

"Life Is Not 'Whatever'"

Text: Luke 12:49-53

May you find comfort and peace in the certain knowledge that the very Savior you know, Jesus Christ, is the one and only gate to heaven. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Have you noticed that our society seems to be growing ever more "whatever" in their attitude – toward just about everything? Our highest public officials flagrantly break the law, doing what even a generation ago would have been called treason and would have earned them prison time or a firing squad, and our society responds with a dull "whatever." Sexual immorality of every imaginable sort is not only openly flaunted but *extolled*, and our society responds with a yawn and a "whatever." Millions of our citizens have figured out how to live off the hard work of others... "whatever." Islam is advancing around the world... "whatever." Souls are dying in unbelief... "whatever." The first thing we need to do to avoid slipping into that same lethargic apathy is to regularly remind ourselves and each other that for a child of God life is never "whatever."

Imagine you are standing before two identical doors. Behind one door is eternally perfect joy in heaven. Behind the other is unending torment in hell. You have no way of knowing which is the right door. Is that "whatever"? Worse than that, you were born with a natural inclination to pick the wrong door, *every single time*. How could you, or *anyone* for that matter, survive such a scenario? And the picture of two doors isn't even accurate. There are not two doors standing before you, there are *hundreds* of doors, hundreds of false religions, all of which promise passage to some sort of paradise, and every human being passes through one of them. That's not "whatever," and neither are any of our words or actions that point our neighbor to the wrong door.

Our text for this morning will help to clear away the indifference that tends to accumulate and remind us again that what we say and do is important, often critically so. That text is found in Luke's Gospel, the Twelfth Chapter:

^{ESV} **Luke 12:49-53** *"I (Jesus) came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. ⁵² For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three. ⁵³ They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."*

So far the words of the Holy Spirit. Though so many have abandoned this truth, may you forever be convinced that these words are indeed the words of *God* - altogether true and right. Fully convinced that God is the author of these words, so we this morning pray, **"Sanctify us by Your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

It is simply neither fair nor accurate to take only part of what a man says and does while on this earth and to base our picture of the man on that limited evidence. One good deed or characteristic doesn't make a bad man good, nor does one misdeed make a good man bad. If we operated like that we could make everyone good or everyone bad. While obviously unfair, this is pretty much what our society has done with Jesus. They have taken part of the man and a part of what he said and turned it into the whole. They have, for example, made him into some sort of a peace activist who went around begging tolerance for all and from all. They urge: *"See how gently he dealt with the prostitute caught in the very act. Surely this is evidence that Jesus was not overly upset by such conduct."* In other words, they try to turn him into a "whatever" kind of guy. But that ignores the undoubtedly stern **"Go and sin no more"** with which he sends the repentant adulterous away. Or they argue: *"Look how he hangs out with sinners of every kind. He wouldn't do that if he really had a problem with those lifestyles and actions."* But that ignores the fact that he was doing that to turn those sinners from the path they were on. *"See how he calls himself the 'Prince of Peace,'* they say, *"Surely he must be of the opinion that ideological differences are not worth fighting over."* But to believe that, you would have to ignore his own words of our text for this morning: **"I have come to cast fire on the earth... Do you think I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division."** You have to take in the whole picture of the man if you are to rightly understand the man himself.

Would Jesus rather see peace on earth? Of course. Would he rather see peace *at any cost*? By his own words, no. Simple test: *would Jesus have come to earth to suffer and die if that were true?* Our text answers. Jesus came **"to send fire on the earth."** In his own words he came to bring not peace but division. This is not the same Jesus the world knows – not by any stretch of the imagination.

But how is it then possible that someone who calls himself **"the Prince of Peace"** one minute, can say words like these the next? Those who do not know the answer to this question very likely also have a strange idea of just what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is not just the warm fuzzy glow and it's certainly not "whatever." Our text teaches us that the full picture must also include the cold hard steel of condemnation for all sin and unbelief. It is, after all, all about Jesus. He is that dividing point between heaven and hell. That's why it is not only true that **"whoever**

believes and is baptized will be saved." It is also just as true that **"he who does not believe will be condemned."**

Tragically, then, we must first establish what it means to be a Christian. The most common misconception today is that a Christian is someone who does good deeds. That's like defining a professional football player as someone who signs autographs. A football player is someone who plays football, and only signs autographs because of who or what he is. A Christian is someone who believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all his sins; a human being in whom the Holy Spirit has created saving faith and therefore a new man, who exists in the very image of his God. This faith in Jesus, this new man, will show itself in many different ways. That change in us creates the desire to help others - financially, morally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. We're not always very good at it, but the new-man heart is right. But that's what we do because of who or what we are. That's not what defines us.

With this as our definition of a Christian we can gain some other insights. A Christian cannot be defined as someone who goes to church each Sunday, but the new man in every Christian does want to worship his God whenever he has opportunity. A Christian cannot be defined as someone who never uses foul language, although the new man in every Christian will always struggle to build up and edify others by what he says. A Christian cannot be defined as someone who studies his Bible or holds regular family devotions, although – again – the new man in every Christian will surely struggle to do just that. A Christian therefore can only be defined as one who believes in Jesus Christ, trusting that Jesus, *and Jesus alone*, paid for all sins on the cross of Calvary. It is only through faith in who and what Jesus is and has done that we have peace with our God and forgiveness.

Why is it so important to hold fast to this definition without wavering? Several reasons. First, if we forget that Christianity - the only path to heaven - is a matter of faith in the heart, we'll almost certainly get suckered into the devil's lie that Christianity is all about earning God's love by the good things we do – which is a rejection of Jesus Christ and an eternal death sentence.

Second, to forget that Christianity is a matter of the heart is to misunderstand and despise what Jesus came to earth to do for us. He did not come to empower us to do our part. He did not come to give us an example as to how to earn God's love by our behavior. He did not come to proclaim toleration for all different doctrines, religions, and lifestyles. He didn't suffer and die for "whatever." He came to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He came to do for us what nonetheless *had* to be done if we were to inherit heaven. He came to keep the law perfectly; to fulfill the law's every demand. And this is that amazing truth, unique to Christianity: *What Jesus did is now credited to you and me - as if we ourselves did it.* Jesus' perfection is now *our* perfection. It is credited to us the moment we are brought to trust that Jesus

did what the Bible says he did – that he died for our sins. To deny this fact is to deny Christianity itself.

Third, to miss the definition of a Christian would be to forever misunderstand exactly what Jesus is talking about in our text for this morning.

What *did* Jesus mean when he said in our text that he came to bring division rather than peace? Up until the coming of Christ, mankind did not and could not know its Savior. He was nameless and faceless. Those who were saved were saved only through faith in the *promise* that a Savior would one day be sent, and referred to him only by his prophesied titles such as "Messiah," "the Christ," and "Son of David." All of that changed the moment Jesus gave his life on the cross of Calvary. This is what Jesus was talking about in our text when he spoke of **"a baptism I have to be baptized with."** He was talking about his own suffering and death. No wonder he also then said, **"and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!"** Who wouldn't be distressed to know that God the Father was about to direct the sum total of his righteous wrath for every single sin upon him! That is exactly what Jesus faced on Good Friday. The full fury of God's wrath toward every single sin was hurled down upon the previously sinless Son of God. At that moment God the Father **"made him to be sin for us."** (2 Corinthians 5:21) There he silently bore the punishment that you and I deserved.

Something pivotal, something earth shattering and eternally significant happened the moment Jesus' sacrifice *was* accomplished. The moment he uttered those supremely powerful words from the cross, **"It is finished!"** and then **"yielded up His spirit"** he became the dividing point for every man, woman, and child on earth. Completing the work he came to do, Jesus then and there was positively and conclusively identified as the only possible Savior from sin and hell. Again the Bible makes this clear when we read verses like Acts 4:12: **"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."** Therefore to truly believe that Jesus is the Savior is also to believe that he is the *only* savior. Jesus himself said, **"No one comes to the Father, but by me."** Before Jesus was born, believers were saved by faith in *the promise of a Savior*. When he came, however, he put a name and a face to that Savior. In this way he became the dividing point forever after. From that point on, a person's belief about Jesus will forever be that which determines whether that human being spends an eternity in heaven or in hell. This is how Jesus now serves as the razor sharp blade that separates believer from unbeliever, the saved from the damned.

Was this what Jesus came to do? Yes and no. He certainly came to save, but it was an unfortunate fact that there would also be those who would

reject him and die eternally. Though certainly not his desire, this is also an inescapable fact of his coming. 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that Jesus **"wants all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** Again in 2 Peter 3:9 we read, **"The Lord is... longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."** To say therefore that Jesus came to condemn those who reject him would be like saying that firemen enter burning buildings to lecture the dying on the folly of playing with matches. And yet Jesus knew full well that countless souls *would* reject him. He knew that millions would choose death rather than life, human works rather than God's grace. Others, he also knew, *would* by the Holy Spirit come to believe in him and be saved. Herein lies the **"division"** he talked about in our text. He loved mankind too deeply to allow us to slip peacefully, quietly, undisturbed into the night of eternal torment. In the end, Jesus came to provide the only alternative to hell, the only means of escape, the only chance that mankind would ever get. In this way he came to create that unavoidable **"division."**

But therein he is also the greatest of all "uniters." In the last half of our text Jesus demonstrates just how deep and painful this division will be in some families. He warns us ahead of time that it will divide even the closest family ties – father against son, mother against daughter, and so on. Yet note well also the great bond of unity that is the possession of all who believe in him. Listen to how Jesus himself describes the unity he gives to those who believe in him: **"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am,"** (John 17:20-24a)

This is what Jesus wants for every single human being – the most intimate and eternal of bonds, with him and with each other, in connection with Christ. Though he came knowing many would be lost, he came not to condemn but to save, and to give this gift.

Don't hide either of these truths from your neighbor, especially from those you love. Jesus is the dividing point – life eternal for all who believe, but death to all who do not. There is no gray area here, certainly no "whatever," so we never want to act or speak as if there is. To believe on Jesus means to trust him for our full and complete sin payment. To reject him means trusting in any other source of "goodness" to enter heaven. This, by the working of the Holy Spirit within you, you know, and this you can share with an unbeliever. And is so doing you can thus prove instrumental in turning a soul from eternal death to eternal life. Think of it! A simple message from you can play a critical role in

rescuing a soul from eternal misery. God grant us all the courage to live, moment by moment, his great commission to rescue the souls that are dying all around us.

The only "whatever" here should be our resolution to do *whatever* we possibly can. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Jeremiah 23:23-31** "Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away? ²⁴ Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' ²⁶ How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, ²⁷ who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal? ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? declares the LORD. ²⁹ Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? ³⁰ Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who steal my words from one another. ³¹ Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.'

^{ESV} **Hebrews 12:1-3** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ ¶ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

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The 13th Sunday after Pentecost – August 14, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 1 (Red Hymnal)

"Open Now the Gates of Beauty"

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

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

The First Lesson: (Jeremiah 23:23-31) Our First Lesson reminds us that a lack of immediate, visible punishment does not mean God approves of evil – including false teaching. The evil, the lies and the false teaching will continue to the end of time, but there judgment awaits it. Our calling is to go on sharing not our own ideas but the truth of God's Word with a world that sorely needs to hear it.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 66 (Page 37) (Read responsively)

The Second Lesson: (Hebrews 12:1-3) Some have summarized the theme of the Book of Hebrews as *Don't give up!* We hear evidence to support this theme in our second lesson. Having worked saving faith in our hearts, the Holy Spirit has set us on the path to heaven. Yet we still possess the awful power to throw away our faith and our salvation. Nothing tempts us toward such foolishness as powerfully as the cares and pleasures of this earthly life. We are also here reminded how foolish it would be for us to imagine that we would escape all hardship and persecution here on earth, or that we are never in need of the Lord's loving discipline to keep us from wandering.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 380 (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ"

The Sermon – Text: Luke 12:49-53 (Back page of this bulletin)

"Life Is Not 'Whatever'"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn -305 (Verses 1 & 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Soul, Adorn Thyself with Gladness"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 46 (Red Hymnal)

"On What has Now been Sown"

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 (53) Average (48)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship and Coffee time
Friday-Saturday	-6:00 p.m.	– CLC BoT Meetings in MSP
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Opening Service at ILC

CLC News – Pastor Ed Starkey has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids, MI. Becky McKenney has returned the call to St. Stephen of Mountain View, CA. Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Faith of Markesan, WI. Pastor Del Maas has returned the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit. Professor-elect Paul Naumann is scheduled to be installed at the opening service of Immanuel Lutheran High School, College, and Seminary in Eau Claire, WI on August 22.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is asked to meet briefly after the service this morning.

Board Meetings – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend CLC Board of Trustees meetings in Minneapolis on Friday-Saturday of this week, followed by the installation of Teacher-elect Andrew Roehl in Eau Claire on Sunday and Professor Elect Paul Naumann on Monday.

Women's Fellowship – The date of the annual Women's Fellowship Salad Supper meeting has been changed to September 11 at 6pm. For more information please contact Cindy Ollenburger.