

## "Personal Awareness"

Text: Luke 9:51-62

May the faith that has been created in your heart by God the Holy Spirit never know doubt or uncertainty, and may you ever be mindful of the evil that wars within you to destroy what is good. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: how well do you know those closest to you? You hear the question asked fairly often, don't you: *How well does anyone really know another human being?* Interesting question, but an even better question is *"How well do you know yourself?"* The Greek philosopher Socrates wrote: *"people make themselves appear ridiculous when they are trying to know obscure things before they know themselves."* Though the phrase was used by others before and after, it is Socrates that is still today known for his "γνῶθι σεαυτόν" (gnōthi seauton) mantra – Greek for "know yourself."

The general idea has obvious merits, on a number of different fronts. To defend effectively against an enemy it is obviously helpful to know and understand that enemy. Human beings will have a hard time defending against the enemy that resides within each of us if we don't really know and understand that enemy. Nor will we be able to understand and accept our place in God's grand plan if we do not first know and accept who and what we are. We must, in other words, know ourselves.

So it is this morning that we will seek to enhance our own personal awareness. Our goal then is to better understand not only ourselves, but that enemy that resides within each of us. Our text for this morning will guide and direct that process. That text is found in Luke's Gospel, the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

**ESV(Luke 9:51-62) *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. <sup>52</sup> And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. <sup>53</sup> But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. <sup>54</sup> And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" <sup>55</sup> But he turned and rebuked them. <sup>56</sup> And they went on to another village. <sup>57</sup> As they were going along the road, someone said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." <sup>58</sup> And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." <sup>59</sup> To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." <sup>60</sup> And Jesus said to***

***him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." <sup>61</sup> Yet another said, "I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home." <sup>62</sup> Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."***

These are the inspired words of our God. May the same God who give us these words give us also the spirit to read them with humility and reverence, and to apply them to our own lives with honesty, courage, and wisdom. So also we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!" Amen.***

Self-awareness is necessary, first of all, if we are to guard ourselves from ourselves. It begins with the understanding that every single one of us tends to approach a question or problem with a certain bias or preconceived notion. If, for example, you are by nature a pleaser, then you can know that your tendency will be to appease – to soften and make more acceptable that which needs to remain firm and unyielding. Your most powerful desire will be for others to like or accept you, or to just "be happy" and "get along." You will probably find yourself caring too much what others think about you and that natural inclination will taint your thought process. If in getting to know yourself you find that you are basically insecure, your particular temptation will probably be to do or say whatever is necessary to make yourself look better to those around you – even if you have to promote what you know to be untrue. If prideful or arrogant, you will refuse even to consider what others are saying and to defend ideas or positions just because they are yours. You will naturally assume that you are the smartest person in every room and every discussion, and you will tend to be dismissive and off-putting.

Here's a simple example of the effect of what we are talking about here. Picture yourself watching a football game with someone who aligns himself with the other team. There is a particularly important call on the field and the network shows the replay over and over again, in slow motion and from multiple angles. How are most viewers going to judge the reality of what they are seeing? More often than not they are going to see exactly the same thing on the screen and come to the exact opposite conclusion, based only on their allegiance. It could not have been a penalty, for example, since that reality would adversely affect your team. Again, you are both watching exactly the same thing, but what you are seeing is powerfully affected by your own personal bias.

This phenomenon can be interesting in connection with something as trivial as a football game, but it is of little lasting consequence. Yet how much more important in spiritual, eternal matters? There an awareness of how you yourself are wired is anything but trivial or unimportant. Suppose, for example, that you are talking to a friend or family member (and those two *can* overlap) about a particular point of doctrine – *God's Word*. Each is entitled, as they say, to their own opinion, but not to their own truth. Truth is an objective thing. Truth is ultimately determined by God. It exists, which means that opposing opinions cannot both be true. It cannot, for example, be true that Christ was born of a virgin and not born of a virgin. He could not have both bodily risen from the dead and only spiritually risen from the dead. Christ could not have both paid in full for every one of our sins and paid only for some or none.

Here's where personal awareness is so critical. If you know yourself to be a pleaser, your particular temptation will be to come out of every doctrinal discussion with every participant happy and satisfied. If you are fearful or insecure, your tendency will be to yield what God does not allow, or to pretend that both are saying the same thing. If you are arrogant, you will naturally assume that you are right and will naturally therefore manipulate God's truth to bring it into harmony with your own.

Knowing yourself also includes knowing your place. Obviously we're not talking here about the old "know your betters" of the British social order. "Knowing your place" in this context means recognizing yourself in all of the various Bible stories that you hear or read. We'll look at just a few to identify the problem. When you hear the parable of the Good Samaritan, where do you find or see yourself? Most identify themselves as the traveler who helps the injured and helpless man – with the inevitable result that the parable becomes a lesson in law: "Go out and be a good Samaritan by helping those in need." Where we *should* see ourselves in that parable is as the one who is beaten, helpless, and in desperate need of rescue. Jesus is the Good Samaritan, which makes the parable purest gospel. Where do you see yourself in the account of the funeral procession coming out of the City of Nain, the mournful procession that encountered the joyful procession led by Jesus? Are you even in the account at all, or just a spectator? You are, of course, there. You are the dead and helpless young man who is absolutely powerless to do anything at all to help himself. You are to see Jesus as the only possible solution to your desperate plight. How about the woman caught in adultery? There you are that very woman – caught up in your own obvious sin and facing the just consequences of your sin. Jesus alone can offer you pardon. So also *you* are the possessed man of the Gerasenes from whom Jesus must cast what is evil, *you* are the man born blind to whom Jesus must give

sight, *you* are the prodigal son that squanders your Heavenly Father's generosity.

We begin to see just how important it is to know ourselves. Our text offers us still other examples.

Note first the reaction of the citizens of that village in Samaria to Jesus. They rejected Jesus. Our text says simple (and tragically), **"they did not receive him."** Consider first the profound eternal implications of that simple phrase, **"they did not receive him."** The result of rejecting Jesus is an eternity in the unspeakable torments of hell. So why? *Why* did they reject Jesus? Our text says simply, **"because his face was set toward Jerusalem."** When the nation of Israel was divided into the north and the south after the death of Solomon, the northern king, Jeroboam, built alternate temples or worship sites (complete with their own golden calves) in both Dan and Bethel as substitutes or rivals to God's temple in Jerusalem. His reasoning was that his half of the nation of Israel would not be able to fully separate from the south if the people continued to align themselves with the temple in Jerusalem. That's the history behind that simple statement in our text: **"because his face was set toward Jerusalem."** The people's rejection of Jesus was caused by something just that petty – Jesus' apparent disrespect of their alternate temples. The result was that they opted for eternal death, rather than eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, all because they lacked personal awareness of their own preconceived bias. Remember how the Samaritan woman at the well fell at first into the same trap. She initially rejected Jesus' overtures to her based on the same deadly bias. You remember the exchange in John 4:16-20: **Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here."** <sup>17</sup> **The woman answered him, "I have no husband."** **Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';** <sup>18</sup> **for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true."** <sup>19</sup> **The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet."** <sup>20</sup> **Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.** Exactly the same problem with exactly the same cause. The woman was ready to dismiss Jesus because she failed to understand herself and her own preconceived (and false) notions. What she found was that "self" was working against her own self-interest.

What exactly does it mean to *"work against yourself"*? Do you remember those cartoons where someone cuts off the branch on which he is sitting, or cuts a hole in the part of the floor on which he is

standing? That's the kind of thing we are talking about – struggling toward what you think will benefit you, only to find that you have actually been working against your own best interests. Since self can do that to self, the question that you and I need to answer this morning is: *Have we in the past, or are we still today, working against ourselves?* This is a critical question, since opposition to the truth is, in reality, opposition to God. You will recall how Peter, in his misguided enthusiasm, was actually working against both himself and his Lord when he, failing to recognize the evil that existed within himself, tried to prevent Jesus from going to Jerusalem to suffer and die for the sins of the world: <sup>ESV</sup>(**Matthew 16:21-23**) ***From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. <sup>22</sup> And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." <sup>23</sup> But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."***

Note just how *sure* Peter was of his actions. He was so certain that he knew what was best that he even presumed to rebuke Jesus, the very One he had just moments earlier identified as ***"the Christ, the Son of the living God."*** Yet Peter's good intentions neither justified nor rectified his actions. He found himself working *against* his God, against himself, and against the eternal good of the whole human race.

Note also in our text how James and John, lacking self-awareness, failed to recognize and guard against their own personal inclination – which was to kill and destroy those who opposed Jesus, rather than to love and win them over: ***And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"*** Jesus' response is telling: ***But he (Jesus) turned and rebuked them.*** In fact virtually all of the men that followed Jesus had problems in this area. Remember how Paul, when he was still Saul, dedicated himself to the destruction of God's Church – all the while certain in his heart that he was doing the will of his God? Paul (Saul) *thought* he had been working for his God when, in fact, he had been working against him – all because he was convinced that what he *felt* was true must in fact be true.

Our text gives still other examples. One who wanted to follow Jesus (Matthew identifies him as a Scribe) actually loved his creature comforts too much and lacked that understanding of himself. Another was judged worthy and invited by Jesus, but he failed to recognize his own worldly sentimentality toward the dead – those who no longer could be rescued.

Still others offered the reasonable-sounding, *"First just let us say goodbye to our families"* – failing to recognize their own divided loyalties.

Very likely for the wrong reasons, Socrates nevertheless had it exactly right. It is absolutely critical that you and I come to know ourselves. No one else can do that for us. Each of us needs to do that all on our own, and that personal self-awareness begins with recognizing that we are, one and all, nothing but decaying clay vessels, deeply flawed, but vessels into which God has placed perfect, divine wealth – the gospel of forgiveness through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Nothing and no one has the power to take that from us, yet we have the terrible power to throw it away. This is why we need to know ourselves, intimately and honestly, so what we can guard against that evil that resides within. Grant us such wisdom, insight, and honesty, dear Heavenly Father. Amen.

## **Scripture Readings**

<sup>ESV</sup>(**1 Kings 19:9-21**) And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>10</sup> He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>11</sup> And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. <sup>12</sup> And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. <sup>13</sup> And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" <sup>14</sup> He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." <sup>15</sup> And the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. <sup>16</sup> And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. <sup>17</sup> And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. <sup>18</sup> Yet I will

leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him." <sup>19</sup> So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. <sup>20</sup> And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" <sup>21</sup> And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

<sup>ESV</sup> **(Galatians 5:13-25)** For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. <sup>14</sup> For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup> But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another. <sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 30, 2019**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 738 (Brown Hymnal)

"Alleluia! Sing to Jesus"

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

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

**The First Lesson:** (1 Kings 19:9-21) Our first reading reminds us just how easy it can be for God's children to lose track of the role they are to play in God's master plan. In our first reading, Elijah had just come from a stunning display of God's power on Mt. Carmel, where 850 priests of Baal and Asherah were humbled and slaughtered. Enraged, Queen Jezebel swore to take Elijah's life, so Elijah fled into the wilderness, lamenting that he alone was left. God made it clear to Elijah that He was still in control and still had a specific role for Elijah to play. That is what we today should seek – to know and do God's will, accepting our own human limitations.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 84 (Page 38)

**The Second Lesson:** (Galatians 5:13-25) Our theme for this morning is "personal awareness." It is easy for us to lose track of ourselves – to forget not only that we are just God's humble servants, but that within every Christian there is both good and evil. This is an awareness we absolutely need to possess if we are to guard ourselves *from ourselves*. Our second reading reminds us of the two natures of man, and the fruits thereof.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 521 (Stanzas 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"What God Ordains Is Always Good"

## The Sermon – Text: Luke 9:51-62 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Personal Awareness"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post Sermon Hymn – 245 (Red Hymnal)

"God Loved the World So that He Gave"

## The Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn – 577 (Red Hymnal)

"God Bless Our Native Land"

## 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 (27) Average (35)

### This Week at St. Paul:

|                    |                    |                              |
|--------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Today</b>       | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | – Worship Service            |
|                    | <b>-11:00 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship and coffee hour |
| <b>Friday</b>      | <b>-6:00 p.m.</b>  | – July Time Out              |
| <b>Next Sunday</b> | <b>-10:00 a.m.</b> | – Worship Service            |
|                    | <b>-11:00 a.m.</b> | – Fellowship and coffee time |

**CLC News** – A full summary of the recent CLC Pastoral Conference is available from the Pastor upon request. Faith of Markesan has called Karl Olmanson. Holy Trinity of West Columbia has called member Leah Fossum. Bethel of Morris has called Pastor Timothy Daub.

**Black Hills Camping Trip** – This summer's Black Hills Family Bible Camp has been scheduled for Friday evening, July 19<sup>th</sup>, through Tuesday morning, July 23<sup>rd</sup>. For more information please call Pastor Aaron Ude at (605) 393-1311 or email him at [aaronude@gmail.com](mailto:aaronude@gmail.com).

**Looking Ahead** – This year's **Vacation Bible School** has been scheduled for August 5-9. Sessions will run from 6:30-8:30 each day. Our **Annual Church Picnic** has been scheduled for the following Sunday, August 11<sup>th</sup>. The site is Hillside Lion's Park, Shelter #1.

**Man Up!** – The "Man Up" retreat is intended to offer strength and encouragement for men 18 and older for their personal faith, family, and fellowship at church. It includes Bible Study, Fellowship, Leadership Training, Team and Relationship Building and Worship, as well as many outdoor bonding activities. The retreat will be held September 12-15, 2019 at Wyalusing State Park near Prairie du Chien, WI. For more information go to: [www.manup.clclutheran.org](http://www.manup.clclutheran.org). The cost is only \$75 for the weekend and includes lodging, meals, and activities. Register by August 31, 2019.