

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity Sunday
St. Matthew 7:15-23
August 6th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

A Good Tree Cannot Bear Bad Fruit

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

When our dear Lord warns us to “*Beware of false prophets,*” He is not warning us about immoral or perverted priests, or lazy or corrupt bishops. These men are wicked, and their wickedness should be exposed and dealt with. In fact, their wickedness exposes itself by their behavior. But there is a difference between a cleric who does not live the truth he teaches, and one who does not teach the true faith. It is better to have a thousand sinful pastors—a thousand who teach holiness but do not live it—than to have one “good” man who tells us devilish lies and who tries to convince us that we should believe and live and worship as the Lord *never* commanded. These are false prophets because they teach not the truth of God but the fancy of their own mind.

There are many false teachers who are obviously false. They teach that Jesus is not God but a prophet; or that Jesus was not the promised Messiah but a misguided rabbi; or that Jesus is not our Savior but only one more good example for us to imitate. These obvious false prophets—the Mormons, the Jehovah Witnesses, the Muslims, the Jews, the various cults—are also *not* the people Our Lord warns us about in today’s Gospel.

When Our Lord Jesus says “*Beware of false prophets,*” He is urging us to watch out for those pastors and preachers, bishops and deacons in our own midst; those who are part of our communion fellowship. The ones who urge unity at the expense of sound doctrine, and those who let false teaching and false worship live alongside the truth. The ones who are more impressed with the world’s standard of success than with the Kingdom of God. The ones who quickly assign tradition to the trash heap and favor newer, better, and more modern ways. And they not only allow but also encourage and even insist on innovations, which sweep away what we have received, what our ancestors knew and believed, and what we must rely on in time of need. “*Beware of them,*” our Lord + Jesus says, “because they are *not* obvious. They partake of your communion, yet with their words they destroy it. They urge you not to get so riled, yet they rile you up. They speak of peace, but they persecute the peacemakers. And many them you have known your whole life. So beware of them. For these are the ones who *come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.*”

Fortunately, at this point and time, we do not have any bishops, pastors or deacons in our diocese who teach these things. But, the Lord’s warning is just as valid for us today. For, our Lord’s warning implores us to stay vigilant and watch for such false teachers in our midst, because the day

will come, as is proven time and again in history, that such false preachers will creep in. For, the devil will not allow the truth to remain at peace; it will come under attack, and such false prophets will appear even in our midst. But, this is why our Lord desires we heed his warning, so that when that day comes, we will be prepared to recognize them by their fruits.

That is what our dear Lord goes on to say: that “*you will know them by their fruits.*” What does this mean? Does it mean that you will know them by how they live and act? No. It means that you will know them by the Christians they produce; those who follow their lead; those who fight for their place at our Lord’s Table; those who defend them as true and honorable teachers of the Faith when, in fact, they usurp what we confess.

You might think that you have known some of these false prophets because they speak of things you did not learn as a child; or because they have enriched your worship; or because they urge you to live and worship not as your grandfather did, but as the millions and millions that were before them. But simply ask yourself this: Did they lead you to the Christ, and show you a clearer vision of the Kingdom of God? Did they encourage you in what was once done instead of urging you to do your own new-fangled thing? Did they provide you and your loved ones with a true and lasting comfort in the words and merits of the Lord + Jesus—especially in your hour of need? And did all their words, all their liturgies, all their ministry speak of the hope and salvation that is given only in and through the Lord + Jesus Christ? These are the good fruits that faithful pastors produce.

What these preachers and pastors produced in your heart; the faith they nurtured and matured in you; and the Spirit of God Who activated in you a lively faith and godliness—these are their good fruits—together with their bold confession of the faith and their willingness to suffer all, even death, rather than depart from the Church’s Faith. If these are the fruits, then these bishops, pastors and deacons are good trees in communion with and united to the One, Good, Tree of Life—our Lord + Jesus.

But bad trees are like the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—a tree that stands apart, that offers no life and no hope, and that houses the devil and his lies. A tree of which if you eat of it you will surely die. How can that evil tree bring forth good fruit? It cannot. If an evil tree cannot bear good fruit, how can these false, fake preachers and prophets produce the good fruit of faith and love in their parishioners? It is easy to spot a false preacher, or a false prophet. If what they say is contrary to Scripture, they are a false preacher. If they make a prediction, that is, a prophecy, and it does not come true, then they are a false prophet. To give you an example, there are people predicting all the time about the world ending on a certain date or year. Well, obviously the world has not ended yet, we are still here, so those so-called prophets, are clearly false prophets, and no one should listen to them ever again. This is why our Lord’s warning must be repeated every year, (and this Gospel reading comes every year about this time in the Church’s year) because false prophets and preachers surround us every day, even today in our own times.

But do not let this warning trouble you. For our Lord does not say, “*Beware*” to frighten or scare you, but to comfort and strengthen you. For when you know that there are false preachers and evil prophets; when you know that there are pastors who speak of their own dreams rather than of the Lord’s heavenly vision; and when you know that there are preachers whom our Lord never sent—then you are more intent to search diligently for the true bishops, godly pastors, and faithful deacons who will shield you and soothe you with the Lord’s undying mercy.

And with the Lord’s mercy—the mercy we pray for in every Liturgy, and that we rely on in every moment—with that mercy comes the Spirit of God. This Holy Spirit has been given to your spirit so that you do not fear any false prophets, but instead look to our Father Who gives you good and upright spiritual fathers. For never forget: *You did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you*

received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Lift up your hearts, then, to your merciful Lord and Savior. For although He speaks a stern warning, it is for our good—so that we stay within the fold of His Church; and remain in communion with God by being in communion with all good and true prophets, priests, bishops, pastors and deacons. For through their ministry alone—which is His liturgy and service—we are taught to say, "*Lord, Lord,*" not as the false prophets do, but in the Holy Ghost and with the faith He engenders, and in this way, you both do the will of the Father and enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But, our Lord also gives us a promise in today's Gospel. "*A good tree cannot bear bad fruit.*" Meaning, the truth of His Word will endure the onslaught of false preachers. His Word will endure forever. And, is that not our motto? "*The Word of the Lord endures forever.*" You may have seen it in its Latin form: "*Verbum Dei manet aeternum.*" This is our Lord's promise to you, that if you seek the truth in His Word, He will preach it to you through His faithful called and ordained servants of His Word. The Lord has given you someone with a mouth to proclaim His promises into your ears, so that you will be able to enjoy the good fruit that He desires you to eat.

Therefore, take and eat of the Tree of Life—our Lord + Jesus Christ—hear His promises: that your sins are forgiven on account of His perfect obedience to the Law; that you have salvation and redemption through His suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross, and that you have the reward of eternal life awaiting you in Heaven. Furthermore, our Lord guards and protects you by His Word from all the attacks of the devil, the world, and your own flesh by preaching into your ears His holy Word and promises, and giving you abundantly of His gifts of grace in His blessed Sacraments. Come, therefore, often to this house, especially in time of trouble, and hear again and again, what our Lord has done for you: He has given you to eat of the good fruit of the Tree of Life, so that your soul may always be refreshed and sustained. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.