

The Repenting Church

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Luke 14:15–24

The Church's Calendar Is Not the World's

I feel compelled to say something today because the Church has gotten to the point where her calendar is governed by the world. We run our Sunday school with the fall term of school and with the spring term. We have one day a year that we remember mothers and a day a year that we remember fathers, until what the world says leads us around by the nose until we are simply making sounds like the words. The Church does not live by the calendar of the world.

Time is hallowed by the Church. Time will come to an end. It is not a god.

So I feel compelled somewhat today to say something to you.

Today Is About the Church Learning to Repent

I'm going to talk only briefly about fathers, because today is not about Father's Day. Today is about the Church learning to repent, and to repent also for the way those of us who are fathers have been fathers and husbands, and those of us who are sons have been sons and brothers, there's much to repent for, and I'll be talking about that. I say that also because we are, next Sunday, there's going to be a great deal said about God our Father, and from that we will learn something about what Fatherhood is in this work.

But I say this furthermore because we are caught up in the midst of wild enthusiasm of the crusades who saved the world, with the famous evangelists, and of people who are making noise all over the world, starting a religious movement of promising faith and keeping those promises. It is typical that when you dishonor and despise God's words, you begin to trumpet and bloat and praise the things you are doing. The promises are the promises of God. First, that's what we are about. But the movement wants to make all of its promises about what it's going to do, and it calls it religious.

Now, there is a way that God before has brought good out of Egypt, and turn all to good that seems most ill and teach us our calling to fulfill is the prayer of the church in one of the

ancient hymns of St. Ambrose. For we are interested also in promises, but it's not cool to be cool about the Word of God. And if all we can talk about is the promises we make, the love we have, what we're going to do, how we're going to break the wall, how we're going to do things, then we have [unclear] in front of God in the highest. We have thumbed our nose at Him and bloated our own breath.

So today it is about not being cool toward the Word of God, about the repenting Church. And the President of our Synod has called us to have a Sunday of repentance. We will have one in this congregation. But today they're already talking about that.

Sloth: Coolness Toward the Word of God

For the sin in this text today is one of the most difficult to deal with. It has to do with laziness toward the Word of God. The ancient word for that was sloth. It does not mean merely somebody who is lazy in the body and just lies around all day and does nothing except drink and [unclear]. It's not talking about that kind of thing. It is talking about a kind of coolness toward the Word of God where the heart judges that the Word of God really doesn't have that much meaning for my life, not for the hard things of daily life.

Like a man must have a piece of property. He's got to have a car or rollerblades or a house or a bed. He's got to have something. "Well, I bought a piece of property and I've got to go check it out." And if you have a piece of property, you better have a [unclear] so that you can have groceries. I mean, that's the hard [unclear] of life.

If you have a job, then you've got to have your tools. "Excuse me, I just want some tools. I've got to go see if they work."

And what is the point of life if you don't have a mate and don't have a family? To live a dreary, lonely life? Just tickling yourself and pleasing yourself as much as you can? That's no way to live. So having a family: "I've just taken a wife. Excuse me."

It isn't that the Word of God is hated. You're neither hot nor cold; you just push it to the periphery of life. That is what sloth is about the Word of God. If a man is ignorant, you can teach him. If he is crippled, you can give him therapy. But if he is lazy, it is awfully hard to do anything with him. God says, "I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth." That's what you're [unclear]. So, the excuses of the invited guests are not [unclear] things.

They are not the murderers, the pusher of drugs, the drunken, the fornicators, society's underbelly of indecent cruelty. These people were Israel, the church like you, like the church in Laodicea. This is the people of God. They simply judge that the Word of God makes no difference if you want to be happy, prosperous, successful, decent, and making your mark in the world.

The Word of God is simply at the edge of things. And the cares and the riches and the pleasures of life, said Jesus, grow like weeds around the Word of God. We're not talking about the heathen who don't know God; [unclear] about Israel and the church. The weeds grow and choke it out that the word never comes to maturity. It never has any fruit.

The Call to Repent

So the call today is to repent. I call you, said Jesus, to the preacher and the preacher to the people. Be zealous and repent. I'm standing there knocking on the eardrums of your heart, open because I've got a feast for you.

It is a call to the church. Get [unclear] up. And if you're going to be against God's word, then hate it. Kill it. Don't ignore it. And tip your hat to it. And dance around the Bible. "Oh, what good the Bible is." Kill it. Or live it.

[unclear] is not true about the Word of God, for there is an urgency in God, a zeal, a determination. He wants us alive, fast and full of joy. He wants us celebrating and eating, living and loving, hoping and waiting, and suffering at great expense in the Word of God. That's what He wants. "I want my house full."

Keeping the Sabbath Holy

Sometime or another, you have heard that about the Sabbath day and the word of God. You were taught or you are being taught, keep the Sabbath day holy. And how do you make your holiday holy? We have good ways. A million and a half cars leave Chicago at the beginning of a holiday. In one brief period of four hours, they're going somewhere to keep holiday. But you have learned to say, this is how you keep the Sabbath holy: "We should fear and love God that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it." You have been taught that there is an earnestness and a zeal that responds to God's determination make you holy, to give you eternal rest, to make you alive. It's a feast.

Invited to the Banquet

Like Israel of old, you too have been invited to this banquet. Prophet after prophet after prophet told Israel, God kept repeating it to them. And as you heard in Zechariah, the prophet said, “Repent, turn back to the Lord your God.”

For God is always seeing our rump, never our face. We’re always running the other way. We think that that’s fun. Go over there and make a promise and keep that. Run over there and get converted and do that. That’s what’s fun. We always have our backs toward Him. And the prophets kept saying, turn around, turn around. And the people did not listen, did not pay attention.

So it was with Laodicea, the Church of God. We’re not talking about a heathen gathering. And so, Israel, now, has Jesus in the presence of us. There he stands. He is the king of the kingdom. And he says, tell the people now, “Come, for everything is ready. I am here.”

And like the congregation of Laodicea, you have also heard the call of the gospel to come to the feast of Messiah: that gracious and holy absolution, that sacred and blessed bath for rebirth into life in God, which some of the great crusaders for evangelism deny. He doesn’t give you the Holy Spirit and baptism. He did it by praying for it. Your works are more important than his work.

You heard that invitation. You heard the invitation to come and eat.

And we don’t just give you a piece of bread and say the body is somewhere; you should think in your heart where it is and go there. The body is put in your mouth, from him, by him, and the blood. It’s not just a little picture, some kind of reminder, like a picture of grape juice would remind you you should get grape juice for breakfast; but this is the blood of the forgiveness. You’ve heard all of that; you’ve been baptized, and you have eaten and drunk. And so now Jesus is saying to you, knocking on the eardrums of your heart, “If anyone opens to me, I will come in.” What will he do with him? “I will eat with him.” Now, let’s talk about the sacrament. Somebody talking about what will happen after a while when you get in heaven—what will happen after a while in heaven is already what we had in the sacrament, until we get there in the resurrection; then we will have the full—blown thing, by sight, not merely by hearing and by faith. But when all of these people, Israel and Laodicea, heard this,

The Excuses

What did Israel do? They had their excuses. “I really am quite busy with my land, and with my work, and with my family.” Good things. And for that, the Word of God pushed off to the edge.

They don’t kill a preacher. They kill Jesus, finally. If the preacher preaches, somebody’s going to get killed. They’re going to kill it, get rid of it. If he say the words, be careful.

The Master’s Anger: “Go Quickly”

So the master of the feast was very angry. He said, “Go quickly.” Now listen to that. “Go quickly.”

All this foot dragging that we have. I don’t know if I’ve been telling you to learn the second article. Oh, you’re foot dragging? Go quickly!

And I want you to go into the streets and cities; I want you to find anybody you can find there: the cripple who can’t get up and walk, the lame, the blind, the ones who can’t see where they’re going, those who are maimed—they’ve been beaten down, knocked around, all bruised up, they can’t possibly heal themselves. Bring them into my feast, because “I want my house full.” Go quickly. “Well, we have done that, we have done that,” said the [unclear]. “There’s still room.” “Good,” said the master.

Now I want you to go out in all of the places along the highways and hedgerows, and I want you to dig them out one by one and compel them to come in. Compel them to come in.

“Buy from Me Gold Refined by Fire”

Now he is talking to us about us. The congregation that says, well, we’re Lutheran, we have the Bible, we’re conservative, we certainly don’t like those liberals. And we have the catechism. I was confirmed once. I know all about that. We have a building, we have our budget. What do we need? Well, we don’t really need much. Yeah, maybe we do. We need a few more people so that we can guarantee our continued existence: more people get more income. That’s what we need. That would be nice, but we really have what we need.

Well, let me counsel you, said Jesus, “Buy from me the gold refined by fire.” You want to be rich. You are among the poor that are dragged in. And the richness is the promises that have

been burned when the Lamb of God was roasted. The holy absolution that has spoken to you at this altar, the water that washed you, the bread and wine, where He gives you His body and blood. That is what He wants.

Buy—just put a linen on you that is white, that is, be covered up with the work of Christ. Don't be so occupied and fascinated and enchanted by all of the wonderful things and how you've decorated yourself up to make yourself attractive to the world and get some eyesalve: the Holy Spirit anointing you so that you can see, calling you by the Gospel, enlightening you, sanctifying you, keeping you in the faith. That's my counsel to you, said Jesus.

And so we today want to give ears to the counsel of Jesus for you and for me.

The Dreadful Warning

His warning is dreadful. The master of the feast says, "Compel them to come in, because not one who was invited will taste of my feast." God have mercy on us. And in Laodicea, the Lord said, "Because you are neither hot nor cold, you make me sick to my stomach, and I'm going to puke [unclear]." The warning is dread.

That may be the way a lazy soul first gets awakened. [unclear]. You don't mess with God's Word, or He'll mess with you.

But that's not what God is asking. What God is asking is to give us a feast. He wants His house full.

"Those whom I love, I chasten, I reprove, so be zealous and repent." God isn't interested in a bunch of corpses in hell. He didn't make hell for people. But God bled and died to make heaven and to open it up and to give it to you.

"So I stand at the door and knock. Behold, if you open, I come in. Listen to my voice, and I will come in and eat with you and you with me."

So, my beloved, let the zeal of God and the urgency of God, the determination of God that his house will be full, turn you to be stirred by that zeal, turn you around and be with you toward God. The alternative is most dreadful.

Go Quickly to the Feast; Compel Them to Come In

And so there are some simple little words left now. Go quickly. Go where? Run off to find the meeting so you can make a promise? No!

Go quickly to that feast. Wish it. Run with hunger. Say, "Tell me again." Peace. Go quickly and bring anybody with you can find. Bring them all.

Second, servants: Compel them to come in.

How will our children have any zeal when they watch you adults? Will they have any zeal and passion for that word? Cool about it? [unclear]? Refusing to teach it at home as if that weren't your job? The adults and the congregation. What do the children see happening with us with this word of God. Adults in the congregation compel them to come in.

I may be wrong. I'm an old man. And I have too much sin, maybe of arrogance. But don't let that excuse you.

Parents tell me the kids don't want to go to church. The kids don't want to do this. They don't want to do that. And the parents stand there like whimpering kids themselves. If you put your foot under the table, I tell them to eat the food at this table, then do what I tell you. If you don't want to do what I tell you, then eat somewhere else or go hungry. Don't belly up to this table and then tell me you don't want to hear the word of God.

But the parents are afraid. We're terrorized by the children. They may not like us, and if they don't like us, our life is gone.

So I say, pastors, parents, and teachers, listen to what the Spirit says, to the Church of Laodicea, to the angel of that church you write. So servants, compel them to come in.

I don't mean break their arms, beat them over the head, but I mean there is a compulsion that can be exercised. You can't make Christians, but neither can you get wet if you don't step in the shower. No matter how much you stink and how much you wish you were clean. If you don't get in the shower, you don't get wet. Well, that's the way it is.

You come to hear the preaching. It's not just that everybody studies his Bible by themselves and thinks whatever it means. You let [unclear] preach and you listen and you gladly hear it and learn it.

The Feast Is the Roasted Lamb of God

But that only is still preliminary. The feast is the roasted lamb of God. God's love laid this Lamb, Jesus, on the altar. There's a cross hung in there, full of shame, death, rejection, and condemnation. Because God said, "In this sacrifice I am taking your sins, the sacrifice of my Son." And the love of God was a hot flame that roasted this Lamb. And if that weren't hot enough, God's wrath blew the flame like a bellows blows the fire in a forge. Until it consumed the Lamb. He was barbecued for [unclear].

He is the feast. Come, now ready, Jesus said, when he walked among them. Come, now is the feast. And so he said to you, what you sing with great glory: "Hosanna, please save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

We don't go to Him to make the meal. He makes the meal to come to us, to feed us. Come, for it's already now. I have prepared it.

And what does He give us in this meal? He gives us Himself. He is no stingy, lazy, penny—pinching God. Everything He is and has He gives. He says it's yours.

[unclear]. Listen to me. [unclear]. [unclear] at the door. If you will open, I will come in and sit with you and eat with you and you with me.

Forgiveness, Peace, and Joy

For where there is the forgiveness of sin, there is no longer wrath and condemnation. We are free. We are free to praise Him and to tell the whole world, He is the one. We are seeing Him.

And where there is that forgiveness, there is peace. Not because we don't have conflict, trouble, and war with ourselves, but because peace lies in that forgiveness. The pastor says to the congregation, "The peace of the Lord be with you," and you roar, "Amen." No quarrels, no fights, no resentments carried on here. We've killed them and dropped them. [unclear], and that's what he gives them. Not because they are absent, but because they are overcome.

And where there is that peace, there is joy. Things are right in heaven and on earth. That's what we mean with justification, by grace, through faith. Things are right. Jesus is our righteousness with God and with each other.

And so, where there is joy... Well, let me ask you, were you ever full of joy and you sat around coolly saying nothing to nobody? Where there's joy, it bubbles like a fountain, it comes out,

for what the heart is full of spills out of the mouth, and in some days we will be face to face at that great party, the marriage feast of the Lamb, the great banquet, then we will see and taste, and there will be no interruption, no jadedness, no sloth, no yawning, only opening him out to praise.

Until that time, here's where your heaven is. It is by faith now, not by sight, but where he is in the [unclear], where he is with his word, where he is with his forgiveness. That is where the heaven is. And he said, "Come on, everything is ready." The peace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.

SOURCE

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