

Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2023

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

1 Peter 2:2-10

John 14:1-14

I recently heard a theologian whom I admire say that all of history is a fight between Christ and Satan. What do you think of that? Do you believe that? Mick Jagger seems to believe it. He wrote a song about the devil in the first person. “I rode a tank, held a general’s rank when the Blitzkrieg raged and the bodies stank.” Alise and I saw a beautiful and disturbing movie titled *Nefarious* on Friday. It is a story, told from a Christian perspective, about evil. Lord Nefariamus is the name of a demon that possesses a murderer on death row. Nefariamus, speaking to a psychiatrist sent to evaluate the condemned man’s sanity, gives voice to the various tactics of hell and the commensurate evil that has become so commonplace in this late day. Euthanasia, abortion, pornography and a raging evolutionary worldview all combine to make a dehumanizing cocktail, a cocktail so blithely consumed by so many. Fallen man truly walks in darkness.

God is actively working out His plan of salvation among us and Satan is vigorously attempting to undermine it. Do you believe that? God is actively reinforcing our humanity and Satan does all he can to dehumanize us. Do you believe that? Jesus said: “Whoever is not with me is against me” (Matthew 12:30). How many of you value theology? How many of y’all believe that God’s Word is the light of your life? How many of y’all believe that there are such things as good and evil, truth and lies, that some things are holy and some things are profane? Jesus said this: “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Sin and death have taken all men captive. Only Christ’s blood sets us free from Satan’s rule. Only Christ’s sacrifice sets you free from your guilt and your shame and your fear and your pride and your emptiness. Is that true? Do you believe it? Do you cling to it? Does that reality inform how you conduct your life?

Our culture is full of commentators. The last 300 years have given us an abundance of philosophers, poets, politicians, and musicians who have attempted to persuade us as to what it is to be human. Carl Marx told us that man is a political animal, always in death struggle for power. Sigmund Freud told us that man is a sexual animal, always in pursuit of satisfaction. Charles Darwin told us that we are an evolved animal, originating haphazardly from the primordial ooze. Do you know what those men are? They are theologians; bad ones. Oprah Winfrey and Carl Sagan and Ibram X. Kendi and Robin DiAngelo – they are theologians as well, religious figures expounding on theological topics (that’s how you are to view them). When they tell us what man is they are engaging in theology. Who in our culture is advocating for a biblical worldview? Billy Graham and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Pope John Paul II are all gone. Scoffers are front and center. A scoffer is a person who is proud and critical and who rejects God’s true wisdom.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:1-2). That’s Psalm 1. That is precisely what this congregation intends to be. “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

There's a reason for that. "The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:17). Jesus did the will of God. Jesus is the will of God. Jesus is the one who sets you free because He fully accomplished the will of the Father and all of His righteousness is credited to you by grace, a free gift. There is no other way to heaven. There is no other way to be forgiven.

It was Thursday of Holy Week and death was all around the disciples. Death was on the march and in mere hours the Lord Christ was to be death's premier victim. Jesus certainly knew it. The disciples were apprehensive, distraught. Jesus knew that as well. "Do not let your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). Christ's word does what it says. And then the Lord gives them the foundation, the basis for their hearts to be calm, confident, strong. The rooms in His Father's house – there's a boatload of them. Heaven's mansion has a room for you, which the crucified King has prepared. He is going to bring you safely there. The God who created you, the God who redeemed and sanctified you, He does not allow anything nefarious to get between you and Him. He shepherds your soul by His Holy Word. He gives you all you need for this body and life – clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home; all that you have is a gift from His hand. He protects you from harm. He funnels His love into your life. He does all this in the presence of our enemies – a table set for us that brings us the banquet of heaven, the feast of forgiveness, a foretaste of the marriage supper between the Lamb and His bride. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Do not let your hearts be troubled. God sees our situation. God knows the forces at work in our age. The disciples were likely so disoriented that they had a hard time grasping Christ's power against this present darkness (Ephesians 6:12). God's plan was playing itself out in a way that they did not expect. Their trust wavered. What they focused on was what they *didn't* know, what they *couldn't* control, what they *hadn't* planned for. Jesus knew precisely what was going on around Him. Was He nervous, bitter, cynical, enraged, forlorn or defeated? Your majestic Lord is composed. He is equipped for every scenario, every enemy, every assault. He is the Lord of His church, the Lord of your life, the Lord of this age, the Lord of the universe. The disciples' disoriented heads are distilled down to one phrase uttered by Thomas: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5). Thomas knew more than he thought he knew. Thomas knew everything. How can I say that? I can say that because Thomas knew Christ. That's what Jesus told him. That's what Jesus tells us.

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Every single one of you knows Christ the King. He has seen to it. What does that mean? It means that you know the *way*, you know the *truth*, and you know deeply, you know incontrovertibly, you know in a way that goes beyond human expression what *life* is. Christ crucified and risen is life – and you know it, in your bones, in your soul, in your heart and mind. You know that the core of human history is located in His cross and empty tomb. The Son of God is the eternal victor and He is with us. We lack nothing. We have everything that we need to live in this age or any other. We have the Word of God. We have the water of Holy Baptism. We have the Eucharistic feast of Christ's body and blood. We have Christ's Spirit. We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16). We have the truth and you know the truth in your bones. The Truth has set you free. Your sin was placed on the Lord of Life and He took that travesty into His flesh and He died. Love, Divine Love, was poured out for you on Good Friday. You

were reborn when you were buried with Christ in Holy Baptism. Jesus shattered death. The Lord is risen. The life that is in you is His life and it is not subject to death. This is the reality that ought to animate our culture but even if it doesn't it is the song of salvation that is sung in this place, a song that you carry with you wherever you go, a song that will be sung continuously on this earth until our Lord returns.

The kingdom of God is advancing. It is beautiful and we have had our eyes filled with it this morning. Tristin and Gavin – they are pure with Christ's righteousness and they are our brothers. We walk in the way with them and they with us and all of us together. Christ is our way. Christ is our truth. Christ is our life. There is no other.