

## THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Matthew 7:15-23

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*“What is truth?”* So asked the Roman Governor of the province of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, of our LORD. Pilate’s actions that day show that he was not all that interested in the *“truth,”* but rather, what was expedient for the moment. Apparently, spiritual truth held no importance for him; if he even believed that truth could be known at all. So, he had JESUS crucified in the hope that even though he believed truth could not be truly known, in complying with the wishes of the Jewish religious authorities of the day and their version of the truth, he could buy himself a moment of peace.

The Man Pilate crucified has a different opinion about what is truth. For JESUS, *“truth”* is the Word of God alone. For JESUS, who *is* the Word of God made flesh, that self-same Word, the Word that speaks of the heart and will of His FATHER for our salvation, is the *“truth”* and the only *“truth.”*

Therefore, our LORD’s warning—*“Beware of false prophets....”* His warning rings out, proclaiming the *“truth”* of God’s Word to every corner of creation, and is no less true today than it was in the day of His speaking. We must remember His warning and take heed, for His Words are not the word of a mere man, but those of God. For this is *truth*; *“... that we believe and confess that our LORD JESUS CHRIST, the SON of God, is at the same time both God and man. He is God, begotten from the substance of the FATHER before all ages; and He is man, born from the substance of His mother in this age; perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh; equal to the FATHER with respect to His divinity, less than the FATHER with respect to His humanity.”* JESUS *is* God and His Word *is* *“truth”* for God cannot lie.

Thus, again, we would do well to pay heed to JESUS’ Word of warning, for His *is* the Word of God, and the Word of God *“is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness....”*

To fully grasp the meaning of CHRIST’s warning we must know who these *“false prophets”* are. So, just how does one recognize a false prophet? Let us again hear what our LORD has to say.

*“Beware of false prophets....”* Our LORD calls them *“false prophets,”* indicating their true nature. As so-called prophets, they are teachers of religion, having declared

themselves qualified to instruct or proclaim the Word of God. Yet, our LORD names them *“false.”* They are self-appointed, without authority or right to teach; their words are *“false”* and without *“truth,”* either completely or in part. The word they proclaim is not the Word as revealed by God in Holy Scripture, but are their own words dressed up to sound holy and righteous. Thus, they teach, not the doctrines of God but *“...the commandments of men.”* As the prophet Jeremiah writes, *“Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; They speak a vision of their own heart, Not from the mouth of the LORD.’”* Such is the nature of those whom our LORD names *“false prophets.”*

Our LORD does not stop there in describing *“false prophets.”* He tells us that they, *“come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”* They come claiming to be teachers of the *“truth,”* but their doctrines are full of lies. JESUS said of such teachers, *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*

They make a good first impression. Being smooth operators, their outward appearance, behavior, and teaching deceive those who listen to their words. They sound sincere and knowledgeable, and may even quote Holy Scripture. They might even wear churchly vestments. But remember, they are not sheep, they are wolves, and as such, their aim is to devour the souls of God’s children.

False prophets come speaking and claiming the authority of CHRIST. They appear as legitimate bearers of JESUS message of salvation, but they wear a clever disguise and preach a message diametrically opposed to the message of the Gospel. Therefore, *“false prophets”* preach neither the full severity of God’s Law, nor the full sweetness of the Gospel of salvation in the forgiveness of sin wrought by the innocent suffering and death of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

The result is that those who hear them do not learn that they are condemned sinners deserving only death and eternal punishment, with no power to save themselves. Instead, they hear a message of works and merit through self-righteousness, *“Get right with God and He will get right with you!”* Nor do they learn the *“truth,”* that it is for this very reason that God sent His SON that whosoever believes in Him shall be saved and have eternal life; that JESUS suffered the wrath of God due to our sins as the Propitiation, that is the Satisfaction, for all that condemns us, redeeming us from death and eternal punishment with His own precious Body and Blood, and making of all who will believe, heirs of eternal life and all the FATHER has to give us.

These precious truths are never learned from *“false prophets”* because they are never heard, and never hearing them, those who remain under the influence of *“false*

*prophets*” die in unbelief and are eternally lost. It is little wonder then, that our LORD calls false prophets *“ravenous wolves.”*

Still, the children of God have this from CHRIST, *“You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.”*

Our LORD does not leave us to guess whether or not a prophet is false or true—*“You will know them by their fruits.”* If you would know the quality of a tree, you must first test its fruits. The words and teachings of a prophet are his fruit. Thus, the words of the good prophet Isaiah can be applied here: *“If they (that is, teachers or prophets) do not speak according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them (that is, they are false).”*

The quality of fruit depends on the quality of the tree upon which it grows, and the quality of the tree depends on the soil that nourishes it. To be a good tree, it must be rooted in good soil. So, too, the Christian, in like ways, must be well rooted in the Word and Sacraments of the Church and the Word and Sacraments of the Church and Her prophets, that is, Her pastors, must be rooted in the Word of God.

Therefore, if you would be protected from false prophets then read your Bible and know your Catechism by heart; pray and meditate upon them in your devotions day by day and week by week. In these are given to you the Words of God and an explanation of the fundamental teachings of the Holy Scriptures; all that you need to know and believe to be saved. There you will find God’s holy Word and a true and right explanation of God’s holy Law and Gospel by which you are brought to repentance and faith in CHRIST JESUS. As we receive and hold to this teaching, we receive God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT, and are defended against any false teaching which seeks to contradict it. By meditating upon and clinging to this truth, we learn to recognize error and reject it.

Likewise, know the Creeds. Not only do they state what we believe, but they also implicitly state what we reject. They are like fortress walls guarding and upholding the truth of God’s Word. Even though the Creeds are ancient, they remain relevant and practical. For example, when someone tells you that you need a second Baptism in the HOLY SPIRIT, you can respond with the words of the Nicene Creed, *“I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins.”* And that, like all of the Creed, simply reflects the Words of Holy Scripture, *“One LORD, one faith, one Baptism”*

If you are wondering whether or not someone is a false teacher, ask yourself this: *“Is the teaching of this man in keeping with the faith of the Apostolic Church as confessed in the Creeds? Is it consistent with what I have learned of sin, CHRIST, and faith in the Small Catechism? Does it agree with the preaching of the Word of God as written in Holy Scripture and preached in my church? Does it keep the salvific work of CHRIST at the center of all things?”* If not, then beware of it, flee from it. Do not walk; run! Remember JESUS’ words, *“Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”*

Yet, do not run blindly, flee to CHRIST, take refuge in Him, and give attention to His Word. Follow that narrow Way, which is JESUS Himself, who said, *“I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life.”* Go to that narrow gate which is the Cross. For through the Cross of CHRIST is our entrance to light and life because it is the only door unto Heaven.

The Cross of CHRIST is the only gate that leads to the resurrection. For there on the Cross JESUS conquered the lies of the devil and the death which sin brings. Believing in Him, you are completely forgiven. You are raised to new life in Him. That is the truth; the whole truth; and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

So turn to the Word of God and judge with righteousness. For God speaks His Word to you by His HOLY SPIRIT *“...that you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name.”* Only in the Words of Holy Scripture will you hear of our God who loved the world in such a way *“that He gave His only begotten SON, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* It is only in the Words of Holy Scripture that you will come to know the one true God, FATHER, SON, and HOLY SPIRIT; the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of Moses, David, Elijah, and Elisha, and all the prophets. It is only in Holy Scripture that you will come to know the God of the Apostles and learn all things that He commanded them. With these *“things”* you will be armed for battle against all false prophets with their deadly false teachings.

Only in the Words of Holy Scripture will you come to know that JESUS is *“the Way, the Truth, and the Life,”* and that *“no one comes unto the FATHER except through [Him].”* JESUS’ way is the way of the Cross. It is to this, that we must cling. The Cross of JESUS is the narrow Gate that leads to our resurrection and eternal life with Him on the final Day. For there on the Cross, JESUS conquered the lies of the devil and every deceiving false prophet. It is there on the Cross that JESUS conquered eternal death by crucifying there with Him all your sins. There they died, and in His tomb, they were buried with Him. When JESUS arose on that first Easter morning, there they remained with the napkin and burial shroud, lying dead in the grave.

Brothers and sisters of CHRIST, truly the Cross of JESUS is the Tree of Life, the Good Tree that has born for all the world the only Fruit which can rightly be called Good. For it bore the very Body and Blood of our LORD JESUS CHRIST for your salvation. Here today you are given to partake of those Fruits in the bread and wine, the Body and Blood, of CHRIST's Holy Supper. JESUS is your true Prophet and the fulfillment of all true prophecy. By His Fruits, you will know Him because it is by His Fruits, that He delivers you from all your sins.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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