

**THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER MICHAELMAS / TRINITY 21**

Text: St. John 4:46-54

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

Here is the deal, believe and you shall live. It really *is* that simple; believe and live. There are no addendums, no quid pro quo, no small print, no hidden terms, no hoops to jump through, no hidden surprises, no special conditions. Believe, and you shall pass from death to life.

Ah, but therein lies the rub, does it not? Believing is often much too difficult for our weak faith. I mean how can one be expected to believe anything if one does not first see it with one's own eyes, witnessing it for him or herself?

Our weak faith is very often overwhelmed by the sin of doubt. All too often, we are filled with distrust and uncertainty. In this day and age, no one wants to look foolish, ignorant, or childish for believing in such things as a god, or that this God had a SON who was both man and God; that He worked among us preaching and teaching the arrival of the Kingdom of Heaven; that He worked miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead; that He died in our place for our sins and the sins of the whole world; and that He rose from the dead three days later defeating death and the grave forever so that we may have eternal life. That all these things He did, He did purely *“out of fatherly, divine goodness, and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in [us]”* (Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, The Creed, The First Article) and He gives to us all the resulting benefits at no cost to ourselves. This is the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after all, and we are so much more sophisticated than the ancients. Yet, JESUS says, *“Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”*

You may have heard it said, *“How could those people have been so dense? They saw the signs and wonders and still, they did not believe. I would not have been so stupid.”* Really? What is it that makes anyone smarter today, anyone holier, anyone less sinful, and more righteous than the people we read about in the Bible?

For example, how often have you witnessed the miracle of Holy Baptism where God's Word is added to the water making of it a *“life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the HOLY SPIRIT”*? You have been taught that Baptism *“works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this”* (Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, The Sacrament of Holy Baptism). JESUS, Himself, tells us, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the SPIRIT, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God...”* and, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned...”* and St. Peter, *“There is also an antitype which now saves us—Baptism....”*

So why do we act as though we do not believe this? Why do even many Christians insist on quibbling about Baptism by pointing out that the thief on the cross was not baptized and he still went to heaven? Why do we often wait weeks and sometimes months before baptizing our children just so Grandma, Grandpa, Uncle Joe Bag O' Donuts, and Aunt Susie Sixpack from Zap, North Dakota can be here for the celebration? Why? I will tell you why; it is because we do not believe the Word of God!

In the same way, you witness every week the miracle of our LORD's Body and Blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, right here at this altar. You have been taught that in this blessed Sacrament is the *"true Body and Blood of our LORD JESUS CHRIST under the bread and wine, instituted by CHRIST Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink."* You have been taught that the words, *"given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words"* and that *"where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation"* (Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar).

JESUS tells us, *"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the Flesh of the SON of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in you."* This means that you ought to be begging for, no, let me rephrase that, you ought to be *demanding* of me, the Sacrament of the Altar, and yet there are still those among you who seem to believe that this wondrous gift is something you do not really need; that somehow you have not yet sinned enough, or perhaps you have life within you apart from CHRIST, and others seem to believe that one can somehow prepare oneself to receive this gracious gift by being less sinful. Yet, is that not the exact reason JESUS provided for us this gift? Is the Sacrament of the Altar not given to forgive sin? Who here can say they are without sin and, therefore, is in no need of our LORD's Body and Blood?

So, how can this be? I will tell you how this can be; it can be because we do not know the Holy Scriptures or the power of God therein. Again, it is because we do not believe the Word of God.

I do find it odd, however, the things even those who say they are Christian do believe with little or no proof at all, even when God's Word clearly speaks against such things. Things like:

- believing that certain men and women of any political persuasion can save you and the world you live in
- that you can extend your life by even one day by living a healthy lifestyle, taking all the right vitamins, and eating all the right foods
- that you are the captain of your destiny
- that accumulated wealth is your key to security and success
- that the proper use of Holy Scripture is to use it as some sort of twelve-step program to holiness and success
- that when we die we become angels
- that Grandma, Grandpa, or Mom, or Dad, is looking down on you from heaven to watch over you

- that the measure of a successful congregation is the number of its members and how many attend worship, not what is taught and preached from its pulpit
- that a Spirit-filled church can be recognized by how you feel when you worship instead of what you receive in worship

Repent! There are no other means by which you must be saved than the Word of God, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other Name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* than that of JESUS CHRIST. Therefore, hear the Word of God and believe, and you *shall* pass from death to life.

Yes, hear and believe, for our LORD says, *“Your son lives”* and it is so. When our LORD speaks, the heavens and the earth must respond. Creation cannot deny its Creator. It is the Word of the LORD that created *all that is created*. As it is written, *“So shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”*

Therefore, hear the Word of JESUS and believe in the signs He has left us. The Word of JESUS contains His power, and the signs, Baptism, and the LORD’s Supper, receive their power from His Word. Repent and be healed—believe and live! The Word and the signs are CHRIST’s own statement of purpose for in His Word we read, *“And truly JESUS did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this Book; but these are written that you may believe that JESUS is the CHRIST, the SON of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name.”*

The power to heal is found in the Word of JESUS, and it is His Word that creates and strengthens faith, and *“...faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”* This hope is not in the sense of maybe, or might, or perhaps. No, the hope of a Christian is a sure and certain knowledge—an assurance, a conviction. It is as sure and certain as the rising and setting of the sun and even more so because the hope of a Christian is founded in none other than the love of God and the power of the Word of God. One day the sun will cease to rise and set, but the love of God is eternal, without beginning or end, and His Word, as Christ has told us, will never pass away.

Therefore we can pray with the Prophet Jeremiah, *“Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved...”* *“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.”* And we can sing with the Psalmist, *“My soul faints for Your salvation, But I hope in Your Word.”* It is that Word, which heals and relieves your soul so that no matter what situation you may find yourself in, you can with St. Paul, be content in any and all things through JESUS CHRIST who strengthens you.

In CHRIST, you are in eternal communion with God. This is so because it is the Word of God that brings us the Cross and the Resurrection of JESUS. The same Word brings us to the waters of Holy Baptism where we are washed in the Blood of the Lamb and freed from all sin. That same Word brings you peace in Confession and Absolution, where Jesus simply announces

through your pastor what has been since the day of His crucifixion: *“Go your way, your sins are forgiven you.”*

These Words do what JESUS’ Words have always done; they give life and salvation. These Words redirect your misguided faith to true faith and strengthen you against your doubts and fears. Just as our LORD spoke the heavens and the earth and all creation into being with His Divine Word, so too, He bespeaks you righteous with that same powerful Word. With these Words, JESUS forgives your sins, rescues you from the power of the grave and the devil, and restores you to life with our FATHER in heaven. That same Word joins bread and Flesh, wine and Blood, together in the LORD’s Supper to revitalize and refresh your soul and keep you firmly anchored in the one true faith.

With these wonders and signs, Baptism, bread and wine, Flesh and Blood, and holy Absolution, JESUS delivers us and heals our weary flesh, preserving us, body and soul until the day of His return. On that day, you will stand before God and hear the Judge proclaim you innocent, pure, and righteous. On that day, JESUS will say to your FATHER in heaven, *“FATHER, behold, Your child lives.”* What a day that will be, all because you have already, even this very day, heard Him say, *“Go your way, my child, for I forgive you all your sins.”*

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

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