

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 26, 2021

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
C: **Amen.**

Scripture Readings

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you."

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. And he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tent. Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. And as soon as the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied. But they did not continue doing it.

Now two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the Spirit rested on them. They were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua the son of Nun, the assistant of Moses from his youth, said, "My lord Moses, stop them." But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!"

3 John

The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face.

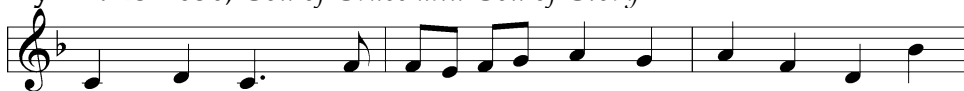
Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, each by name.

Mark 9:38-50

John said to [Jesus], "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us. For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

"Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Hymn: *LSB 850, God of Grace and God of Glory*



1 God of grace and God of glo - ry, On Your peo - ple
2 Lo, the hosts of e - vil round us Scorn the Christ, as -
3 Cure Your chil - dren's war - ring mad - ness; Bend our pride to
4 Save us from weak res - ig - na - tion To the e - vils



pour Your pow'r; Crown Your an - cient Church's sto - ry;
sail His ways! From the fears that long have bound us
Your con - trol; Shame our wan - ton, self - ish glad - ness,
we de - plore; Let the gift of Your sal - va - tion



Bring its bud to glo - rious flow'r. Grant us wis - dom,
 Free our hearts to faith and praise. Grant us wis - dom,
 Rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wis - dom,
 Be our glo - ry ev - er - more. Grant us wis - dom,



grant us cour - age For the fac - ing of this
 grant us cour - age For the liv - ing of these
 grant us cour - age Lest we miss Your king - dom's
 grant us cour - age, Serv - ing You whom we a -



hour, For the fac - ing of this hour.
 days, For the liv - ing of these days.
 goal, Lest we miss Your king - dom's goal.
 dore, Serv - ing You whom we a - dore.

Sermon

“I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” That’s what John said in our epistle reading. “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.” Isn’t that true for every parent? John is speaking in terms of spiritual children, that those who have come to faith through his preaching and teaching are like his children -- but we can say the same for all parents. We want the best for our kids. We want them to succeed, to be happy and healthy, but we also want to instill our values in them.

We want our children to share our ideals and our priorities. If you’re a Southern fan, you’re probably not going to get your son hats and jerseys from Mississippi State; if you’re a Cardinals fan, you’re not going to take him to many Cubs games. How much more important is it when it comes to faith? Eternal life is far more important than team rivalry; Christian parents want their children to share their faith, knowing that that faith is the key to the most important things in the universe.

The way parents spend their time and energy and money teaches their children what that family sees as most important. If the truth you want your children to walk in is the truth of Christ, rather than sports or fishing or whatever other cause or hobby people invest themselves in, then it takes more than lip service and a weekly hour-long visit -- it takes a daily lifestyle and focus. We do indeed rejoice when we see our children sharing our values and priorities, when we see our children walking in the truth -- we just want to make sure that that truth is the one that really matters in the end.

But here, John isn’t talking about biological children; he is looking after the well-being of those younger believers with that same father-like responsibility. Certainly there is plenty of talk in the New Testament that’s like this: coming to faith is being born again, receiving spiritual birth, and while God is the true Father of us all, Paul also talks about those who came to faith by his preaching as his spiritual children. We don’t normally use the term “Father So-and-So” in the Lutheran Church for pastors, but this is one of those places that does use father-and-children language for Christian relationships. John clearly knows all these people personally, and the basic situation is this: he’s writing to a man named Gaius who has offered hospitality to traveling group of Christians, and also mentions a church leader named Diotrephes who did not welcome them.

This is the same John who wrote that Gospel, as well as 1 and 2 John; the last one, we heard just two weeks ago and there are similarities. This letter gives us few details about the exact situation, but it seems to be this: a group of Christians passed through the area. Probably it was a group of

missionaries or some people otherwise going about Church business, and not just people who happen to be Christians. Gaius gave them hospitality and support, and apparently did it so generously and eagerly that when John hears about it, he has to write. On the contrary, Diotrophes puts himself first, talks wicked nonsense, refuses to welcome these Christian brothers, and even kicks out of the church whoever does welcome them.

The most striking detail is that it's the bad guy, Diotrophes, who is the leader of the local church; on the other hand, it's unclear who Gaius is, but quite possibly he was a layman. Certainly in my position I'd like to think that the pastor is supposed to be the good guy; the pastor is supposed to be the ideal of Christian virtue and hospitality. But you know what human nature is like, and you probably know of pastors who haven't measured up to that standard. This sounds like a pretty unhealthy situation, in this congregation, with Diotrophes acting arrogantly and kicking people out.

I'm very thankful that, at least as long as I've been here, this congregation has been a pretty peaceful and harmonious place. I hope nothing happens to change that, and I especially do not want to be the cause of it like Diotrophes. But I also know that human sin makes us all fall short of the Christian ideal we're called to, the truth we're meant to walk in, and I've heard far, far too many stories about unhealthy congregations and bad pastors. It's common enough that many of you may have had experiences like that. Sadly, being hurt by someone at church -- whether pastor, lay leaders, or another member -- is one of the top reasons that people walk away from Christianity altogether. It's easy to be disillusioned: how can someone claim to follow Jesus but act like that towards others?

There are no easy answers. Sin is the ultimate answer, but knowing that doesn't make it harder to bear in real life situations. Our behavior and lifestyle is definitely meant to be different than the unbelieving world around us: "let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven," Jesus says. Or "by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." So when Christians don't have those good deeds or that love for one another, it is not the Gospel they are reflecting, but to use John's words here about Diotrophes, "wicked nonsense." The behavior of Diotrophes sounds outrageous, but every day people do similar outrageous things in the name of the Church with none of the truth nor the love that John is always emphasizing and encouraging for those who read his letters.

So if you're one of those people who have been hurt by Christians and churches in the past, I'm glad you're still here. Jesus also had some bad experiences with religious people. In fact, they killed him. One of our Concordia college professors even has a fantastic presentation titled "The Gospel for Those Broken by the Church" and if you think that might apply to you, I will be more than happy to share it with you. This is a problem that goes back to the time of the Apostles, to the time of Jesus, to the time of the Old Testament faithful among the Israelites -- at all times where there has been some kind of religious establishment or institutional church organization, there have been those within it who don't reflect the nature of the Gospel. Diotrophes is just one example of that.

Likewise Jesus has some pretty strong words in today's Gospel reading about those whose words or actions keep others away from Jesus, or as we could say "those broken by the Church." He finishes in this passage, "Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." If Christians and churches have lost that flavor, that Holy Spirit and wisdom, that essential truth about Jesus and love for each other... How can it be recovered?

It sounds like these two in John's letter give a nice case study to illustrate what Jesus was talking about in this Gospel reading. Gaius is one who fits the first part: "whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward." He gave these other Christians (who were otherwise strangers to him) much more than a cool drink of water, and John commends him enthusiastically. On the other hand, Diotrophes is pushing others away from the Church, away from Christ, causing divisions, talking wicked nonsense -- overall, acting badly and

speaking unfaithfully, like those who cause others to sin who, Jesus warns, “it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” He’s certainly not the example we want to imitate.

Instead, let us focus on Gaius. One early writer said in connection with this text “There is no greater joy than to know that those who have heard the gospel are now putting it into practice by the way in which they live.” This is the branch that, connected to Jesus the vine, bears much good fruit. This is the seed that falls on good soil and produces a bountiful crop, thirty times, sixty times, a hundred times greater than the seed that was sown. This is someone who does not hide his light under a basket, who is the salt of the earth, who (as we heard in James recently) demonstrates his faith through his faithful living.

So again, not to sound like a broken record, but just about everything that John wrote boils down to those two central themes: truth and love. The truth about Jesus, having the right faith in the One who is the way, the truth, and the life; and love for our neighbors (and especially our brothers and sisters in Christ), reflecting towards others this light from him who is the light of the world. “Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good,” John encourages us. Imitate good -- most fundamentally, this is (as Scripture also tells us) to imitate Christ. To imitate his humility, not putting ourselves first like Diotrephes; to imitate his generosity and compassion, like Gaius; to imitate his faithfulness to the Father, walking in the truth.

Lord’s Prayer

**Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

P: Everlasting Father, source of every blessing, mercifully direct and govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may complete the works You have prepared for us to do; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

C: Amen.

All: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

P: Let us bless the Lord!

C: Thanks be to God!

P: The almighty and merciful Lord, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.