

EXAUDI / THE SUNDAY AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Text: St. John 15:26-16:4

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

For what reason does the world hate and condemn Christianity? What crime has Christianity committed that is so heinous that the world should condemn, and even kill, the followers of CHRIST? Dr. Martin Luther of blessed memory wrote: “[*Christians*] can be blamed for nothing except preaching about CHRIST and for a desire to bring people from death and hell to God and heaven. [According to the world] the great sin [of Christendom] is this, first of all, we teach [people] to believe in CHRIST, that God will give us eternal life for His sake and not because of our own merits or holiness; then, that we teach them to do good works to the glory of God, and for the benefit of their neighbor, and to be obedient, peaceful, charitable, patient, and respectable.” (Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, volume 24, p. 315-16.) And let us not forget the chief sin of which Christians are guilty in the eyes of the world. The chief sin is this: we claim to worship the *One True God*.

But is this truly the reason that the world hates us, or is it just a symptom of something much deeper, something much darker? This morning, JESUS offers up this reason for the contempt and hatred His people receive from the world: “*And these things they will do to you because they have not known the FATHER nor Me.*”

The world does not know the FATHER or JESUS, His SON. Nor does the world desire to know them. So it is that the world seeks to persecute JESUS and His followers. And my friends, it should not surprise you at all, that JESUS is being cast from the public discourse in our country today. After all, He has already lost His position in the one place that should defend Him. He has already been cast aside in many of the so-called “*Christian*” denominations and congregations in our great land.

Those who reject JESUS, those who thrust Him aside for another gospel, those who offer peace where there is no peace, suffer from an awful blindness—not a blindness of the eye, but of the heart and soul. It is a blindness that makes it impossible for them to know the FATHER and His goodness or His love, and therefore, it also makes it impossible for them to know His SON. You see, the Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing because the god of this age has blinded them to the light of CHRIST.

Satan and their own sin-filled hearts keep them from knowing JESUS or desiring Him and even though they have heard of JESUS and all He has done for them and the whole world, even though the HOLY SPIRIT holds the light of His Gospel right before their eyes, they refuse to see it. They refuse to grasp hold of it. They refuse to confess it. Instead of confessing it, they stubbornly and intentionally turn their face away from it. They choose to be blind; they choose darkness over light. They choose to remain in their sin. The sad fact of the matter is that those who reject JESUS and His Gospel choose death over life.

It is as though they remain like rebellious teenagers who cannot stand to be corrected by their parents, teachers, or other authorities, who cannot bear to have someone point out to them they are doing something wrong, immoral, harmful, or evil. They know we Christians are right; the Law of God is written in their hearts. This they cannot erase, they can only choose to ignore it and in their arrogance, refuse to hear what we have to say. Such poor souls would rather have their beating hearts torn from their chests rather than submit to the truth or bow a knee and worship JESUS CHRIST.

The world does not want to believe in JESUS, nor does it want to hear anything of Him. It is my observation that there is no one as intolerant as an unbeliever, at least when it comes to spiritual things. So the unbelieving world rages against us. The world persecutes Christianity even though they can find no charge against us. Instead, the world persecutes, and even now, brazenly murders and beheads Christians for something that it cannot and never will understand—for the preaching of JESUS CHRIST and Him crucified for the life of the world is a stumbling block and offense for those who refuse to believe.

Again Martin Luther writes: *“We desire nothing more than what certainly does not harm them at all: freedom for God’s Word and for faith. This they refuse to grant. Instead, they want to force us to believe and to teach what they themselves want—in opposition to CHRIST and His Word—even though they themselves either believe nothing at all or at least do not know what they believe.”* (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, volume 24, p. 317.)

So the Spirit proceeds forth from the FATHER and the SON to reveal the truth of the Gospel to you. He comes to make you mindful of the Words of our SAVIOR. He tells these things to you, *“that when the time comes, you may remember that [JESUS] told you of them.”* He reminds you of JESUS’ Words that you would *“not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but [that you will] rejoice to the extent that you partake of CHRIST’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”*

Consequently, what does it matter if they put you out of the synagogues? What does it matter even if they kill you? You are a baptized child of God, sprinkled with clean water and cleansed from all your filthiness and all your idols. You are clean. In Baptism, which is the washing of regeneration, the Comforter gives to you a new heart, removing your heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. God has placed His SPIRIT of TRUTH within you, so that your blind eyes may be opened to see JESUS CHRIST as your LORD and SAVIOR, and in seeing Him, you become His people even as He has become your God.

Therefore, rejoice when you see the whole world hate and persecute you because you are a believer. God has given you His Word and SPIRIT. They abide in your heart. They are your Sword and Shield against all the fiery darts Satan and the world can throw against you.

Make no mistake, in this world, you will suffer. Trials will come. But you are never alone. Jesus stands with you upon the plain of battle. He fights for you. And take they our life, Goods, fame, child, and wife, Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won; The Kingdom ours remaineth.

The Kingdom of God is yours and can never be wrested away from you. No, to lose it you, yourself, must give it away. But to prevent that from happening God gives the gift of His very Body and Blood to you, to strengthen your weak faith so that you may stand in the face of every trial you must endure in this life. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, Jesus has overcome the world for you, and by His death and resurrection, He gives to you all that He has won on the Cross to save you—forgiveness of sin and life everlasting with Him in His Kingdom.

Today the world is an ugly and frightening place. We seem to stand on a precipice staring into an abyss of confusion, fear, hatred, war, and despair. Yet, do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot harm your soul. Rather let those who refuse to believe the Gospel fear Him who can destroy both body and soul. For you are Baptized into CHRIST and have nothing more to fear.

There is no reason to fear the world, it cannot harm you. Neither is there a reason to fear Satan; his power is undone. He is vanquished and you stand with JESUS who crushed his head beneath His nail-pierced heel.

Thus, JESUS' victory is your victory. He has sent the SPIRIT OF TRUTH to proclaim it to you. He has sent His Helper to testify to you of the truth of His Words—Words of peace and comfort. His SPIRIT speaks the Words He has been given by the FATHER and the SON. And what are these Words? That JESUS CHRIST, true Man, and true God came to

give you life so that you may have it to the full. How do you know? Because each and every day JESUS has these words to say to you: *“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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