

The Second Sunday of Advent – 2022

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-14

Matthew 3:1-12

My dog thinks that I'm omniscient. Either that or he's a bad liar. There are certain things that I don't want him to do. These are more venial sins than mortal sins. I don't want him on my bed and I don't want him digging in the yard. He knows this. Ace is a pretty good scout – totally and beautifully trained, but he's a dog. He hasn't read Hamlet and he doesn't have a 401K. He has an animal's nature which sometimes takes over. He loves people a bit too much but that is a canine virtue in my book. He loves me which is part of the reason he wants to get on my bed. Always my side of the bed; never Alise's. Alise couldn't care less if he gets on the bed but she enforces the rule.

Ace seems to have a conscience. Whenever I catch him doing something that he shouldn't do he'll hang his head and slowly walk away from me, if we're outside. Or, if we're inside, he'll quickly sit down, kinda sideways-like, hang his head, look at me out of the corner of his eye and rapid fire wag his tail against the floor. I've seen it a million times. I know exactly what it means. The crazy thing is, when I come into a room unannounced, he'll pull this "I'm totally guilty" routine because he thinks that I already know what he did. I have no doubt that he'd done something behind my back. He does not lie, or else he's really bad at it. I'm not inclined to disabuse him of the notion that I'm omniscient as it's a useful tool to keep Ace in check.

God is omniscient and you know it. He gave you a conscience. You know what pleases Him. You know what sin is and you engage in it anyway. And then, you try to lie. Do you know how ridiculous a sin lying is? Lying to your fellow man is absolutely lying to God. I hope that you're bad at it. Every Christian ought to be a horrible liar. Lying is a gateway sin – it leads to other stupid stuff. Good liars get into way more trouble than bad liars. Good liars probably have a harder time repenting; that's just conjecture on my part. Good liars, people who deceive others regularly, probably think that they can get away with a lot. They can't. No one can "get away" with sin. You either repent or you don't but no one gets away with it.

Repentance is truthfulness. It is impossible to overestimate the centrality of truthfulness in Christianity. The Son of God declared Himself to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Those realities are inextricably intertwined. You cannot have one without the other two. You cannot do violence to the Truth and pretend that you endorse the Way and the Life. You cannot do violence to the Truth and pretend to endorse the Messianic King. This is why we repent. The Truth is our Life. The Truth is our Way. We don't pretend in the Kingdom of God. Christianity leads us to be open and honest about who we genuinely are. My dog seemingly knows what honesty is. You are so much more. You are made in God's image. The treasure of eternal Truth has been invested in your very soul. Do you not love it? Do you not value its divine qualities? Do you not value its sublime sweetness? The bonds of friendship and love are born from people, from all walks of life, being equally committed to the Truth. Truth is the bedrock of marriage. Truth is the cornerstone of the church. Truth is the portal to knowledge. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

John the Baptizer was preparing His way. John's voice is remarkably unique. He prepared the people of old to welcome the Lord's Christ in faith. When Jesus began His ministry, it was in the wake of John's preaching. And now, for us, John's voice prepares us for Jesus' second advent, His return on the Last Day. John is a remarkable blessing to you. His message is lively, pertinent, applicable to each one of us. Christ is coming. This life will end. "Prepare the way for the Lord; make his paths straight" (Matthew 3:3). "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance" (Matthew 3:8). Christianity is not a spiritually sedentary endeavor. Christianity is perpetually in motion. Faith is always in action. Truth is always lived. Bearing fruit in keeping with repentance means giving up those things that violate God's righteousness and replacing them. We strive.

On this score, Luther's Small Catechism is brilliantly perceptive. Let's use his explanation to the Fourth Commandment since us old people love the Fourth Commandment. Honor your father and your mother. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents or other authorities but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. Bearing fruit in keeping with repentance means to stop despising or angering our parents but to love and cherish them. Stop doing what is sinful and replace it with what is Christlike. My dog hangs his head and walks away from me when I discover his misdeeds. Some folks react that way to God. They close up, like a book, and spiritually distance themselves even more from the truth. It is not just a bad spiritual habit, a childlike fakery that attempts to forget that God is omniscient. Refusal to repent endangers your life. John cried out to those listening: "The axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matthew 3:10). Our Lord approaches. He is looking for good fruit. It is not "works righteous" to remind you that God is looking for good fruit and that you are to be very mindful of that. Cast off the works of darkness. Put on the armor of light (Romans 13:12).

Ace is a good fellow. He sat, curled up, by the fire that I built last night. I took pleasure in seeing him happy, content. He's never spent a night outside, or even in the garage. He's well fed and Alise takes him on walks and I play with him every day. I wouldn't die for him. Your Creator opens His hand and gives you all that you need for this body and life. Your Creator took up the form of a servant and He died for you. John lifted his hands and identified the Savior to all within the sound of his voice: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Christ pulls you to Himself by His love, His blood, His forgiveness, His Spirit, His Word, His grace. You know that He is merciful. His love isn't passive. His care for you isn't distant, aloof. He never monitors His own needs before reaching out to you. His death was entirely for you. There is nothing in this world that serves to bring you life other than this death, this Savior, this Lamb of God. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared" (Psalm 130:4).

Faith in Christ leads you to repent and to become more like Him. Hope is born when Jesus is born and hope is in your heart. Joy in this life comes from knowing God and His love and that you are forgiven, completely forgiven. Freedom starts with Christ's resurrection and embracing the truth that death is a defeated enemy that cannot rob us of a single moment with the God of glory. Heaven is our home. Christ the King Lutheran Church is devoted to making His paths straight. We want to receive Him as He comes to us, without obstacles, without pretension or the

slightest hint of deceit. Our confession will be honest. We trust the Lord of glory. He died for us. His life courses through this holy house. His Word animates your heart. His body and blood infuse you with the fertility of Easter, the joy of heaven, the love of the Father. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We are in His presence. He has baptized us with the Holy Spirit and we are sanctified, set apart for the Truth. The Lord approaches and it is our joy to greet Him, to greet the Son of David, to greet Christ the King.