

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

Our sunday morning readings are not something hurriedly thrown together or haphazard. Things in the church are done in good order to show Christ more clearly. The sundays during the trinity season develop three great themes. The first, is that of the baptized life, baptism and its graces, the last is the second coming of our Lord and the Christian's preparation for the return of Christ. Where we find ourselves today is in that middle part, after baptism and before Jesus returns in glory. And there is a struggle in the Christian life during this time. It is always true that the promise of Christ stands, he does not allow us to struggle alone, but he is with us in our struggles and directs us, giving us the tools to come through.

Today, Jesus teaches us to watch out for false teachers; don't put your trust in men. Our struggles in this world between baptism and the second coming of our Lord are against our flesh, the world, and against false teaching and pastors, that is, wolves in sheep's clothing. You will recognize them by their fruit, our Lord says; and you are obligated to notice. We are not to look the other way or pretend we don't see it. We cannot let our guard down in this world; we are called upon to think critically of what we hear and what we see. We are to judge what we hear by God's word alone; earthly wisdom and your own wisdom will let you down. Even men placed into the apostolic ministry may let you down. Pastors are not infallible. So on this side of heaven, we must listen and think critically.

This exhortation to beware of false prophets is interestingly placed in Christ's sermon. A weeks ago we heard in the Gospel, "Do not judge lest you be judged". Now that verse is misused by many to stop theological discussion when it is talking about sins that we don't want to talk about. Others use it to say "who am I to judge, I don't really want to look carefully into other people's lives even though it's my vocation to do so". And so parents turn a blind eye to their children, and husbands and wives ignore their spouses' sins. Here, Jesus tells us to beware.

We are to judge, to be discerning, and to watch out. It is not just something pastors are to do, but something every Christian is called upon to do within their vocation. You are to beware of false prophets and false teachings.

The word prophet in apostolic times was connected with the preaching and teaching office. Today it is fair to say “beware of pastors and theologians who do not stand on the word of God, beware of those who would undermine the work of Christ, while claiming the name of Christ.” You are to beware of anyone who presumes to speak with the authority of God but yet their words do not match up with what the bible says. And each and every Christian is equipped for this judging. You have the Small Catechism, you have the holy scriptures.

Jesus calls those false prophets wolves, a demonic term in the Holy Scriptures. He also calls them rotten trees with bad fruit that are to be cut down and thrown into the fire; and fire has hellish overtones to it. This may sound harsh to our midwestern sensitive ears, but our Lord is impressing upon us the seriousness of false doctrine. People who claim to stand in the stead of Christ and teach falsely are demonic. They are fit only for the fires of hell. Theology is that serious. IT is not a playful pastime or a hobby or something we can agree to disagree on. Theology matters because truth matters.

Our god is a god of truth, and if man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God, then every word that comes from our Lord is precious to us and should be held in the highest regard.

It's popular today to be spiritual, its popular to have spiritual convictions. But there is little mention nowadays of the truth. That which is true for all men at all times in all places. There is little to no mention of biblical truth. Consistent and unchanging doctrine that transcends our own generation and shows us how God has always been and always wills to be towards us.

Instead the spirit of our age, turns faith into a personal and private matter. Something every individual must find for themselves and god forbid they would dare to judge or impose their beliefs upon someone else.

The focus today is not outward towards an almighty god, it is inward toward a subjective feeling. The false prophets know this human condition and tell you what your sinful flesh wants you to hear rather than what your almighty God wants you to know for certain. Jeremiah paints the picture of a transcendent God that fills heaven and earth, that sees everything that is going on; and wants us to know him and to be with him. We in the Lutheran Church are not immune to false spirits. The devil seeks to focus upon the moment. Changing the truth and what we want to hear, in order for us to find and gain our own pleasures. We believe and confess but are always wary to suggest that others are wrong. But the scriptures are clear, and the way to salvation is exclusive, it is Christ alone, and they have revealed the truth to us. Take a look at the Book of Concord, consider how Lutherans have always confessed, both in the positive, and in the negative! Do not abide false doctrine and teaching, condemn it and be watchful.

Jesus says to you, "Beware of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves". It is the way of evil to dress itself up in sheep's clothing, to look good and salutary, to appear honorable. The bible says the devil himself comes not as the wicked destroyer, a man dressed in red with a pitchfork, but as an angel of light. Appearing to be holy and good. So also false prophets come looking like sheep of the good shepherd. They may even believe they are sheep of the Good Shepherd, not knowing that their fruit is rotten and poisonous. But you can recognize by their teaching and doctrines that they are not.

Falsehood is much more dangerous when it is wrapped up in what appears to be the truth. Jesus says, "Beware," but he does not leave you without a guide, without a means to judge the false prophets.

To live according to the flesh is death, but we live by the Holy Spirit, given to you in your baptism. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of god. You received the spirit of adoption, and the Holy Spirit guides you against false teachings and false prophets in concrete ways. He caused the Holy Scriptures to be written for your protection. The very word of God is your shield against wolves. You might be tempted to say, "I'm not a theologian, I'm not an expert in the

Holy Scriptures, how do I distinguish between a false and genuine teacher, when they both seemingly use holy scripture?"

The simplest answer is the most profound. Recount the words from your Christian instruction that most of you learned when you were quite young. What are the 10 commandments? What is the Lord's Prayer? What is the Apostles' Creed? Most of you have these memorized, and it's good to recount them, because when those difficult questions that seek to tear you away from your good shepherd; when those questions arise you can cling to the simple words of your faith. How do you know a man and women living together outside of marriage is wrong? The sixth commandment. How do you know that talking poorly about your neighbor behind his back is a sin? The 8th commandment. How do you know Jesus is the only way to salvation and the Lord and Saviour who saves by grace through faith? The apostles creed.

This is the entry into God's word, you learned it as a child, in Sunday school and at home. The Lord is looking after you through his word by his Holy Spirit.

That is the way of salvation. It is narrow because it doesn't let in any of the opinions or qualifications of men. Rather it admits that only the merits of Christ and his righteousness are salvific. He alone is the one through whom we gain entrance into heaven and are protected in this world. Our Lord alone is the way that leads to everlasting life. He said I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me. His is a difficult and unpopular way because it flows from and through his cross. Through an apparent failing when our Lord hung on the cross and died for the sins of the world. But he blazed the trail through Calvary.

It is into this way you are baptized and share in the life he has won. Through the cross you have been entirely forgiven of your sins and given the tools to withstand in the day of temptation. Through his suffering and death he has provided a shield for you against your flesh, against the world and against the devil, through his resurrection you have been raised to new life in him. The Spirit himself bears witness we are children of God. And if children heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

In Jesus name. Amen.