

Pentecost 3 – June 30th, 2019

A Sermon from the heart by our Pastor Alvin... Grace, mercy and peace to you – from God our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, I want to talk with you from my heart. This sermon has not been approved by any committee. However, this sermon is coming to you from my heart and the Holy Spirit.

Some of you will have an open heart and mind... and I sincerely pray for those who are less open and receptive. I feel so convicted to share this message... and here is why: the healing and future of St. Johannes is at stake.

You see, it is not just in other countries that there are challenges for people who place their faith in Jesus Christ and seek to be responsible and make hard choices.

However, time and time again we see how some people disregard Scriptural teaching and allow themselves to be used by an unseen spirit that seeks to destroy what God has created. I believe we are in the midst of spiritual warfare and therefore we must allow the Holy Spirit to get us back on track.

When Jesus talked about discipleship, he not only knew it would be costly, but he knew it would cost him – his life. And as Jesus taught the people in our Gospel lesson today, he knew some people would take the road **MOST TRAVELED** and forgo the

cost of Christian discipleship, the road **LESS TRAVELED**, if you will.

Years ago, in the movie, "Apollo 13," the space mission to the moon went terribly wrong. At one tense point in the movie where the astronauts' lives were in danger, the attentive viewer was moved to the edge of his or her seat.

Things exploded, the crew became frustrated and stressed, tension grew between the team, and numerous issues threatened both the astronauts and their safe arrival to their desired destination.

So how does this relate to the future of St. Johannes and what is going among some members of this congregation St. Johannes? You see, destruction at any cost... is **NOT** an option or our purpose or goal.

Today's Gospel reading gives us a snapshot into a moment where brothers James and John go terribly wrong. Without question, it is always the goal of Satan's kingdom – to divide us. But I submit that we, as the Church, are better than that... because we are called to be the Church – united – as followers of Christ.

But this is not what we see in today's text. It is James and John breathing murderous threats, seeking to destroy the very thing that they wanted to preserve and propel forward.

They allowed animosity to grow toward the Samaritan people who refused to receive Jesus as that Lord and Savior..., or do what

they wanted! And at the same time, these Samaritans had no room for this man named Jesus... in their inns..., or in their hearts.

For the Samaritans, Jesus was too focused on the Jewish people. And if you know anything about the relationship between Samaritans and Jews in the New Testament, you know that they had nothing good to say about each other.

They refused to respect and trust each other... even though if they had decided to work together – they could have accomplished so much more... than fighting and division and murderous threats.

So James and John, the sons of thunder, figure that if these Samaritan people were going to reject Jesus – as they knew him, there is no point to keeping them around. And did you notice what they said? They said: “Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54).

You see, these fishers of men had heard John the Baptizer preach that Christ would baptize the world with fire (Luke 3:17) – and they figured there was no better place – than the town of Samaria... to get Judgment’s inferno started – with its destruction.

So where are we today? Which spirit are we following? Are we willing to quit... to take our hands from the plow... to turn against each other... to perpetuated distrust and misinformation... that **WE KNOW** will destroyed this sacred and hollowed place – we love?

This may be too much realism on a day like this, but what good can come from in-fighting and judgements and conversation of destruction? Please answer this question in your own heart today!

AS you heard in our Gospel lesson today, Jesus rebuked these two individuals for thinking like the Devil thinks. Evil spirits delight in destruction, just like retribution against each other – results in nothing good. **SO** can you hear **THE WORD** and sense the **SPIRIT** of God in this Gospel lesson today? I hope so!

You see, the earth is full of the Lord's goodness and this is what we should bask in every day. But if we think and act that Jesus Christ is inferior to help us make changes in our hearts and thinking, then we will find ourselves **BASKING** in the work of sin – that always seeks to harm and destroy what God is trying to create in us!

The only cure is to "**Repent**," which is to stop the madness before it is **TOO LATE**. And I want to say this again: The only cure is to "**Repent**," which is to stop the madness before it is **TOO LATE**.

You see, our Gracious Lord takes no pleasure in the destruction of HIS church, of you and me or any Christian. Our Triune God does not even desire the death of the sinful, but that the wayward would turn from their destructive ways... and harmful conversations and live (Ezekiel 33:11).

So God did not send fire down from Heaven as James and John wanted, but God did send Jesus and His Holy Spirit... and they

are here among us today.

The Bible tells us that God sent His Son not to condemn the world, but to save the world through Jesus Christ (John 3:17), a world not **MUCH** different... from that Samaritan village, and James and John, and you and me!

Jesus knew the world He was stepping into... and He knew how messy our human sins would make His world. God saw that He would have no place to lay His head, but would be crowned with thorns.

Yet Jesus, God in human flesh, still rejoiced in the goodness of the Father's will – to be our sacrifice for sin and make change and life possible.

You see, it was Jesus who took the heat for the Samaritans' rejection of our Lord. It was Jesus with mercy and grace – who took the heat for James and John... and their desire to rain down destruction – on their perceived enemies. And you know what else? It is Jesus who took the heat of God's wrath for all the times you and I have enjoyed the evil that makes the devil cheer.

That is how Jesus took away the sins of the world on the Cross, by being the Lamb of God – grilled over the fires of God's righteous judgment against our wretchedness.

So from my heart today, I am telling you with truth and certainty that **YOUR** Church Council, in the Executive Session on June 19, 2019, meant **NO** evil to our former musician,

George, **OR TO YOU – THIS WONDERFUL CONGREGATION.**

And I can truthfully tell you that **YOUR** elected representatives, the Church Council, cried, agonized and made a hard decision.

So please do not villainize your Church Council. I implore you..., please do not allow yourselves to become the James and John against your elected leaders who prayed, talked openly and honestly, and painfully made the decision they felt was responsible and appropriate.

Please do not let suspicion grow in your hearts – like a cancer, but rather, let us trust our leaders – whom we love and who love each one of us! Please do not let destruction be an option – because – in times like this – these are the places, times and circumstances... where God is most powerfully present and working for the good of all.

I think that we are in a battle for the soul of our congregation. So can we come together? It is my prayer that we show the devil (*the one against God since the early days of time*) that he cannot win the day – as Luther wrote in that great hymn, **A Mighty Fortress is our God!**

So with the memories you have – from attending this church with your family, always remember this is God's Church and it is **YOUR** church...for as long as it is supported. St. Johannes will continue... for you and your family members and friends – but only by your continued attendance and gifts of time, talents and financial resources.

And would it not be wonderful if no one ever had to leave us: no deaths, no divorces, no relocations and... no one ever leaving? But this is not realistic – as you all know quite so well. And with change and departures... comes something that will be different, but it will continue to honor Christ and nurture your spirit and faith – as we journey together to our eternal destiny. If we come together, the devil cannot win the day!



This is from my heart – to your heart! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of God's Holy Spirit. Amen!