

Third Sunday after Trinity, Sunday June 25, 2023

Readings: Micah 7:18-20, 1 Timothy 1:12-17, Luke 15:11-32

Jesus Receives Sinners

"This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). The Pharisees' statement of judgment against Jesus is in fact a proclamation of Gospel truth. For our God is one who delights in mercy, who casts all our sins into the depths of the sea through the cross (Micah 7:18–20). *"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"* (1 Tim. 1:15). Those who refuse to be counted as sinners also refuse Jesus who came only for sinners. Those like the older son (Luke 15:11–32), who think they are righteous of themselves, will not join in the heavenly celebration over the sinner who repents and so remain outside of the Father's house. Let us therefore be on guard against self-righteously trusting in our own merits. *"Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time He may exalt you"* (1 Peter 5:6). Rejoice that Jesus receives sinners like us and that He still sits at table with us in the Holy Supper, bestowing His forgiveness and life.

Sermon Transcript

We begin in the name of God, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The text for this morning's message is based upon the Epistle reading from I Timothy. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm not in the habit of promoting any particular television program, but there is one program that I try to watch often. I would encourage you to watch it also. Well, first of all, it is clean, family-oriented and something that all the family can watch. Secondly, it is educational and will teach you a lot of things that you otherwise would never know. Thirdly, it is inspirational. It has great storylines, real life heroes and heroines, and it builds character. It is exciting and never boring, nonstop action. At times, it's even very funny. Of course, I'm sure that by now you have guessed the program, right? Sports Center. Every day at the end of the program, they have a segment called Did You Know? And they ask a sports trivia question that you probably didn't know, but you as a fan, a sports fan, you would like to know the answer.

Now, there are two things that I've learned about what people know. First of all, we know things that really aren't worth knowing. I heard about one teacher who was teaching math to his third grade class and he asked a little boy named William the question, "What is three fourths of five sixteenths?" The little boy thought and thought, and then he said, "Well, I don't know exactly what it is, but it's not enough to worry about." And indeed, we all know things that are really not worth worrying about.

But another thing we know is that nobody knows everything. A census-taker knocked on the door of an old backwards shack way up in the mountains of West Virginia in the middle of nowhere. An old timer came to the door and asked the man what he wanted. The census-taker said, "Well, the President has sent me across the country to find out exactly how many people live in the United States." And the hillbilly answered, "Well, Sonny, I'm sorry you came all the way out here to ask me because I ain't got the faintest idea how many people live in the United States."

We all know things that aren't worth knowing and none of us knows everything, but there is one thing that everyone ought to know, and it is this, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Now, Paul says, there are several reasons why we need to know this. First of all, Paul says, the saying is trustworthy. And notice he did not say it was faithful. He said, it is a trustworthy saying. That is, it is authentic. It is up-to-date. It is always true. Today's scientific truth may be tomorrow's superstition, but that is not true of the Word of God. Every statement from the lips of God is always reliable, but it is also a valuable statement. He says, it is deserving of full acceptance. Now, the word deserving means worthy. That is, it deserves your attention. It is worth your allegiance. It is a statement that is as worthy today as it was yesterday, and it will be as worthy tomorrow as it is today. It is also an acceptable statement for "It is deserving of full acceptance," says Paul. This is a statement for everyone at every time, at every place, and every circumstance. The entire Bible really comes down to this one simple singular truth that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That simple sentence tells us three things that if you don't know, you should know.

That simple statement, I'll repeat, that simple statement tells us three things. Three things, that if you don't know that you should know. "Did You Know", this is the sermon title. Did you know Jesus Christ came? And how do we know? How can we be sure that this man really came, who walked the face of this earth by the name of Jesus Christ? Well, first of all, we have 27 books of the New Testament that speak to that truth. Speaking in a strictly secular sense, the Bible is a book of history. It is one of the most valuable historical pieces that has ever been written. But it's not just ordinary history. This history is a story of His story. But even if we did not have these books of the New Testament, we would know that there was a man by the name of Jesus Christ who lived 2000 years ago.

Secular historians all the way back to the time of Jesus himself speak about a man named Jesus. Cornelius Tacitus, a Roman historian who was born 20 years after the death of Jesus, speaks about a Christ who was put to death by Pontius Pilate. Josephus, a Jewish historian who was born about the time that Jesus died, speaks about a man named Jesus, who he called a wise man, a doer of wonderful works, who was the Christ whom Pilate condemned to the cross. Now, time will not permit for me to tell you all the secular historians who refer to this historical figure, Jesus.

However, Encyclopedia Britannica uses 20,000 words in it's article on Jesus Christ and takes up more space than given to Aristotle, Cicero, Alexander, Julius Caesar, Buddha, Confucius, Mohammad, Napoleon Bonaparte. There is more proof of the existence of Jesus Christ than there is the existence of Julius Caesar. But notice again the two names Christ Jesus. Jesus was his domestic name. Many people don't realize that Jesus was a common name 2000 years ago, much like Oliver or Liam or Benjamin is today. But the Lord Jesus had a way of turning the common into the uncommon and turning the natural into the supernatural.

Now, His other name, Christ or Christos from the Greek, is His divine name. The name Christ literally means anointed one. And you see, He had to have two names because He had two natures. Jesus was His human name. Christ was His heavenly name. Jesus refers to His humanity. Christ refers to His deity. He was Jesus because He was the Son of Man. He was Christ because He was the Son of God.

Another reason we know that Jesus came is because the Bible tells us so. In the Old Testament alone, there are over 300 prophecies that have been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. But beyond that, four books in the New Testament are devoted strictly to the birth, the life, the death, and the resurrection of this man called Jesus Christ. Some of the manuscripts which support the New Testament go all the way back to the first

century AD. Every day when we simply write down a date, it is a subtle reminder of the person of Jesus Christ. Our entire dating system revolves around this man called Jesus. We live in 2023 AD. Those two letters AD come from the Latin words, anno domini, which means in the year of our Lord. BC means Before Christ. So would you be surprised at how many of the ordinary things of life that we take for granted on a daily basis point to Jesus Christ?

The next time that you drink Welch's grape juice just remember that a Christian by the name of Welch was looking for a way to develop a non-alcoholic drink with grapes so that people who were adverse to alcohol could take the Lord's Supper. And so, he invented Welch's grape juice. Many of us eat pretzels. Has it ever occurred to you why the pretzel is twisted into that well-known shape? The pretzel was developed by a godly Christian monk in AD 610 to reward students who would say their prayers to Jesus each day. He shaped the snack in such a way as to reflect the crossing of arms, for prayers to the one who died on the cross.

Now, just think about it. Whether you eat a pretzel or drink grape juice, you cannot get away from Jesus. Again, Paul tells us Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That's exactly what Jesus himself said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Jesus came into this world specifically to save sinners. That tells us two things. First, we are sinners. Secondly, we need to be saved. If we were not sinners, we would not need a savior. And if we did not need to be saved, Jesus would not have come.

And you do understand that the only reason Jesus came was to save you and me and take us to Heaven? He did not come to build an empire. He did not come to be part of the rich and famous. He did not come to raise money. He did not come to write a book. More books have been written about Him than any other figure in human history. Yet He never wrote one sentence. The reason He came was to save sinners. If our problem had been knowledge, God would've sent a teacher. If our problem had been money, God would've sent a philanthropist. If we had problem with peace, God would've sent a diplomat. If our problem had been health, God would've sent a doctor.

But our problem was sin. So God sent us a savior. He came to save, and He is all that we need to be saved. There are some who say that the church saves, and there are some who claim that baptism saves. And there are millions in this world who believe that religion saves us. America is full of people who believe that clean living saves. But we need to shout this from the rooftops. As was mentioned in our Bible Class today, there's only one person that can save us. Jesus came to save us.

One of our Lutheran missionaries was visiting with a small boy and told him how Jesus died to save sinners. A few days later, she came back to that village and noticed a change in the boy's demeanor. She asked, "What happened to you, son?" And he said, "Well, Miss Missionary, I always knew Jesus was necessary to be saved, but I finally understood a few days ago that not only is Jesus necessary to be saved, but from what you shared, He is all you need to be saved." We are told Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, that is the only kind of people that can be saved.

Jesus himself said, "Those who are well do not need a physician. But those who are sick, I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to righteousness." I've got some good news for you today. If you aren't a sinner, Paul tells us, by grace you have been saved through faith in Christ Jesus and it's a gift from God. Did you know that the only people eligible to go to Heaven are sinners? Did you know that the only people Jesus came to save are sinners? And did you know that the only people that can be forgiven are sinners? And did you know that the only people who can receive eternal life are sinners?

I get amused at people sometimes who say, "Well, I don't go to church because there are all those hypocrites at that church." I'll be honest. I hope there are hypocrites in the church because that's exactly where the hypocrites belong. And if you know one of those who do not come to church because of the hypocrites, I suggest you invite them to come anyway. There's room for one more. Sometimes I believe we ought to put a sign over the front door of our churches that says, "For sinners only. No one else need apply." And Luther tells us that if you try to come to the Savior as a saint, He will reject you as a sinner. But if you come to the Savior as a sinner, He will receive you as a saint.

Now, there are two types of people that I have never met in my life. I have yet to meet a person so good he did not need to be saved. And I have yet to meet a person so bad that he could not be saved. There are some people who have the idea that before they can be saved, they've got to clean up their life. They've got that backwards. You don't clean up your life so you can be saved. You get saved and God cleans up your life. But you have to come to God just as you are, a sinner in need of salvation.

I'm going to close with this story about a beautiful lady years ago who was playing the piano at a gathering of wealthy noble people at a lovely home. After the party was over, everybody went up to her to tell her how talented and beautiful, and lovely she was. A preacher by the name of Cesar Milan went up to this young lady and said, "Young lady, I don't mean to offend you, but I want to tell you that in the middle of all this praise and adulation that you're receiving tonight, unless you receive Christ as your savior, you are as lost as the most wicked harlot in London."

What that preacher said went like a dart into the heart of that young woman. She went home that night, unable to get out of her mind what Cesar Milan had said to her. At three o'clock in the morning, she got out of her bed, knelt down and asked Jesus to come into her life. That lady's name was Charlotte Elliott. In 1835, she had suffered a grave illness and was an invalid when she wrote these words, and you'll be familiar with them, "Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me. And that thou bidst me come to thee, Oh Lamb of God, I come, I come."

Did you know that if you're going to be saved, you must come to Jesus? And did you know that if you come to Jesus, you'll have to come as a sinner? And did you know that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners like you and me? Amen.

And may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.