

THE TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Text: St. Luke 19:41-48

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

It seems to me, that to go through life without regrets is to go through life without repentance. Is it not true that having no regrets, whatsoever, also means that one is pretty pleased with oneself and all the decisions one has made and all the things one has done or left undone? To say, "*I have no regrets*" is to say I know of no faults within me; it is to say, "*I have no sins.*" More on that later.

It also seems to me, that of all our regrets in life, some of the greatest regrets would have to be those associated with lost opportunities. You know what I mean; regrets over the lost love of your life; the missed chance to mend relationships in your broken family; the missed promotion opportunity; the missed job opportunity; the missed opportunity to be at the bedside of a dying loved one to say your final goodbyes; the regret over a life-long dream not realized; all missed because when the opportunities came along you allowed them to slip through your fingers as though you were trying to grasp a fist full of water.

Perhaps the worst of it all is that you know in your heart of hearts that you have no one to blame but yourself—no one on whom you can place the responsibility for your failure to act or follow through on an opportunity when it presented itself but the person who gazes back at you from the mirror every morning as you prepare for your day, and again, every evening before you lay down to sleep.

Opportunities are often fleeting. They can come and go in the wink of an eye and when they are lost one is often left wondering, "*What happened? Where did the opportunity go?*" We are left wondering and perhaps saying to ourselves, "*I could have done...*" or "*If I would have done...*" or maybe, "*I should have done...*" but most often, "*If only I had done....*" But then, the opportunity is gone. Lost forever. The time for acting past—never to be seen again.

Of course, there are also lost opportunities that were completely beyond your control and missed through no fault of your own, but these, you can rationalize and find an excuse for having missed them. They never weigh so heavily on your conscience as those you, in some way, lost through your own inaction.

As I read the Gospel text before us today, I cannot help but wonder, "*Did the Jews come to regret their lost opportunity?*" Certainly, JESUS looked upon Jerusalem with regret; not for Himself, nor for anything *He* had done or left undone; He mourned for the future of His people and His Holy City. He openly wept for both city and people because the Jews had closed their hearts, hardening them beyond redemption. So much so, that His FATHER had, in response to

their hardness of heart, also closed their eyes so they would not recognize their folly. He gave them over to their reprobate minds.

Therefore, hearing they could not hear, and seeing they could not see. They rejected the peace CHRIST JESUS had come to give them—peace found only in Himself, His Word, and the Sacraments He would leave for His Holy Church. In short, they rejected JESUS.

It is hard to understand why the Jews did this. Had they not long awaited the advent of their promised MESSIAH? Was it not obvious to the most casual observer, and especially their spiritual leaders, that here was a Man who fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets—who so clearly was the answer to all the promises of Holy Scripture in human Flesh? When there should have been joy and rejoicing and loud hosannas from all the people, the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought only to destroy JESUS. How could this be?

JESUS wept for Jerusalem and the Jews who lived there because He had compassion for them—a gut-wrenching desire that they should be saved, having been reconciled to His FATHER. Had they known the truth of their future perhaps they would have done as the citizens of Nineveh had done long before them when Jonah prophesied to the Ninevites their impending destruction and doom. Perhaps the Jews, too, would have wept for themselves, tearing their garments, and laying down in ashes and sackcloth, but they would not.

Now, because of their hardhearted refusal to hear and heed the Word of the LORD, because they rejected CHRIST, the anointed One of God, they could not. God gave them over to their sinful refusal to see the *“things that make for [their] peace.”* This, they would surely come to regret.

So, as you can plainly see, there exists something much worse in life than our petty regrets; it is the poverty and sickness of our souls; it is living in unrepentance and carnal security; it is godlessness.

You see, all those who refuse to be turned toward CHRIST, as well as all who have turned away from CHRIST, ought also to weep, for their fate is no different from the inhabitants of Jerusalem—death and destruction in this world, and eternal death and misery in the world to come. But by the hardness of their hearts and their stiff-necked unbelief, these things were hidden from their eyes, that is, they were hidden from their understanding because of their own evil desires. A veil had been drawn across their hearts just as evil darkened their minds.

It is so easy for each of you to sit here in our climate-controlled nave and listen to me, your pastor, prattle on about the Gospel text and assume that I cannot possibly be talking about you; if I am, I must be confused. You could not possibly be so blind as the Jews were to CHRIST and His Word; after all, here you are, so I am obviously preaching to the choir.

But allow me to ask a question or two of you—do you fear, love, and trust in God above all things? Do you honor preaching and His Word, gladly hearing and learning from it? From

our inconsistent weekly attendance at worship and Bible class, I can tell you that a positive answer to these questions may be in doubt.

You may be thinking, *“But Pastor, you do not understand. I have things to do, places to go, and people to see. I cannot make every worship service and I have little time outside of one hour a week to study the Bible.”* Now granted, this may occasionally be true, but every Sunday? How then do you define the first and third commandments of our LORD? Do you really know the things that make for your peace? This is an important question. I am called here to preach the whole counsel of God that when the Day of Judgment comes you will have nothing to regret.

Therefore, if you glean nothing else from the Gospel this morning, know this, not all the seed of Abraham are truly Abraham’s children. It can be implied from that, that not all who *claim* to be Christian are truly God’s children. To be Abraham’s seed simply means that one is born of the flesh, from human desire and oftentimes, nothing more than simple lust. But to be a child of Abraham means to walk in his ways, and his ways are the paths into which God led him—the paths of righteousness. To be a child of Abraham then means to walk in his faith, for his faith was accounted to him as righteousness. In the same way, it is not necessarily those who say *“LORD, LORD!”* but those who have *known* the LORD and who are known by Him, who do His will, that are CHRIST’s true disciples. Only those who hear and believe the Gospel of God are living members of the Church.

Thus, the true children of Abraham do the works of Abraham. But then, what are the works of Abraham? For what reason are his works accounted to him for righteousness? Simply speaking, the works of Abraham are the hearing of God’s Word and believing it for no other reason than God said it, for *“...blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!”* Abraham was made righteous by faith.

But if one refuses to hear the Word of God when it is offered, what then? What happens to people when they reject those things that make for their peace? One need only look to the prophecy of CHRIST and the history of Jerusalem to answer that question. In 70 A.D. they were crushed by their Roman occupiers and their beloved Holy City, left without one stone upon another.

But know this also, wherever God’s Word is preached, there God’s children, God’s true children, are being born. CHRIST was still preaching the Gospel in the Temple at Jerusalem on that day when He predicted her destruction so that some might still be saved by it. It reads in our text that *“all the people were very attentive to hear Him.”*

We know seed sprouted from CHRIST’s Word bearing fruit among many of those who heard Him. On Good Friday and Pentecost, many Jews were converted to the LORD. At all times and in all places, where CHRIST JESUS’ Word is being preached, God has His elect. Wherever the Gospel is being preached, there are those who will believe. Wherever the Gospel is preached in its purity, hearts are converted and won for CHRIST. By the grace of God, we have the Gospel. So certainly among us here, in this very nave, and hundreds of thousands of others like it, God makes of His people the true Israel and the true spiritual children of Abraham.

Yet, there is still one question that may burn in your mind and heart, a question that threatens to overcome your comfort and hope with gloom and despair, namely, whether or not you actually belong to God's people whom He has chosen from eternity and whom He will not reject forever, or whether you are simply a member of the natural, carnal Israel which is awaiting judgment and God's all-consuming wrath.

Who among you has not been plagued by such thoughts, by such doubts? Who among you has not feared your faith is too little and too weak to stand fast amid the terrors of Judgment Day? Let me reassure you, that anyone who nurtures his or her faith, anyone who is fearful for his or her salvation, can know that he does not belong among the number of the unbelievers and hypocrites, who, of their own accord, have rejected their salvation.

Such a one as this bares the mark of an elect child of God who cries and sighs unto God both day and night. We are weak and often tremble while awaiting the approaching end, while awaiting the great and terrible Day of the LORD, rather than remembering and rejoicing in our salvation. Still, even when that is the case, we do not belong among the despisers who resist the LORD's hand, but to that small remnant to which the LORD calls continually: *"Do not fear, little flock!"* And when we feel within ourselves neither fear nor hope, when the heart is silent and the sighs just will not come out, we look to God's promise, to His Word that stands firm, and guarantees sinners deliverance and life. It is only those who turn their eyes and heart away from the Word of God, who lose and forfeit their promised inheritance.

Therefore, recognize the moment of your visitation; it is now! Even now CHRIST is being sounded into your ears, coming to you in the Words of His Gospel. JESUS, the Word made flesh, has come to you to bring that peace which only He can give. With CHRIST's Word, the HOLY SPIRIT exorcises your heart, casting out all the thieving demons that would rob you of your salvation, and instead of a den of thieves, makes of your heart a house of prayer. In this, God continues the good work begun in you on the day when you were baptized and which He promises to bring to completion in the Day of our LORD, JESUS CHRIST.

When that Day comes, Christians may hold up their heads, comforted with the knowledge that their redemption is drawing near. God is faithful and will fulfill in His children everything He has promised them in His Word and give them the promised inheritance at the time the world is destroyed. And as often as they stumble, He will lift them up again and again. The everlasting Church which He is gathering out of the world will not be overcome by the gates of hell but will remain immovable, even as the world is consumed by fire and the wicked and the hypocrites are brought to ruin. It is impossible for even one of the numbers of God's elect to be lost.

A Christian does not go through life without regret. We know we are sinners falling far short of the demands made of us by the Law of God. Yet, faith gives birth to repentance and repentance to salvation in JESUS CHRIST, our SAVIOR, and our LORD. So, when it comes to your salvation you may have peace without regrets; the life of JESUS is yours because your death was His. His holiness is yours because your sins were His on the Cross. His heaven is yours

because your hell was His. He received what you rightfully had coming that you would receive life everlasting and all that is good from your gracious and loving FATHER in Heaven. The fate of the unbelieving Jews and Jerusalem is not yours, for in CHRIST you have been made a true child of God. Come today to His altar where Heaven comes down to touch the earth, and receive from your Savior His Body and Blood, *“the things that make for your peace.”*

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

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