**Follow Your Heart?**

**False Teachers?**

**At Your Peril!**

Jer. 23:16-29 & Matt. 7:15-23

8th Sun. after Trinity – 07.24.2021

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

God gives warning to His children throughout Scripture. Today, both our Old Testament lesson from Jeremiah – and Christ Himself speaking in our Gospel lesson give us warning.

First we heard this: Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’”

Then Jesus proclaimed, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.”…

A little further He declares, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

Dearly beloved of God, it is tough to be a Christian. Let’s face it, there is so much that leads us away from God, so many enticements that beckon seductively to us. We know which ones are wrong, we know which ones are evil. We know what we should do and what we should not do.

There is however, a large problem! While we may know what we should do, our heart tells us something else. In 1862, Emily Dickinson wrote to Mary Bowles, “The heart wants what it wants - or else it does not care.” Selena Gomez winsomely reminded us a few years ago, that this is still true, “the heart wants what it wants.” These are attempts to explain that, while they know what they should do, the heart wants what it wants – even if you know it is going to bring pain.

Today’s world points us to our hearts. When God’s Word is spoken to people and it does not fit the narrative of their life, to often the response to God’s Word is – “well, I know what I believe in my heart.” And you know that your heart cannot be wrong, can it? We are advised regularly, “follow your heart.” That is the world’s dictum, and it sounds right, “Your heart will never lead you astray!” Or at least that is what we are reminded of again and again.

Who wants to believe that what they're doing is a sin? And if it is something we really, really enjoy – something we love – something that makes our hearts sing – it is so much harder to believe that it's a sin. This is even more true when we see the rest of the world doing it, and nobody else saying that there is anything wrong with it. It gets even more difficult to believe it is wrong when there are pastors who say that such behavior is acceptable, that “a loving God would never condemn such behavior.”

What did God say in our Old Testament lesson about the prophets who say continually to those who do not do what is right according to the word of God, and stubbornly follow their own heart? Those pastors who say that no disaster will fall upon them? Just so we are clear that this is not Pastor Jerabek’s “interpretation”, let me read it to you again.

Thus says the Lord of hosts: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, ‘It shall be well with you’; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, ‘No disaster shall come upon you.’” For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to see and to hear his word, or who has paid attention to his word and listened? Behold, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked.

False prophets claim to be Christians speaking God's word. Many Christian teachers tell you to follow your heart. They try to keep the people happy, telling them what they want to hear – just like the ones described in our Old Testament lesson.

What is so very sad is that many are very well-intentioned. Many hope to keep people in church, or bring them to church, often believing that being in church means they are going to heaven. The problem is that in order to bring them or keep them in church, they have to tell the people what they want to hear. They believe they must do so or they will lose their paycheck if they do not. They are more worried about themselves, their earning a living than the truth of God’s Word. Thinking that a full church is more important than proclaiming truth and leaving the rest to God. Their self-concern makes them ravenous wolves - following their own hearts.

What does God's word say about man's heart?

Noah built an altar and offered a sacrifice to God. The Lord smelled the soothing aroma, and the Lord said to Himself, “I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.” (Gen. 8:21)

When some scribes and Pharisees complained to Jesus about His disciples eating with unwashed hands, later He had to explain His response to them to His disciples. “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, acts of adultery, other immoral sexual acts, thefts, false testimonies, and slanderous statements. These are the things that defile the person; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the person.” (Matt. 15:19-20)

Paul talks about the flesh in today’s Epistle, but at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, he revealed this Word of God. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom.1:24-25)

In other passage of Scripture God speaks of man’s heart, and what He declares of it is not flattering. Why do you think that is? Because it has to do with our flesh, the desires of our flesh, the lusts of our flesh – our hearts. Our flesh is sinful! We inherited it from Adam! It can do no good thing. It is why we are to put to death the deeds of the body, and no longer live according to the flesh.

Unfortunately, too often we would rather follow our hearts than God's word. Our world tempts us, often agreeing with our heart. Or it was what lead our heart astray in the first place. That is why we read, Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Rom. 12:1-2)

When false teachers come along agreeing with the world AND our heart, we double down! “My heart agrees with that teacher, that (false) teacher agrees with my heart, so I'm going to throw that against the preacher quoting the scripture, ‘that's just your interpretation pastor.’”

Everybody is certainly entitled to their own opinion, and people can do whatever they desire. They can follow their heart! They can follow the teachers proclaiming what their itching ears want to hear!

God declares through Jeremiah. “I have heard with the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ how long shall there be lies in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesied the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? But the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully.”

Jesus gives warning in our Gospel that on the last day there are those who will claim to have done things in the name of Christ, in Jesus’ own name, to whom Jesus will declare, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.”

To be rather blunt; go ahead, follow your heart...follow the ear tickling false teachers...but you do so at your own peril, at the risk of your eternal well-being.

Of course, if our hearts are correct…if the world is correct… If the false teachers are correct –then God is a loving God who would never punish anyone. That means there is no eternal punishment, there is no hell.

Go ahead, listen to your heart! OR…

You can listen to God’s Word!

It was a bit over 2,000 years ago that someone said, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” If Christ were only a man, it might have sounded more like this, “my heart would rather not suffer on the cross, my heart would that I do not endure what is planned for me.” But He was not only man, so His heart was not corrupted by sin. His will, His heart, was the will of His Father.

The Father’s will – the loving heart of your heavenly Father – was that His only begotten Son endure the suffering and death that you and I deserve for following our heart. He died for the times we sinfully cast off His Word for the appealing words of the false prophets.

Christ purchased the cure for your heart. The truth of Christ requires honesty with your heart – and me, with my heart. My heart does not want to admit that just looking is sinful. How bad can it be if I simply follow my heart, and just hold that grudge a little longer – nobody is hurt by what I hold onto in my heart?

There is another option – a God-pleasing option. Declare boldly that you heart it is sinful and unclean. The truth of Christ is that we have each sinned against God in thought, word, and deed – by what we have done and by what we have left undone. I fall to my knees, confess my lust and the hatred harbored in my heart as sinful, begging God's mercy to forgive me and change my heart, trusting solely in Christ's work, and His innocent suffering and death upon the cross.

This is what is means to live in your baptism. There is no fear in your adoption as sons, for in daily contrition and repentance drowns the sinful flesh and the new man is raised in you by God to live a new life.

This is the work of God's Spirit that would move in us, to remake our hearts. Of our own fleshly heart, this does not happen. Christ is delivered to you in Word and Sacrament, and in these means of God’s grace, the Spirit works on your hearts – putting to death the deeds of the body and making of your hearts new, repentant, and believing hearts. Hearts that trust no longer in themselves, but in Christ.

Thanks be to God that in Christ, you have been given a new heart – to life everlasting – the heart of Christ. Amen.