

"Elevators"

Text: Luke 10:38-42

May you both recognize and fully appreciate the love that God the Father has for each of you – shown nowhere more clearly than in the fact that he subjected his own dear Son to unimaginable torment to pay for your sins. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Has it struck you just how rare it is to find individuals who do the right thing *just because it is the right thing*? To ask the question another way, how often do you see anyone (yourself included) doing what they/you do *all to the glory of God*? For example, you all know people who are very disciplined when it comes to diet and exercise. That, in and of itself, is a good thing – but not necessarily in the eyes of God. God is interested in the heart, which means that if that discipline is born of vanity or pride or any of the baser, sinful emotions of man, God is not impressed.

Our Lord wants us to do the right thing, but he wants us to do that right thing *for the right reason*. Don't misunderstand. The solution is not to stop doing the right thing because your motivations are all messed up. The solution is to keep doing the right thing as you work on doing that right thing for the right reason.

We point this out this morning as an example to demonstrate, first of all, just how vital a role our Christian faith is intended to play *in all of the moment-by-moment decisions of our lives*. All day, every day, we are faced with choices and decisions. The art of Christian living is not only to make the right decision, but to make that right decision *for the right reason* – which can usually be summed up as **"to the glory of God."**

Here's just one example of the sort of thing we're talking. How many of you, if faced with the option, choose the stairs rather than the elevator when you have business in a multi-story building? I'm guessing most take the elevator. Why, when you know that walking the steps would be better for you? (And don't kid yourself that the elevator is faster. Unless your destination is more than three or four stories up, the stairs on average are actually as fast or faster.) More to the point, what is it that would finally move you to take the steps – assuming that you believe it would be the better choice? While I can't answer for you, what helps me to make the better decision is actually that which we are going to discuss this morning: the "elevators" God has placed into the circle of my life. Only we're talking

about a different kind of elevator here. That different kind of elevator is not a machine or a grain storage facility; we're talking about people – human beings who lift our thoughts or attitude by pointing out a blind spot, a better way, a more God-pleasing path.

So it is this morning that we will center our study around "elevators," and we will divide our study into three parts: Elevators: 1) Find them. 2) Be one. 3) Make more.

The text that will guide and instruct us this morning is found in the Gospel of Luke, the Tenth Chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 10:38-42** *Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." ⁴¹ But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, ⁴² but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."*

So far the very Word of God. God himself has given these words to you, and herein offers you wisdom, strength, comfort, and – in particular this morning – profoundly practical advice. Since these are all things we need and desire, we ask our God to give us these very gifts as we pray, *"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."* Amen.

One of my favorite things in life is when someone points out something that maybe I subconsciously knew, but failed to recognize. In other words, I consider it a great gift when someone points out something that I myself had experienced, but hadn't consciously identified or was unable to wrap my mind around – like when someone points out that your physical symptoms seem to indicate that you are lactose intolerant, or identifies for you what's causing your car to pull to the left or vibrate, or when someone shares the simple, obvious explanation to a Bible passage that has always confused you. More and more I find myself drawn to that sort of person – someone that *elevates* me in some way.

I'm guessing you've all experienced that same sort of thing for yourself. Even young people, if they pause long enough (turn the screens off

long enough) to actually think about it, tend to recognize that there are people in their lives that lift them up and make them better, and others that just drag them down. As adults you have unquestionably recognized that there are those individuals in your life that just inspire you to be or do better – in your speech, your thoughts, your attitude – just as there are those that have the opposite effect. Most valuable are those individuals that lift you to a closer walk with your God and to a better understanding and appreciation of his Word.

That's what Mary had found in our text, isn't it? Who better to draw her to a closer walk with her God than the God-Man himself? That was the choice she made, as described in our text, and Jesus himself labeled it as "a good decision."

Understand what was and wasn't happening in our text. Jesus wasn't accusing Martha of sin; he was pointing out to her a better, higher way. He was thereby acting as her elevator. Martha was a devout and conscientious Christian woman. We know that from her words to Jesus when her brother Lazarus suffered his first death. You recall the conversation she had with Jesus on that occasion: **Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."** ²³ **Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."** ²⁴ **Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."** ²⁵ **Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"** ²⁷ **She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."** John 11:21-27 This was arguably one of the earliest and best confessions of just who Jesus was and what he had come to do. Martha could therefore have received this truth from no one but the Holy Spirit, living and active within her. It indicates that Martha's heart was in the right place.

Yet as a conscientious person, Martha also recognized that there was work to do. She recognized and accepted her responsibility to care for the earthly needs of Jesus and his disciples. The problem then was one of priorities, and she – consciously or not – assigned a higher priority to the provision of earthly needs. In our text Jesus was lovingly *elevating* her to that better place, to the better choice.

Though Jesus himself no longer walks this earth, there are such elevators among us. We need to find them, identify them, and surround ourselves with them. They are the Christians who lift us to a more regular study of

God's Word, to more wholesome speech, bolder witnessing, and better discipline in how we use our time. Jesus advocated this very thing in our text, though we may need to look a bit to find it. His message to Martha was not, *"Too bad Martha, Mary got the good part. Now get back in that kitchen."* His clear implication was, *"There's plenty of room for you by the Elevator. Instead of Mary joining you, you go join her."*

Be warned, however, that the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh will relentlessly object, and will offer creative alternatives. They will relentlessly try to convince you that that sort of *elevator* just isn't cool. On the contrary, those individuals who lift us to a more Godly walk are to be despised and ridiculed. Instead of *"I want to be like that"* your sinful flesh will typically respond with something like, *"Look at Mr. Goodie-Goodie."* or *"She just thinks she's so much better than everyone else"* or *"How impractical and outdated."* While the new man in you thrills to the prospect of being elevated, your old Adam will fairly scream, *"Don't get suckered – that's not how normal people live and act! That's just not you!"* It's just a given that nothing good and God-pleasing will ever be acceptable to Satan and his allies. They will always spend themselves in their resistance effort. Their goal is to drag you ever lower – until you finally join them for all eternity at rock bottom in the never-ending torments of hell itself.

In this too we recognize our own sinfulness and our desperate need for a Savior. If left to our own devices, we would (and consistently do) choose the low road. There is even within us the capacity to join the world in their condemnation and ridicule of those fellow Christians who, by their words and actions and speech, elevate those around them. Note well in our text how someone as devout as Martha condemned her sister for doing the right thing. You and I need to do just the opposite. Look for those who will lift you up, and surround yourself with them.

Our text not only encourages us to seek out and surround ourselves with elevators, it also calls on each of us to *be* one – to be the sort of Christian that elevates others. That's both the goal and the natural result of surrounding ourselves with those who build us up – we learn to do the same. We ourselves are slowly transformed.

Though for Christians it goes without saying, we are not talking so much about behavior modification here as we are conversion, sanctification, and salvation. Any and all outward "goodness" on the part of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ is a foul odor to God. Isaiah 1:11-18: ***"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?"***

says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹² **"When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts?"** ¹³ **Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations-- I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.** ¹⁴ **Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.** ¹⁵ **When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.** ¹⁶ **Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil,** ¹⁷ **learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause."** And then take special note of how he puts all of this into perspective in the next verse. Since we cannot provide such perfection on our own, he assures us that he is the one that will provide it for us: **"Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."** The bottom line, as far as God is concerned, is that there is nothing in all creation that God sees as good apart from, or that in any way opposes, his Son. **"Without faith it is impossible to please God."**

From this it is clear that God's ultimate goal for every human being is their salvation through faith in his Son. But the *result* of that conversion is also supposed to be our *transformation* here in time, on this earth. That too is his will. He did not punish his Son for our sins so that we could continue in them. He does not lift us up with the intention that we bring our neighbor down. He does not bring good examples of Christian conduct into our lives with the intention that we continue to live like the godless.

Again, God's ultimate goal is the rescue of human souls. He himself provided that rescue by sending his Son to pay our sin debt. That's also why we are still here. Our job, our calling, is make more Christians, and thereby to build more elevators. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus laid it out for us: **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.** ¹⁵ **Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house.** ¹⁶ **In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."** Matthew 5:14-16

God's direction is never just horizontal (all about this life) and certainly never lower, baser, more crass or corrupting. God's direction is always up,

always vertical, until we are finally lifted to that perfect existence in his presence for all eternity – the ultimate elevation. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Genesis 18:1-10** And the LORD appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, "O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on--since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, "Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate. ⁹ ¶ They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent." ¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son."

^{ESV} **Colossians 1:21-29** And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. ²⁴ ¶ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

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

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – July 17, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 10 (Red Hymnal)

"This Is the Day the Lord Hath Made"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 18:1-10) From the very beginning our God determined to demonstrate in a wide variety of ways that his plan for our salvation was different from every manmade plan. One of the ways he demonstrated this is revealed in our first reading, where he determined that Abraham and Sarah would not have a child until their old age. The message is that we are saved not by the normal course of man's effort but by the miraculous work and promise of God himself. We trust not in ourselves but in God's promise.

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 84 (Brown Hymnal page 38)

The New Testament Lesson: (Colossians 1:21-29) As Christians, we really can't fully appreciate who we are and where we now stand unless we first come to terms with what we used to be. This is the first lesson of our second reading. In this reading we are also reminded that, despite our great privilege and high calling, we should never be so naïve as to expect that the devil and his minions would allow us to fulfill our calling without serious opposition. We can only succeed through the power that God himself supplies.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn –767 (Verses 1-2) (Brown Hymnal)

"Church of God, Elect and Glorious"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 10:38-42 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Elevators"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn -767 (Verses 3-4) (Brown Hymnal)

"Church of God, Elect and Glorious"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 764 (Verses 1-2, 4) (Brown Hymnal)

"God of Grace and God of Glory"

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 (46) Ave (46)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Picnic at Jaycee Park
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time

CLC News – Pastor Matthew Ude is considering the call to Ascension Lutheran of Batavia (Chicago area). Pastor Caleb Schaller is considering the call to Faith of Markesan. Pastor Bruce Naumann is considering the call to serve as fulltime resident (visiting) missionary. Pastor-elect Timothy Daub has accepted the call to Prince of Peace of Hecla.

Church Picnic – Our annual picnic is today at Jaycee Park on Century at 4th. It begins as soon as you can get there. Please direct any question to Cindy Ollenburger.

Church Council Notes – The Church Council met on 7/10. Five Council members, plus the Pastor, were present. Thanks in part to a donation of Ethel Baumgarten memorial funds, the congregation will now be able to purchase the assisted hearing devices that were authorized at the last Voters meeting. Offerings for June were \$1,300 below budgeted needs for June and \$2,240 behind budgeted needs YTD. The Council voted to transfer the \$1,692 balance in the Organ Fund back into the General Fund, which will help to offset our current shortfall. The Pastor's church cell phone reimbursement was increased from \$60 to \$98 per month. A Quarterly Voters' Meeting was tentatively scheduled for September 11. The next Council Meeting is scheduled for August 28.

Thank You – Thanks to those members who were able to provide last-minute housing for the Travelling Vacation Bible School flyer distribution team that passed through on Thursday en route to Seattle.