

"Different by Association"

Text: Exodus 33:12-20

May the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ lead you to contemplate and appreciate the priceless gift that was thereby earned for you – the forgiveness of your sins and Eternal Life. And may you never be afraid or ashamed to announce to the world your association with that Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

My guess is that more than just a few of us here this morning really have no idea what it is like to be in the minority, and therefore to be immediately recognizable as different. How many of you, for example, have ever been to a foreign country where the population wasn't primarily – or even in large part – Caucasian? It's a strange and rather unique experience to be in a situation where you are not only obviously different, but to experience the darting glances or full-on stares of those who constantly remind you that you are different.

If you haven't experienced it yet, all of you may well come to know that sensation much sooner than you would envision, but not in the way you might imagine. We're not talking about ethnicity here, or skin color. We're talking about our morality and our Christian walk. It is altogether possible that you may soon find yourself sticking out like a sore thumb not because of what is on the outside but because of what is on the inside. That difference will become all the more apparent as our society continues to decay.

Understand that, just like skin color, this growing difference is something over which we are not supposed to have any control. In other words, Christians have been given a path and a direction in life - by God himself. We are supposed to conduct ourselves according to God's unchanging standards. As the rest of society steadily drifts ever further from those same standards, the fact that Christians are different should become all the more apparent. We do of course have the power to hide the Christian faith that dictates our Christian walk, but that was never our God's intention. Jesus made that clear with his simple statement: ***"Let your light so shine before men..."***

That is how and why we have no power over the growing dissimilarity between believers and non-believers. We have not been given the option by our God to be one way on the inside and to live another on the outside. Christians have been commissioned simply to let the outside accurately

reflect the inside. Our goal is not to make a show or pretense of how we are different, but neither is it our goal to blend in when we don't really fit. Our goal is simply to walk side-by-side with our Savior during our time of grace, and that association will itself identify us as different. *Different, by Association.*

The text that will instruct us this morning points out this necessary, unavoidable difference in a unique way. That text is found recorded in the Second Book of Moses – the Book of Exodus – reading there in the 33rd Chapter:

^{ESV} ***Exodus 33:12-20*** ***Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' ¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴ And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" ¹⁷ ¶ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." ¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."***

These are the words of our God. Fully confident that these are indeed the very words of God, and confident that he will work powerfully through these words in our hearts this morning, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

Differences on the inside will, under normal God-pleasing circumstances, manifest themselves on the outside. Anything else is more than just hypocritical and cowardly; it is loveless and it is sinful. When our hearts are in the right place, we never want to hide that great blessing from those around us. To do so would be loveless. Nor do we want to act contrary to the will of our God, which is the very definition of sin.

Moses got this. Look again at his dialog with the Lord in our text. After God's miraculous release from 400 years of slavery in Egypt, Moses didn't even want to continue on to the land God had promised them without the Lord constantly at his side. Talk about a great attitude to use as an example. Our natural human inclination is to do pretty much everything all on our own, according to our own plans and goals, and to have God pop in now and then to get us through the particularly nasty stretches of life. That's not what Moses wanted. He wanted no future at all without the Lord at his side. Constantly.

His first request was simple: *"Show me what to do so that I can always know that I am doing the right thing – the thing that pleases you alone."* Surely this is an example of why the Bible describes Moses as a man of tremendous humility. Humanism, which is pretty much the exact opposite of humility, makes man the measure of all things. Christian humility makes God the measure of all things. Humanism promotes man as the one who gets to call the shots – to decide what is right and what is wrong. Christian humility accepts without question that God is the only one who determines such things. Humanism looks to man, Christian humility looks to God. Moses fully and unashamedly embraced that basic truth.

But Moses was just getting started. He continued: ***"If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"***

Consider the depth and the ramifications of Moses' words here. Not only was he unafraid of being seen as different or ***"distinct"*** in the eyes of the people around him, he wanted everyone to immediately recognize him as such. Not only did he refuse to hide his association with his God, he wanted that obvious association to serve as that which identified him and his people as different from the rest of the world of his day. Far from afraid to show his intimate association with his God, that association was the very thing he craved. It was the one thing he *demand*ed of his God before he would go on.

Some are uncomfortable with the concept of *demand*ing anything from God, yet it is God himself who encourages it. Not the sort of demanding that comes from imagining that God owes us anything or that man can impose his will upon God. God encourages us to make demands of him *based on his promises* and in agreement with the promises that he has made to us. When he tells us to ***"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"*** and then promises that ***"all these other things will be***

provided" God is not displeased when man holds him to that promise. During the days of Malachi the Prophet, for example, the people were withholding the mandatory tithe because they were afraid that they wouldn't have enough left over to satisfy their own personal needs. (That is, by the way, putting the best construction on what they were doing.) Listen to God's response: ***"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."*** (Malachi 3:10)

This phenomenon where man is encouraged to hold God to his promises is nowhere more evident (or more important) than in connection with the forgiveness of sins and the gospel promise itself. There's a section in John's First Epistle that we use regularly in both our public and private worship services, especially as an introduction to the confession of our sins: ***"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** The Holy Spirit is here identifying the only two conditions or attitudes that can possibly exist in connection with our sins. The first is if or when we deny that we are sinful, or imagine that we are paying our sin debt by our own good works. The result of that scenario is that our guilt and condemnation remain. We are then ***"deceiving ourselves"*** and ***"the truth is not in us."*** This is the lot of the godless, who imagine that the solution to sin is to deny that it is even sin. The other situation or category is to confess our own sinfulness and to look in faith to Jesus Christ as the one who has already supplied all the goodness necessary to make us clean in the sight of our Heavenly Father. Note especially here the inevitable result of that condition – the reaction to which our God has bound himself: ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*** The words ***"faithful"*** and ***"just"*** tell us that God, in the face of repentance, cannot do otherwise than to ***forgive*** and ***cleanse***. He has bound himself to that word, that course of action. Because he cannot do otherwise, he wants his children to hold him to that promise. He wants his children to have rock solid confidence that he cannot and will not judge or act otherwise. ***"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved."*** Repent, and you can only be forgiven. You and I then have every reason to expect that our God will do exactly as he has promised.

When we hold God to this promise – when, in a manner of speaking, we *demand* of him that he keep his word – we do so always and only not because we are worthy or owed any such grace. We do so by his

invitation and because of our God-given confidence that he himself has sworn to *always* keep his promises. If God, the Righteous Judge, declares us innocent, nothing else in all creation – in heaven or in hell – could ever even *accuse* us, let alone *condemn* us. When God declares us righteous, we are righteous.

This is the God with whom we seek always to associate, and this is also the association that will always make us different. The world looks at the Christian faith as delusional at best, and dangerous at worst. According to their reckoning, free forgiveness amounts to little more than a license to go on sinning - with impunity. *"If the glory of Jesus is determined by how much sin he forgives, then I will make him even greater by running up my sin debt."*

That's how and why the world doesn't get you, and never will. They have no concept of the internal change that takes place the moment saving faith is created by God the Holy Spirit in the human heart. At that moment the new man is born in us, and that new man knows nothing of the love of sin. It loathes all that is not holy and righteous. This is the part of every Christian that longs to be openly and continually associated with our Savior God. But there is another voice or will within us – a dark side that still allies itself with the devil and the depraved world around us. Thus the war that rages within us. That struggle does not indicate unbelief: it indicates faith and life. We will always have that sinful flesh, but if there were no new man, there would be no struggle.

Which will, which part of the Christian, will win in the end. Whichever one we feed, which is why that new man in us, like Moses, craves an ever-closer association with our Savior-God. That which saves us will always also be that which identifies us as different. God grant us the spirit of Moses, who wanted nothing more. With Moses, who didn't want to go on if it meant going on without an ever-closer association with his God. With Moses, who absolutely and unequivocally wanted both that association and the resulting distinction to be readily apparent to the unbelieving world in which we live. God grant us such confidence, courage, and love. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 10:5-13** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶ ¶ Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷ Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." ⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. ¹² Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

^{ESV} **Luke 13:1-9** There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." ⁶ ¶ And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. ⁷ And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' ⁸ And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. ⁹ Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

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The Third Sunday in Lent – February 28, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 148 (Verses 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 15ff. (Red Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (1 Corinthians 10:5-13) We are never supposed to read God's Word as though we are spectators of the events recorded there. The lessons taught there are not taught only to others. The Holy Spirit here teaches us that we are rightly to apply the Word of God to ourselves, since that is the reason these words were recorded and preserved. Only then can we gain the full benefit that our God intends.

The Second Lesson: (Luke 13:1-9) The fact that bad things happen to a human being is never a valid indication of the moral character of that individual, nor of God's attitude toward that individual. This is Jesus' message in this reading from Luke's Gospel. Christians are supposed to thank our God for the good times, but never to turn on him in hard times. Nor are we to use his blessings as justification for ongoing sin in our lives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 22. (Red Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 457 (Red Hymnal)

"What a Friend We Have in Jesus"

The Sermon – Text: Exodus 33:12-20 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Different by Association"

The Offertory – (Hymnal page 22)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 436 (Red Hymnal)

"The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Red Hymnal page 24ff)

The Distribution -Hymn 306 (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis (Red Hymnal page 30)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 644 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (36) Ave (45) Wed (17) Organ Fund (\$19,855 of \$22,000)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit. Immanuel of Mankato has called Pastor Neal Radichel. Pastor Paul Naumann is considering the call to the faculty of ILC. Teacher Nathan Wales has returned the call to Gethsemane of Spokane. Prof. Steven Sippert has accepted the call to serve another two years as president of ILC.

Easter Flowers – The deadline is tomorrow for ordering Easter flowers. Please see the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

Mid-week Lenten Services – Please make use of the special opportunity afforded by our mid-week Lenten services. It is a unique time set aside for repentance, which always serves to magnify our Savior.

Confirmation Class – Parents note that Confirmation Class is scheduled for 5:45 pm on Wednesday this week.

Renewal of Vows – On the occasion of their 50th Anniversary, Myron and Leota Schiermeister plan to renew their wedding vows in a special service on March 12. The congregation is invited.