

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

Today we find ourselves in the second Sunday in the church season of Lent, forty days that not only take us back to the basics of our spiritual life initiated in the waters of our baptisms, but also realizing that saved by grace through faith, we are justified before God. At the same time this is a season that should unsettle us, disquiet us as we consider that we are called as Christians to participate in God's work in this world, not only in our congregation and immediate community, but in this world. We find ourselves in a country that is divided and becoming more so day by day, we find ourselves in a world where a new mosquito-borne virus is affecting more and more people, especially infants and those still carried by their mothers. We find ourselves hearing impossible promises from those who would lead us, hearing threats from those who would destroy us, hearing pleas for help from those who have less than nothing within and without our borders.

I suppose one could say that the reality of life in this world shows problems that are seemingly unsolvable. But then our gospel this morning jars our thinking and strongly suggests that we can't be distracted or deterred by the events in the world around us as unsolvable as they may seem. Last week Satan attempted to distract Jesus, to lure him away from what God has sent him to do. Today we experience Satan, working through others, trying to accomplish the same thing, to distract our Lord, and us, from his journey to Jerusalem.

Jesus has been carrying out the mission of the Father, he's cast out demons, he's performed cures, he's called people to repentance, told parables relating to life in this world, as well as to the end-times, and now he intends to finish his work, the Father's work. He has stated many are called but few are chosen, that the gate to salvation is narrow. Now some Pharisees have come to warn him to flee the region of Galilee, that Herod wants to kill him. We wonder why Pharisees, many who have no regard for Jesus are warning him. Of course they would like the problem that is Jesus removed, but they would like someone else to do it, Pilate maybe, who has the region south of Galilee. This warning could be a threat, perhaps that's why Jesus calls Herod a fox.

But Jesus responds with a strong message to the Pharisees, to Herod and to anyone who might be concerned in this. Jesus is not going to be distracted from his Father's mission, he's going to continue to do what he's been doing, casting out demons, healing, preaching and teaching until the time appointed by the Father has come. He tells them that it is impossible for a prophet to be killed away from Jerusalem. And he laments for Jerusalem, a city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. Those living in Jerusalem think they have a special relationship with God, and Jesus wants to gather them together and protect them but they are not willing. But they will be held responsible for their refusal.

Jesus also tells those listening to him that they will not see him again until the time when they will say “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” Jesus will press on until the work given him by the Father, affirmed in his baptism in the Jordan, is done.

So how about us? How about you and me? Are we pressing on in the new lives given us in our baptisms? Or are we letting the distractions and attractions of the world around us keep us from the work of the Father? Distractions and attractions such as envy and pride, anger, greed, lust. Things that are intended to separate us from God, things that get between us and our baptism, our worship, our hearing and doing God’s Word. These things are held out to us constantly, calling for our participation, because we deserve it, our lives will have deeper meaning, we’ll have greater satisfaction, and we’ll feel secure. But brothers and sisters these things are lies! They are intended to block us, to get us off on detours from the life given in our baptisms.

But remember the basics of our spiritual life, given to us in baptism. Nearly every Sunday we start our service with Confession & Forgiveness, which calls us away from the worldly focus on self, bringing us back into relationship with the Holy Trinity. We confess our sins knowing that try as we might, we are often helpless in the grip of sin. We hear nearly every Sunday of Christ crucified, Jesus who carried our sins to the cross, who finished the Father’s mission.

Our sins have been carried to the cross, we are saved, justified, we are people of God, baptized and set free from sin, and we know we live in Christ as his people. We have been given new life and our Lord will complete that life which was started in our baptisms. We cannot solve the problems of the world, we can’t change the world, but pressing on with our mission from Christ, we can change the world for one person at a time.

AMEN