

"Trending"

Text: Hebrews 3:12-19

"May the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 5:10-11)

Dear Fellow Christians:

YouTube, Twitter, Google, ESPN, most of the broadcast networks and a score of newspapers – all now offer a "trending now" feature. Trends are the new trend. The fact is trends are important, but not so much the sort of trend you would hear discussed on one of those sites. We're talking here about those things that affect the spiritual walk of Christians. Almost nothing in a Christian's life gets corrected overnight, nor do bad habits tend to form instantly - which is why we need to observe carefully the *direction* of the trend. That's also why you've probably heard me ask not if a particular problem is *solved*, but if it is getting *better* or *worse*. Most of the time an upward trend (things are getting better) is not only all we can realistically expect, most of the time it is enough to keep us going. Would you prefer instant perfection? Of course. Unfortunately that's almost never how life works in a sin-broken world.

So it is this morning that we are going to talk about trends in our lives – not the fashion or fashionable trends the world is all into, but the trends that really need to be important to Christians.

Our text for this morning talks speaks of such things, but, like the trends themselves, you probably have to look closely to see it. Our study this morning centers on the Word of God recorded in the Third Chapter of the Book of Hebrews:

^{ESV} **Hebrews 3:12-19** *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.* ¹³ *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.* ¹⁴ *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.* ¹⁵ *As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."* ¹⁶ *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?* ¹⁷ *And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the*

wilderness? ¹⁸ *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?* ¹⁹ *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

These are the very words of our God. May God lead you to hear and accept them as though he himself is standing before you and speaking directly to you, personally. That our God would so fill, strengthen, instruct and comfort us through the study of these words this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Did you notice the warning in our text and the trend we are told to identify? It was summed up in verses 12 and 13 with these words: **"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ...that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."** We refer to this as a trend because a Christian falling from faith is almost never an event. In other words, the human heart is almost never hardened all at once by a single event or sin. It is slowly deadened by evil – by a *pattern* of bad choices, by a comfortable cohabitation with sin, by a gradual conformity to the sinful world in which we live.

That's the trend our text calls on each of us to search out in our own personal lives – *and in the lives of our fellow Christians*. Is this a worthy venture? Is this worth our time and effort? The upside could not be higher and the downside could not be lower. It's the difference between heaven and hell – obviously therefore "worth the effort."

Which is not to say that the process is going to be easy. We've got a whole world of evil working against us. The first problem was identified for us in our text as **"the deceitfulness of sin."** Interestingly enough the word translated **"deceitfulness"** can also at times be translated as **"pleasantness."** That's part of the problem, isn't it? Sin is so deceitful, in part, because it is often quite pleasant to our baser nature – in an incredible variety of different ways. The sin of gossip, for example, satisfies that strange desire within us to hear and share bad things about other people. "Experts" tell us that this is because hearing bad things about others makes us feel better about ourselves. Yet it also plays to our natural love of sin – that darkness of the human heart that every Christian struggles to beat into submission on a daily basis. Every time we hear of sin in others, our will to resist is diminished and we are left weaker – and therefore also more vulnerable.

Pick a sin and you will typically find sinful pleasure behind it. Stealing gives us the pleasure of ownership, even if it is tainted ownership. Pride makes us feel superior, sexual sins yield carnal pleasure, harming our neighbor's body provides a sense of revenge or domination – you get the point. Sin is generally pleasurable, which means that that old Adam in us is going to offer countless reasons, excuses, rationalizations as to why sin is somehow acceptable, or at least tolerable, *"in my particular situation."*

Sin is also so deceitful because it often pretends to be so harmless, so innocuous. It's no big deal. So many others seem to do and be so much worse, so much more evil. It's the old "sin graded on the curve" mentality. *"I'm not a murderer, after all, so spreading a rumor about my neighbor can't be that bad."* *"I may allow lustful thoughts to fill my heart, but it's no big deal as long as I don't let it go too far."* *"I'm not always all that truthful, but I never lie when it really matters."*

Just in case you are feeling somewhat immune because you happen to be sitting in the house of God or reading the Sunday sermon for your own private meditation, know that sin can and eventually will destroy every heart where it is allowed to grow and fester. Look at the examples in our text (which is why God put them there.) Our text talks about those who fell away and were lost between the time when Moses led them out of Egypt and when the Children of Israel finally entered the Promised Land. It's pretty amazing – in an alarming sort of way – to stop and consider these examples. Which of course is exactly why God the Holy Spirit brought them to our attention. These were individuals who actually got to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and taste with their mouths the miraculous intervention of their God. All who came out of Egypt saw the plagues. All must have believed – at least to the point of painting their doorposts with blood and preparing the Passover meal – or they would have been decimated by the final plague. All had witnessed the parting of the Red Sea, the destruction of the Egyptian army, the manna and quail in the wilderness, the water flowing from the rock, the pillar of cloud that led them by day and the pillar of fire by night. All heard the Lord's voice at Sinai... and still they rebelled, still they were lost.

How could that happen? The first fact that we need to acknowledge is that it *did* happen, which means you and I ought to be intensely interested. We don't want to make the same mistakes. So what was the problem? Boil it all down and what you find is that those Jews who rebelled allowed sin to fester in their hearts. It started with a lack of trust – trust that God could and would protect and provide for them – it continued with a lack of contentment and it culminated in an outright rejection of the one true God and the idolatrous worship of the Golden Calf. Those who started out so

well and were given every advantage along the way – including actual visible proof of the goodness and power of their God – were destroyed by sin. Most came to the very borders of the Promised Land and were turned away because of their lack of trust in their God. So close and yet so far. All died in the subsequent 40 year wandering in the wilderness.

It happens, doesn't it? We see almost daily examples of those who almost succeed, but fail at the last possible moment. I don't know if any of you remember Sian Welch and Wendy Ingraham, two women who competed in an Iron Man competition in 1997. The event is still today known as "The Crawl." The two were in first and second place in the race, and after 140 miles of swimming, biking, and running, the two collapsed about 50 yards from the finish line. They just plain ran out of gas. Their muscles just quit working. Though they ended up crawling to the finish line, they were passed by other competitors in the process.

Carry that example into your own life and it provides exactly the same sort of encouragement offered in our text for this morning. Running well isn't the same as ending well. In fact in the case of those runners, their downfall didn't come all at once; it came because they failed to provide their bodies with enough food and water to finish the trip. Note too that while they didn't give the food and the water the ability to do what it does, they did need to put it into their bodies.

In the same way you and I don't give the Word of God the power to heal, comfort, and sustain, but we are expected to introduce it into our hearts and lives. Just as running right alongside a lake doesn't quench anyone's thirst, so also proximity to God's Word doesn't provide us with its power. That means, for example, that having a Bible on the bed stand doesn't do us any good if we don't read it. Going to church or Bible Class doesn't do anything for us if we don't pay attention and work to apply what is presented there to our own personal lives. Sin can only do its destructive work in our hearts if we allow it to live and grow there.

It is the Word of God, after all, that fixes the problem for us. It is the Word that provides that mirror of the Law that shows even the hidden sins in our lives. It is the Word that reminds us that sin only differs as to its consequences, not as to its power to destroy or corrupt. That means, for example, that while murder carries greater physical consequences than, say, hate, both carry not only equal power to damn, both also possess equal power to erode and eventually destroy saving faith.

Understand something, by the way, about this whole process. What we are talking about here is not the relationship between you and your pastor, or you and your parents, or you and your spouse. We're talking about the relationship between you and your God. That's why you ought to take this very, very seriously. God's is the only opinion that matters. You can be right with the whole world, but you have gained nothing if you are not right with your God. You can fool man; you can hide things from man; you can pretend with man. Not so with God. All of this is therefore for your benefit. No one else's. My calling is to bring God's message to your ears and hearts. From that point on you have the power – the terrible, frightening power – to ignore God's Word and to refuse to deal with the sin that is threatening your very soul.

And that, fellow Christians, is the great trend of our day – inside and outside of the Church. Sin is no longer condemned as sin, as displeasing to our God. It is coddled, justified, defended, and embraced. It is even, in some cases, celebrated. Let it not be so with us. Hear and heed the words of our text: ***"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."***

And what is that ***voice***? What does it say? That's the good news in all of this, because not only does that voice of God condemn sin, it tells us that the punishment for *our* personal, individual sins – every single sin of every single sinner – all was satisfied by Jesus on the cross. Today the voice of our God breathes not the fire of condemnation but the comfort of forgiveness. In our text our God does not call out sin because he hates and rejects *us*, but because he loves and accepts us in view of the goodness of his Son. We do not, therefore, want to rid our hearts and lives of sin because we will then be forgiven. We want sin gone because we *are already forgiven*. All of our sin has been loaded on Jesus. We are saved by God's unmerited, unearned love through the faith that has been given to us.

That new man in us now loathes and despises all that is contrary to the will of our God. We want it gone; we want no part of it. Our God simply reminds us of the danger of sin not because it represents some sort of unpaid debt that we have to fulfill, but because he does not want that saving faith that lives in us damaged, weakened, or destroyed. So also the words of our text are sobering – for we live in dangerous times – but they also offer great comfort and confidence that we are on the right path: ***"For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."***

God grant us the joy of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, and then grant us also the wisdom and tenacity to thank him by identifying and then rooting from our hearts and lives all that displeases him, the sin that so easily corrupts and destroys. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Amos 5:6-7,10-15** Seek the LORD and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, ⁷ O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast down righteousness to the earth! ¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth. ¹¹ Therefore because you trample on the poor and you exact taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins-- you who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and turn aside the needy in the gate. ¹³ Therefore he who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, will be with you, as you have said. ¹⁵ Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

ESV **Mark 10:17-22** And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." ²¹ And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²² Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

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 20th Sunday after Pentecost – October 11, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 761 (Brown Hymnal)

"In You Is Gladness"

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

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

The First Lesson: (Amos 5:6-7,10-15) Christians know their Lord as a merciful God. That doesn't mean he can be mocked, or that his mercy does not have an end point. There will be a day of reckoning for all mankind. Those not covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness will be required to pay their sin debt in hell. Those with faith in Jesus Christ will be spared.

Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 10:17-22) Our Gospel lesson reminds us that there are only two kinds of human beings in the world: Those who know that they cannot keep God's Law perfectly and those who think they can. The young man in our second lesson was among those who fool themselves into believing that they can and do keep God's will. Jesus here crushes that misconception and self-delusion. We are righteous only through faith.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 354 (Red Hymnal)

"In the Cross of Christ I Glory"

The Sermon – Text: Hebrews 3:12-19 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Trending"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 307 (Red Hymnal)

"Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 311 & 312 (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 652 (Verse 1) (Red Hymnal)

"I Lay My Sins on Jesus"

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 (41) Average (51)

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 and coffee time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting
Monday	-6:00 p.m.	– Women's Fellowship Salad Supper
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Peter Evensen has accepted the Missionary call to India. Our sister CLC congregation in West Columbia, SC experienced some flooding from the recent rains there, but was spared the devastating destruction that many other areas experienced.

Church Council Meeting – Council Members please remember the meeting scheduled for this morning after the fellowship time.

Flower Order – The Christmas flower order will be due soon. Please check the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table.

Fall Women's Fellowship Meeting – The Women's Fellowship has scheduled the annual Salad Supper for tomorrow (Monday, October 12) at 6 pm. Bring a salad to share and contact Cindy if you have any questions.