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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Judica (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

March 18, 2018

Text: John 8:42–59

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Judica Sunday begins our joyful, reverential contemplation of Christ's passion and death. We're not quite in Holy Week but our annual commemoration of our Lord's passion and death is just around the corner. Our contemplation begins as we hear Jesus pray, through the prophetic inspiration of the psalmist, "Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause against an ungodly people, from the deceitful and unjust man deliver me! (Introit, Ps. 43:1). Why would Jesus need to pray for vindication, for God His Father to judge Him and declare Him just and righteous in all He does?

Before we answer that question, we need to consider something of immense importance. The devil's chief weapon is "the lie." The very first temptation humanity had to face was a lie. In the Garden, Satan basically said God was not telling the truth. That God Himself was a liar. Satan called into question God's work of creating man in His image. No so, said Satan. You need to eat the fruit of that tree in order to become like God. You aren't like God yet. But that fruit will make you like Him. And just so you know, God doesn't really want you to be like Him. Then Satan adds more deception. All that talk about dying when you eat that particular fruit...well, God is lying about that too. You won't die. He's just trying to scare you away from something greater: the realization of your own divinity. The devil is the father of lies. And we human beings have been believing his lies ever since Adam and Eve ate of that dreadful fruit. We need to keep before us this basic fact: the devil's chief weapon is "the lie."

The Lord Jesus prays, through the psalmist, that His heavenly Father will vindicate His righteous cause. For our Lord's enemies, the Jews, Satan, and his angels, have been saying that Jesus is a liar, that He's a fraud of a teacher and a fraud of a man. Their accusations begin with at a personal attack on His manhood. John 8:41, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God." In vs. 48, the Jews make their attack even more vicious, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?". You are a sinner born in sin and you teach ungodly

doctrines, declare the Jews. But we know the truth. You were born in sin and cannot claim God as your Father like we can.

Jesus counters their lie with the truth, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me” (vs. 42). Jesus speaks the truth about His origins. He came from God the Father. Don’t forget the original accusation: You, Jesus were born of sexual immorality. Not so, says Jesus. My origins are from the God the Father Almighty. I am eternally begotten of My heavenly Father. And because He is My Father, He sent Me, His Son, to do His will. “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn. 3:16). Consequently, anyone who loves God the Father must, of divine necessity, love Me, says Jesus. Anyone who loves Me, must of divine necessity love My heavenly Father, who sent Me as His gift to the world. For I came from God and He sent Me.

All this back and forth debate between Jesus and the Jews really comes down to this: Do you believe Jesus to be the eternal Son of the Father sent by the Father into this world to save the world from the lies and deceptions of Satan? In the apostolic Church, this was the litmus test for whether or not a teacher or a congregation was being faithful to the Holy Scriptures (I John 4:1–3):

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

The “spirit of the antichrist” reveals itself in any teaching, in any form of religious devotion, in any teacher who denies, downplays, or overlooks that Jesus is God’s eternal Son, sent from God, to accomplish perfectly the Father’s will for this world. When Jesus told the Jews His believers would never see death because He is God, the great “I am” who was before Abraham, they picked up stones to kill Him (vs. 58–59).

Last week, I referred to a popular “praise song” sung in many, many Protestant Churches in our country. That song did not proclaim Christ Jesus as God’s Son come in the flesh nor did it proclaim Him as our heavenly Father’s gift to save us from Satan, sin, despair, and eternal judgment. In short, it reflected the “spirit of anti-Christ.” That kind of so-called devotion must be avoided. For Satan would tell lies

and deceive us using God's name. Instead, we are to call upon the name of Christ in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks to Him at all times and in all places.

The Jews of Jesus' day did not receive nor understand our Lord's teaching. Our Lord Himself told them (and us) why, "Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires...But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me...Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God" (vs. 43–47). They could not hear God's Word for they believed Satan's lie that Jesus wasn't God's Son. "The lie" told them that Man who claims to be God can't possibly be a Savior. Our Lord asks them to convict Him of any sin or any false teaching. But they cannot. Our Lord speaks the truth. And we must hear His true teaching and cherish it as our priceless treasure.

We who confess the name of Christ and have God's baptismal name splashed upon us must always approach God's Word and Sacraments with prayerful humility and joyous thanksgiving. Satan wishes to take God's Word and Sacraments away from us because he wants to take Jesus from us. Let me expose some of Satan's lies about God's Word and Sacraments.

We hear, in many and various ways, that preaching only about Christ and Him crucified and resurrected according to God's Law and God's Gospel is passé, out dated relics from previous generations. "The lie" says we moderns need "practical" sermons about family, finances, relationship, politics, positive self-identify, and so forth. "The lie" says we have such a radical Gospel that we can move past Jesus and all that stuff about living pious and godly lives in repentance and faith. All that talk about contrition and repentance from sin and dead works, atonement, suffering, the shedding of blood for forgiveness, etc. is tiresome and negative. Don't believe such lies for a moment.

Dear saints, constantly pray to the Lord for ears and hearts that desire to hear the truth of Holy Scripture preached and taught in all of its truth and purity. Pray for sermons, hymns, liturgies, Bible studies, devotional materials, etc. that give us Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Redeemer. And we must constantly pray for the grace and strength of the Holy Spirit to live according to the truth of God's Word. We must have our Lord's grace lest we believe and live "the lie."

Similarly, the devil would take away our Lord's blessed sacraments: baptism, holy absolution, and the Lord's Supper. The great "lie" that Satan wishes to deceive us with regarding the Sacraments is that they are not gifts of God whereby He gives to us the truth, love, and salvation of His Son, Jesus. "The lie" says Holy Baptism is merely your testimony of obedience to Jesus. "The lie" says pastors and other Christians cannot say that sins are actually forgiven when we say "I forgive you." "The lie" says the Lord's Supper is only your work of remembering Jesus' death; Christ does not actually give us His body and blood nor does the Christian actually receive real forgiveness when he receives Holy Communion. In short, the sacraments are all about you and your meritorious works rather than Christ saving us through His love and atoning sacrifice. All such thoughts are Satan's lie.

Do not allow Satan's lies take you away from the preaching of Christ crucified and resurrected for your sins. And let not Satan deceive you into thinking the sacraments aren't important for your salvation. Baptism is necessary for salvation. By divine command, the Church must preach God's holy absolution. And the Lord's Supper is a divine, mysterious communion in Christ's body and blood for life, grace, forgiveness, and salvation. Christ gives us His body and blood to receive often in His name. It must not be left undone lest Satan's lie find a home in our hearts and minds.

All true Christian devotion at home, work, and church flows out of who Jesus is and what He did for us. In other words, our 24/7 life in this world and our eternal life in the world to come, are built and formed upon the truth that Jesus is God the Father's Son come in the flesh to save us from Satan's lies by dying and rising again.

Jesus prays that His righteous cause would be judged and vindicated by His heavenly Father. Our Lord's cause is the truth, the truth that all who believe Him will never see death (vs. 51). Let us also pray that His truth would have free course among us:

Vindicate the truth of Your Son, O God, and defend His righteous cause among us. Send out your light and your truth lest the ungodly and deceitful destroy your work. To Your altar we come with exceeding joy. Hear our prayers and hymns of praise for our hope is in You alone. Vindicate and defend your cause ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.