

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Jeremiah 20:7-13

Romans 6:12-23

Matthew 10:5a, 21-33

The Genie tells Aladdin that, regarding the whole three wishes thing, “there are a few provisos, a couple of quid pro quos.” The Genie is limited. There are certain things that the Genie can’t do. The first is that he can’t kill anyone, “so don’t ask.” The third is that he can’t bring people back from the dead: “It’s not a pretty picture. I don’t like doing it.” This is all from the Disney animated motion picture, *Aladdin*. The second limitation was a gut punch to the street rat. Aladdin was infatuated with Jasmine, but the Genie said: “I can’t make anybody fall in love with anybody else.” And there’s the rub. Aladdin wants to impress the girl, wants to find a way to attract the sublime Jasmine, and so he adopts a façade, Aladdin becomes “fake-arama,” the fictitious Prince Ali. In order to be liked... have you ever adopted a façade? Does the church want to be liked by the world? Where has that ever gotten us? Would you rather be popular or faithful? Do you believe that the world is ever going to fall in love with the church?

Church Growth principles became a thing in the 1980’s, but their origin can be traced back to the 50’s and 60’s. Church Growth methods have their basis in sociology not theology. The idea that a congregation should be friendly, welcoming, generous to visitors, willing to engage people where they are – these are character traits of our Lord Himself so they are certainly to be the characteristic of any body of believers. But the idea that we must water down what we believe to make Christianity palatable to the world, the idea that we must change the conduct of the Divine Service to be evangelically effective to those who are in darkness, well that is simply a misguided idea. The Lord sends out His disciples with some sobering words. “You will be hated by all for my name’s sake” (Matthew 10:22). There are plenty of enemies of the cross (Philippians 3:18). Their god is their appetite. They glory in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. Their end is destruction. The attempt to entice unbelievers into Christ’s church using sociological methods is a disastrous and foolish pursuit. Christianity is beautiful just exactly the way it is. Christianity elevates us above the mean streets of selfishness. Christianity is hope and joy and truth – truth that sets men free from the prison of death, free from the vain philosophy of men.

Who knows this more than Jesus? He sent them out. He sent the twelve out. Not with illusions of ticker tape parades, but with warnings of adversity. “If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household” (Matthew 10:25). Our Lord is referencing you, there. You are the children of His household. His character, His life, His holiness is alive in you. You are not of this world (John 15:19). Christ chose you out of this world, that’s why the world hates you (ibid.). Jesus said that. You can’t undo it. There is a reason for it (the world hating you), a reason that is glorious and empowering and consoling. You are a witness. You are a living, breathing manifestation of Christianity. You are light shining in the darkness. Christians trust God when the world deliberately abandons Him. Humility is the Christlike fruit in your spirit when the world knows only pride. The world encounters truth by way of believers like you and me. Why would we adopt a façade when the truth is embedded in our soul? Why would we smear layer upon layer of cosmetics on the splendor of Christ’s bride when she is radiant precisely as she is?

After Jesus gave His beloved disciples those sobering words, He said this: “Have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops” (Matthew 10:27-28). The Kingdom of God is hidden. We walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). God, in His wisdom, has hidden the nature of His kingdom from the eyes of sinful man. We don’t play by the world’s faithless rules. We don’t adopt their commercialism. St. Paul wrote this: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith, from first to last” (Romans 1:16-17). The world-redeeming Savior is the One who leads us. He said that all things will be revealed at the proper time. Do you believe Him? Are you willing to act on that belief? The emptiness of the world’s treasure – that will be revealed. The fact that Christ triumphed over the realm of death and darkness by sacrificing Himself – that will be revealed... to everyone. The veracity of Christ’s church being the glorious realm of light and life – that will be revealed. It’s hidden now. Only the eyes of faith see it but see it you do.

We don’t monkey with God’s Modus Operandi. We don’t apologize for it, we don’t alter it with humanistic drivel, we don’t look for something more tantalizing. The Lord of heaven and earth took up the form of a servant, a physical body, and died on a cross. Love poured out His life. In a fleshly, corporeal body, the Son of God defeated all the enemies that you will ever have. That is God’s Modus Operandi. Powerful forces were aligned against Him and He rendered up His life to deliver you from sin and death. He who rules the cosmos spent His blood because of your value to Him. Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). He uses the things that the world dismisses as weak to demonstrate His power (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). God uses simple water, simple bread and wine, simple words, to deliver the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. And we savor that truth. We know that the shame and poverty of Jesus’ crucifixion was real. He suffered. But by that weakness His power was manifest, His power to redeem was unleashed, His glory is anchored there, in His shame – that’s His Modus Operandi. The world can’t see it, but we do. The world is quick to move on from His cross, but we aren’t.

The unbelieving world is deeply unhappy, on some level. There’s a gaping hole in man’s unbelieving heart. There’s an empty space where our Creator is to reside in the one who rejects Christ. It’s sad. But God reaches out. God calls sinners to Himself. God is the evangelist. He is at work. His Word pulls people out of darkness. You are the proof. You are a child of the light. The courage and beauty and trust that animates a believer is an evangelical thing. Faith is a witness, a powerful witness. This world encounters the truth as you conduct your life, trusting God with all that you are and have, especially in adversity. One of our young lasses had to have an emergency C section on Monday. Can you imagine the emotional alarm that such a medical procedure evokes? Heather had a psalm verse on repeat in her head, a verse that was in a devotional near the time of the emergency, a verse that she relied on throughout her travail, a verse that captured her spirit. It was like having an anchor for her soul in a storm, like being given the strength of an Easter sunrise when darkness threatened, like God whispering “I am with you” in her ear. This is the verse: “I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears” (Psalm 34:4). All the hairs on Heather’s head are numbered. All the hairs on Hannah June’s head are numbered. The Lord values us. We are His.

Aladdin gets the girl. He goes back to being the person he genuinely was and, on that basis, he gets the girl. The church will not pretend. We will not adopt a false persona just to be more palatable to a faithless generation. We will shine. We hold up the truth, a strong confession of faith, a genuine humility that looks to Christ's righteousness alone. The Lord, whom we trust, doesn't promise us deliverance from danger or suffering. We will bear our crosses. What He promises is that He is with us. He stands with us in all things. He is risen from the dead and there is no enemy that can harm us. The reign of Christ the King is here, and it towers over every worldly concern. The Kingdom of God is growing. The truth of who Jesus is, what He has done, and what He is doing now cannot be denied. We may be vulnerable to the slings and arrows of unbelief, but we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37). Our trail has been blazed by prophets and apostles. Our pathway is straight (Proverbs 3:6). In Christ we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). We trust in the Lord with all our heart. We acknowledge Him in all our ways. Our path is straight.