

Sermon Transcript for October 3, 2021

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

All right, we have this Gospel lesson and Jesus is in a particularly confrontational mood it seems like. He's with the Pharisees and now, what often goes on in these situations is to get a philosophical conversation started, you throw out a softball question and it gets the ball rolling and starts the discussion. That seems like what the Pharisees are doing right now. Jesus has just silenced the Sadducees because they did not believe in the life everlasting. You realize that half of the Jewish people, the people that followed after the Sadducees, did not actually believe that there was life after death. In the day of Jesus, they believed that this life was the only life, and after that, there was just nothing. And that tradition is really what a majority of the Jewish people today have come from, is that Sadducee tradition, where there is no afterlife, there is just the life today. But Jesus silenced them because He bore witness to eternal life, life everlasting with the Father. So the Pharisees are in some ways excited because the Pharisees and the Sadducees did not get along. Sadducees were the ruling class. They compromised with the Roman leaders so that they could maintain authority and control. The Pharisees, on the other hand, were the righteous ones. They were the ones that felt like they needed to follow the Law in its totality and completeness and they were doing it and everybody else should follow them, and if they just followed them, then finally the Messiah would come and life would be wonderful. See the idea was, and to some degree still is, in some Jewish communities, is that if we could just follow the Law, 100% for one day, then finally the Messiah could come. But the reality is it's never happened. There's only been one man who has followed the law 100% every day, and that is Jesus Christ, of course. But the Pharisees did not see Him as a Messiah. They saw Him as a foil, as someone who was throwing their ideas into chaos. Because again, they liked to make their own laws and make laws that they could look at and justify themselves, which is very common today.

The world is making its own laws. If you do X, Y, and Z, then you're holy. If you drive this certain car, or if you have these certain beliefs, or if you're this color skin, or if you have this vaccine, or if you wear that many masks, or if you do this, that, or the other thing, whatever it might be, we've got this laundry list that makes us feel more superior than everybody else. As long as we fit the categories and they don't. And sometimes, we in the church have the same ideas, that we are better than others because our sins aren't as glaringly obvious as the sins out there. So, we sometimes are tempted to look at ourselves as perhaps more righteous than others. But the reality of it all is, is none are righteous, not one. And we all fall short of the commands of God. So, the idea of the Pharisees asking Jesus, "What is the greatest commandment?" Their whole idea was, "Let's see if we can trip Him up. If He doesn't list the commandments in the right order, or pick the one that we think is the best, then we got Him." Basically if you let somebody talk long enough, you can find something that you can accuse them of is the Pharisees' philosophy.

But of course, Jesus is not an ordinary man. He is the Christ. Now, what is this person, the Christ, that we are talking about? And it really comes to the crux of what is going on here. See, the Sadducees had been silenced because they did not believe in the life everlasting, which as Jesus will help describe, comes from faith in Him. The Pharisees did believe in eternal life, but they thought that they got it by their own efforts and merits, by obeying the law, by being good people, and He's going to silence them as well, because it focuses upon again who He is and what that means for us, and He is the Christ. So the Christ is one of those borrowed words, it's a Greek word and it literally is Christos, and we just borrowed it and transliterated it into English. So, Christos becomes Christ, but Christ is a translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, which is again, something that we borrow from the Hebrews, and so we just pulled Messiah into English as well. So, Messiah and the Christ. Those are the same thing, the same word. So, Jesus Christ is Jesus the Messiah.

Now, what does Messiah and Christ mean? It means anointed one, that's the actual translation, is the one who is anointed. To be anointed is to be chosen, and so there were many anointings and anointed ones throughout the history of Israel and other nations as well. Whenever a new king was chosen, King David in fact, when the prophet came and looked for the new king, he went through all of David's brothers and

couldn't find one that God approved of, and finally got to David. And when he got to David, God said, "This is the one," and the prophet anointed David with oil, basically poured oil over his head. The idea was that this was a sign of being chosen for a particular purpose. Now, sometimes it was to be king. Sometimes it was to be a prophet. Sometimes it was to be other things. But the idea of the anointed one means the one who is chosen for a purpose. And so we have Jesus, the one who is anointed by God for the purpose of offering salvation to us as a gift. Because when it comes to the commandments of God, we fall far short and as much as we would like to justify ourselves, we cannot.

Again, the world is trying to justify themselves all over the place and make themselves feel good because they're not part of the "out" group, they're part of the "in" group, whatever that may be today or tomorrow. But again, we are not divided by our skin color. We're not divided by our sin. We are not divided by our particular political parties. We are all united in this one thing. We are all sinners in need of the grace of God. And when it comes right down to what is the greatest commandment? Love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. Now how do you define that? I mean, that's sort of a, "Well, have I really loved God with all my soul, all my heart and mind?" You might be able to say, "Well, it seems like I do. I mean, I'm at church every Sunday, I read my Bible on a regular basis," but how do you know when you've done it all? When your entire mind has loved God, when your entire soul, your entire heart has loved God? It's left up to ... almost personal ideas until Jesus adds the next part and then it makes it a lot more clear, or at least it makes it easier for us to see that we've failed. Maybe it doesn't make it easier to see that we've succeeded, but it definitely makes it easier to see that we've failed. The second is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. Well, let's face it. I don't love anybody any better than I love myself. I take care of myself, I give myself what I need and I protect what I need. I mean, we all do that to some degree. Now, every once in a while, we might sacrifice for somebody else that we love, but the reality is we love ourselves and we do what we want, what's best for us. So, what Jesus is saying is we want what's best for everybody else as well. Do we treat them with the same honor that we treat ourselves? And when it gets right down to it, there's no way that we do that. We cannot.

So, what are we called to do? To be a person who is a good person, you rely upon your own behavior, your own actions. But to be a person of faith relies upon the promise of God. And the promise of God is that nothing we do can earn our place. It's completely and utterly a gift of God. Now, we as Lutherans hammer that home left, right and center every day, every hour, that we are justified by faith and not by words, lest any man should boast. But even though we believe that, it's so hard. It's so hard to live according to that, especially in trying times, especially when there is doubt, and confusion, and anxiety, and chaos, and persecution going on in the world.

We need to hold fast to the promises of God because the world is actively, actively trying to tear us apart to create the haves and the have-nots, the good people and the bad people, based upon their own ideas. And yet we are called to remember to serve God and to hold fast to Him. To hold fast to Him, that imagery just has struck me. When you're in the water and you get in the water, and it's too deep for you and you weren't quite ready for it, and you're sputtering and you swallowed some water and you're out of sorts, somebody throws you a boogie board, or a lifesaver, or noodle, or anything. You just hold fast to it, because you're like, "Oh finally." It's that image that we need to see. Holding fast to God is seeing Him as our only hope, our only focus, our only desire and everything else, our wealth, our wellbeing, our job, our family, everything is subservient and submitted to His will. So that no matter what happens, we can trust Him, even when the bad things happen. For He is our God and who has done for you these great and terrifying things? I'm not sure I often see God as terrifying things, but He has judged us and He has judged His son. And it's terrifying that He could have judged us as guilty, but He doesn't. He judges His son as guilty because His son is the anointed one. He was anointed to bear our sins. He was anointed to be the worst of sinners, so that we might be anointed in our baptisms, to be holy and righteous before God. He was anointed to take our place, to be our Savior and our hope. Let us hold fast to Him with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our body, and all of our soul.

May His grace, mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore. Amen.