us into all truth even as He leads us to our graves. For the truth *will* set you free. The truth that Jesus rose from the dead will set you free from your grave. The truth that Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father will set you free to sit in Paradise. Though you fight now, by faith you will inherit the freedom attained by the Son of the Most High God.

Then you will cease to fight; the Sword will be beaten into a ploughshare. But we are not there yet. Do not lower your guard just yet.

The Gospel is worth fighting for. It is worth being ostracized by family and friends for. It is worth being hated for. It is worth dying for. Where are the sons and daughters of Luther? They are here. Look to your left and to your right. They are the ones who will not go quietly into the night. They will not compromise. They will not give in. They will fight the good fight. They will not sell the Gospel for thirty pieces of silver, for the sake of hypocritical unity. Like the sons of Abraham, the sons of Luther are not those who bear his name, but those who share his faith. Here we stand, we can do no other. So help us God.

He who has ears let him hear.

In the name of the FATHER and of the ✠ SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT.

✠ AMEN ✠