**Whoever Is Not With Jesus**

**Luke 11:14-28**

Our text for meditation is the Gospel lesson read earlier as recorded by the evangelist St. Luke.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

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

Our Gospel lesson finds Jesus casting out a demon that had left a man mute – that is – it had caused the man to be unable to speak. We see this event graphically depicted in the picture on the front of our bulletin. After casting out the demon, some of the Jews grumbled that He did this by the power of Satan.

We ask with Jesus, does it truly make sense that Satan would fight against Satan? Of course not!

Seeing Jesus’ actions and hearing His Words, you have a dilemma. Either Jesus acts on behalf of one stronger than Him – Beelzubul – or Jesus is Himself the stronger One? Jesus is the Word which brought all that is into existence – including angels – before the rebelled against God. Jesus is the stronger man, the One who alone can cast out Satan. All those who are not with Jesus are against Him. AND, if you do not gather with Jesus, you are scattering. Jesus is furthermore claiming that He is the One who creates and maintains Israel, that is, His Church as His flock.

What an excellent text for today's Divine Service. It is plainly obvious that Satan is alive and well in the world. Satan shuts the mouths of some so that they cannot speak, even as he moves others to spew forth some of the foulest hatred and lies. He does work hard upon the hearts and minds of all. And know this, He would gladly drive all away from Christ.

I have no doubt that he is gleefully laughing at the seeming madness which has broken out in our land – who would ever have thought that people would hoard toilet paper. I mean, there was food aplenty at Woodman’s the other day, but almost no toilet paper. I pondered this thinking, “Hmmm, for what use the toilet paper if they have no food?”

Please do not misunderstand, there is much value to common sense being used at a time like this. Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze. Wash your hands regularly, especially after touching things that are communal in nature. If your immune system is compromised, stay away from gatherings of people. And the wisest is, if you think you have symptoms of the cold, flu, or COVID-19, stay home!

Today we have gathered together to hear the word of God. We have gathered to be with Jesus, to gather around His means of grace to us – Word and Sacrament. Are we with Jesus? Are we gathering with Him? Or, are we teaching and doing something else, driving a wedge in the church, maybe scattering it – causing doubt and unbelief?

There are some congregations that have completely cancelled services. Without knowing all the circumstances, there may be good reasons that they did so, but I wonder. Faith trusts that God will watch over, guard and protect His people. May doubt have crept in, a wolf in sheep’s clothing – and been embraced? Is this a gathering with Christ? Or a scattering?

Some other churches will still meet, but have decided to forego communion, especially the common cup. They believe that somehow, this meal which God Himself has instituted and consecrated, might somehow make some ill. In the Lord’s Supper, you eat the very Body of Christ, and drink of His very and real Blood. This meal is given as the medicine of immortality. As such, should a Christian be afraid of receiving the Blessed Sacrament? Or of receiving it in a way other than that in which Christ gave it. Faith believes that this Supper will not harm, but can only help. This meal provides the very antidote for death itself.

So, is cancelling Holy Communion a gathering with Christ? Or a scattering?

Dear friends I know that there is terror over this illness, that people might contract COVID-19. Some might even contract it and die. What we have been told is that the healthy will exhibit certain symptoms to varying degrees of severity, and that there are only a few who are at risk. All should be careful to help stop the spread.

It is true that we may die. In fact, unless Christ returns before that day, you and I will die.

I consider that I might die every time I walk back home from Zion in the evening. I am wearing black, it is dark, I am almost impossible to see, and I have to cross the street where people regularly cut through the parking lot so they do not need to slow down. Some think, “nobody is ever on Church Street,” and pay little attention. So, even in broad daylight, the speed and inattentive driver has almost clipped me walking from Zion to the parsonage.

Yes, our days in this life are numbered, and the ways in which we could depart this mortal coil are indeed legion.

Know this though, the One who cast out the demon in our text is the One who gathers us together in this place – His house. He gathers us in this place which is more like a hospital than anything else. It is the place where those suffering the malady of sinfulness may come for healing from the Good Physician.

Christ does not heal us merely for this life. Consider that all those whom He healed, those mentioned throughout the pages of all four Gospels, they all eventually departed the great tribulation of this temporal valley of the shadow of death. In faith, they were gathered with Jesus in paradise. But on the last day they will be raised, their bodies glorified, and they will walk the new Jerusalem come down out of heaven.

As we gather in this place, we are gathering with Jesus. He is here, just as He was there. He comes not just to heal the temporal problems – to release a man from the clutches of Satan and restore speech – but He gives eternal salvation. He is the antidote for death. He feeds those who gather together for life everlasting, not just to make our lives here temporarily disease free.

We are gathered with Him, so that He might be a comfort to us, that He might bring us peace and strength. Yes, this world often terrifies us. But let us not be so overwhelmed by the influences of temptation that we are not with Jesus. He has overcome the world, so we need not fear it.

Dear friends, there are days that life in this world is terrifying. Yes, there are health tips that might be helpful. The mission of Christ’s church however is the same as it has been since we lost that place in the garden. Christ is delivered here! The church is here to stand up to the old evil foe, to stand toe to toe with death and to declare to the saints who gather – fear not!

Come – be fed and nourished!

Come – receive the medicine of immortality!

Come – be with Jesus.

Come – gather with Him that He might bless you, heal you, and grant you life everlasting.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.