

"With and Without God"

Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25

May the love of God the Father fill you with wonder; may the sacrifice of God the Son fill you with thanksgiving; and may the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit fill you with comfort, faith, and hope. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: You've all probably heard the expression: "Nature abhors a vacuum." To put that into terms that might be more readily understandable: "*Something will always take advantage.*" The biggest, toughest animals always occupy the best habitat. If that animal is removed, the next in line will always move in. A \$100 bill will always have an owner. If it gets spent from your wallet, others will be glad to give it a home.

Unforeseen and unexpected consequences routinely occur when a vacuum is created. Arguably the most obvious example is when human beings push God from their lives, which creates a vacuum that *will* be filled. What then happens is not always what human beings expect, though they should. All should know that the expulsion of God will result in hell, but an alarming number still seem surprised, as they are when moral depravity and foolishness take over the home previously occupied by God. It is, after all, only "***a fool that says in his heart, 'There is no God.'***" The foolishness and moral depravity of the godless should never surprise us. Driving God from our society and our lives will invariably result in an incredible variety of bad things. God is supposed to be the rudder that gives direction to everything that we do. "***Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.***" Remove God from that passage and you have to substitute something else in that sentence. Having removed God, our society substitutes whatever it feels like. "*Do all to the glory of... mother earth, your country, your family, your pet, your job, your hobby, humanity.*" Pick your own noun. Pretty much anything has a shot at the title once God is removed.

In fact the consequences of removing God from our lives are endless. When God is removed as creator, man is free to pretend that he created himself. As soon as there is no longer a God that determines what is right and what is wrong, man creates essentially a free-fire zone where society decides such things. If God didn't give life, man gets to decide who lives and who dies. (You can see the results, by the way, in that today mass murderers have more rights than unborn children.) If it wasn't God that created and defined marriage, then man is free to "marry" whomever (or *whatever*) he wants. This week I read that people around the world have "married" a couch, a roller coaster, a pirate ghost, a game avatar, a

chandelier, and there was one woman who married the person she loves the most, herself – complete with lavish ceremony, bridesmaids, and a reception.

In short, there are absolutely no limits to the stupidity and evil that man can justify, and that can actually look wise and appealing to man, once God is forced from his world.

Our text for this morning, like all parts of God's Word, provides perfect guidance precisely because it not only originates from God himself, but because it rightly acknowledges both the existence of God and the fact that he is the center of our existence. Our text, in other words, will provide us a view of life *With and Without God*. That text is found in the First Epistle of Peter, the Second Chapter:

ESV 1 Peter 2:19-25 *For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

These are God's Words. What a joy and a privilege to possess such treasures of timeless truth as our sure and constant guide. That our God would bless our study of these perfect words, so we pray, "***Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.***" Amen.

I wonder how many are aware of just how much preparation goes into virtually every game played by professional athletes. Coaches endlessly study everything they can about opposing teams. They know, for example, if a quarterback is more accurate scrambling to his left or to his right. In fact they study every opposing player to try to learn both his strengths and weaknesses, and then form a game plan designed to exploit those weaknesses. Baseball teams have a "book" on every opposing batter, and pitch to him according to his

weaknesses. Hockey, basketball, soccer – every team studies their opponent, all in an effort to win a game. Given that, do you ever find it disturbing that most Christians expend so little thought and effort in studying our Great Adversary, the devil? What, exactly, do you know about Satan?

The devil, for starters, is not God. He is neither omnipotent nor omniscient (he isn't all-powerful and doesn't know all things.) His greatest power seems to be that he learns from his mistakes and remembers what works. Not just in general. He and his demon horde know what works best on you. That means that he studies you, even if you pay little to no attention to him.

We can do better. Because we know that Satan will continue to try what has worked in the past, we can be better prepared by knowing what to expect in the future. God's Word enables and educates us in this. This, in fact, is one of the great benefits of understanding that our Bibles are the verbally inspired Word of God. God doesn't make mistakes. That means, in part, that if he gave us words like those of our text for this morning, he gave them to us for a reason. In other words, every warning in God's Word addresses a real threat and teaches us something about our enemies. To put it in terms of our text for this morning, that means that since God saw fit to tell us **"For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?"** there was a reason, a threat. Sure enough, almost as soon as Jesus warned his followers that they would have hardship on earth if they followed in his footsteps, Satan promptly began twisting that truth to bring about truly ghastly atrocities. Heinous actions were carried out by so-called "Christians" in the name of the Christian religion. This sort of thing probably reached its low-point during the days of the Crusades and the Inquisition. When those who carried out such horrible atrocities were condemned by their Christian peers, or by society in general, they actually took all such criticism as *validation* that they were doing God's will. They were, after all, suffering for their actions, and in this they took great comfort. They undoubtedly wore their "persecution" as a badge of honor and used it as evidence that what they were doing was blessed by God.

God the Holy Spirit beat all such cruelty and evil into submission with the inspired words of our text for this morning. Here he clearly drew the line between barbaric acts of passion and true Godly service when he taught us not only that there was no virtue in getting punished for doing evil, but **"if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."** What does that mean in practical terms? It means simply that suffering itself is absolutely no indication of whether we are acting rightly or wrongly – but count on the devil to try to persuade you

otherwise. The key, again, is always and only following God's lead. Our text referred to that as being **"mindful of God."** The opposite is to remove God from your life and then expect your unguided self to stumble into something other than foolishness, sin, and unbelief. It would be like removing the steering wheel from your car and imagining that you will still wind up at Grandma's house.

There are still those in our day who seek out persecution to gain a false sense of security about their standing with God. The Holy Spirit through Peter recognized and addressed the problem in our text with those words we just heard, **"For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?"** Remember, our great Christian Commission (our life's mandate from our God) is not to correct social ills and injustices but to save souls. We all want life on earth to get better, but true reform never precedes conversion. It does, however, follow naturally after an unbeliever is converted. That means that if we just do what God told us to do, the social reform we all want to see will take care of itself as sinners are changed on the inside.

All of this is tied together in our sermon theme for this morning - *With and Without God*. "With God" (our text refers to it as **"Mindful of God"**) means always being connected to him. It means always considering every thought, word and action according to how God views it, and according to his will for our lives. "Without God" means we do what *we* think is right, without direction from our God. Both can result in suffering, but only one carries God's assurance of blessing.

The fact of life for a Child of God in a sinful world is that we don't have to seek out persecution. Humbly and devoutly follow God's will in every aspect of your life *and persecution will find you*. Gently try to recall someone from the sin that has taken ownership of them and you will suffer. Patiently try to share sin and grace with an unbeliever and most will ridicule you for it. Humbly refuse to pretend that all Christian churches are the same, identifying error, and most will despise you for it. Do the right thing and persecution will find you.

We began this morning by talking about the unforeseen consequences of failing to consider God and his will in everything we do. The opposite is also true, as unforeseen consequences *bless our lives* when God is the heart, soul, center of our existence. When we are **"mindful of God,"** we acknowledge that life is not about us; it is about him. We also then accept the fact that since it is God who created us, every gift or ability he has given us is intended by him to be used to its fullest in *his service* – directly or indirectly. That then has a profound impact on

what we choose to do for a career, what we choose to do with our free time, how we choose to spend our time in retirement. The question is no longer "what makes me happy" but "what benefits God and my neighbor?" Mindful of God means recognizing that it's not *my* life; it's God's.

So then, can we just sum up the message of our text by saying that God wants us to follow in the footsteps of Jesus? Our text certainly seems to say just that: "**Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.**" But count on the devil confusing even something so simple. That's why we need to know our enemy. The devil loves to distort and pervert even the simplest Bible truths. In this case, Satan will try to twist and misrepresent these words to fool us into believing that Jesus didn't actually win our salvation and forgiveness for our sins. He "**left us an example**" of how we must now earn our own passage. According to Satan, it is only when we do as Jesus did that we can have any confidence that God the Father loves us and will accept us into the heavenly mansions. In other words, Jesus didn't do it for us; he showed us how to do it for ourselves. Be wise enough to understand that that actually represents life not *with God* but *without*. If that were actually the message of our text, what need do we have for God?

Amazingly enough, this sort of nonsense is very appealing to all flesh – mostly because it creates the illusion that we too, like Jesus, can earn our own way to heaven through our suffering here on earth. Man's pride and man's ego are fertile soil for the devil's weeds. He plants that sort of nonsense in our minds and it tends to flourish there *if God is not allowed to dictate both our thoughts and our truth.*

Our text makes short work of the spiritual nonsense that Jesus came to give us an example of how to earn heaven: "**(Jesus) himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**" Note that Jesus is the one who carried our sins in his own body to the cross. He is the one who bore the punishment that we deserved. The "**stripes**" by which we are now healed were laid on Jesus, not us. In this sense we cannot "follow the Savior," since he went where only he could go. God our Savior won forgiveness on the cross for every single sinner, including you and me, and his payment was a "once for all" event.

Our God *does* want us to follow in our Savior's footsteps, but not as little individual self-saviors. He wants us to walk as those who have already been freed from the slavery to sin, and liberated to walk in harmony with his will. Again our text points the direction for us: "**He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.** ²³ **When he was reviled, he**

did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly."

Does our God want to see us suffer? Obviously not. We have been called to serve and to imitate, but in so doing our God knows that suffering and persecution will often result. That's not his desire, but it is nonetheless an inescapable fact of life in this sin-broken world. Those who live and walk according to the new man that has been created in them can expect resistance from the godless, unbelieving world, either subtly or obviously.

This is the reality God revealed to us in his Word. This is the reality of what we should expect from a life with God as the center and focus. Do not shy away or run from this reality. Pray instead for the strength and courage to carry out your one great purpose in life with great enthusiasm, skill, and determination. This is our holy calling. This is our God-centered purpose. Humbly acknowledge it, joyfully accept it, and devoutly order your life accordingly. So help us God. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Acts 2:42-47** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

ESV **John 10:1-10** "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." ⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. ⁷ ¶ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The Third Sunday after Easter – May 3, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 196 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"I Am Content! My Jesus Liveth Still"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

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

The First Lesson: (Acts 2:42-47) Last week we read how the Lord granted phenomenal success to the young Christian Church following the Pentecost sermon of Peter. In today's lesson we hear how God then gave this young Church a period of calm and popular favor and rest so that the new converts might not only be brought into the Church, but so that they might be further instructed and the Church strengthened. Persecution, however, was not far off.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40)

The Second Lesson: (John 10:1-10) Here Jesus warns us that part of our hardship on this earth will come in the form of false teachers. It is only when we cling stubbornly to the Word of God that we can know the true Shepherd's voice as He calls to us. Jesus here also rules out any other path to heaven. Through faith in Him alone we have Eternal Life. God grant us the faith to always hear the voice of our Shepherd.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 207 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

The Sermon – Text: 1 Peter 2:19-25 (Printed on the back page)

"With and Without God"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 342 (Red Hymnal)

"Chief of Sinners Though I Be"

The Prayers followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Closing Hymn – 207 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Like the Golden Sun Ascending"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (NA) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

| | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Today | -9:00 a.m. | Suspended |
| | -10:00 a.m. | Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | Suspended |
| Wednesday | -6:00 p.m. | Suspended |
| | -7:00 p.m. | Suspended |
| Next Sunday | -9:00 a.m. | Suspended |
| | -10:00 a.m. | Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | Suspended |

CLC News – Seminary Graduate Cory Drehle has accepted the call to Berea Lutheran, Sioux Falls, SD. Pastor Michael Gurath, Holy Cross, Phoenix, AZ has been called by St Luke's, Lemmon, SD. Neil Bernthal, Immanuel, Winter Haven, FL has been called by Immanuel, Mankato, MN to serve as high school math and science teacher. Dan Barthels, Gethsemane, Saginaw, MI has been called by Redeemer, Cheyenne, WY to be their teacher. Quinn Sprengeler, K-8 teacher/principal at Redemption, Lynnwood, WA has been called to teach grades 4-8 and be principal at Holy Trinity, West Columbia, SC. ILC Graduate Mikkela Hammond, Eau Claire, WI has accepted the call to serve as teacher at St. Stephen, Mountain View CA.

Public Meeting Precautions – Public services have again resumed at St Paul, but services and sermons will continue to be provided in both audio and printed formats on our website: www.bismarcklutheran.org Please observe prudent precautions if you are attending in person, including spreading out in the pews, touching as few things as possible, and spacing yourselves if you wish to visit after church. Food and beverage service will remain suspended for the time being.

Holy Communion – No decision has yet been made on when or how to proceed with the celebration of Holy Communion. The Church Council will make a decision on this in the coming week and you will be notified. Please don't hesitate to share your thoughts or opinion with a Church Council member. Private communion is always available by appointment with the Pastor.