

"Where Is Your Home?"

Text: John 7:40-53

From Psalm 100: ***"Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! 5 For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."*** Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

You usually hear the question that forms the title of the sermon this morning (*Where is your home?*) in places like airports, on planes, or in truck stops and other places where travelers meet. Sometimes it's asked of little children that seem to be lost. Someday, no doubt, someone will see me shuffling along and ask the question of me. I just hope I know the answer when they do.

This morning, however, we ask the question of ourselves, and how we answer is critical to our spiritual wellbeing. The God-inspired words that will guide our thoughts this morning are found in the Gospel of John, the Seventh Chapter:

^{ESV} ***John 7:40-53*** ***When they heard these words, some of the people said... "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? 42 Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" 43 So there was a division among the people over him. 44 Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. 45 ¶ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" 46 The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" 47 The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? 48 Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? 49 But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." 50 Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, 51 "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" 52 They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." 53 Then each went to his own home.***

This is the Word of God – gifted to man to bring about our rebirth and preservation. Having already used the power of his Word to bring about our rebirth or conversion, we now ask our God to use that same power to

preserve us in that saving faith, and to increase our wisdom and understanding of his Word and will until he calls us home. So also we pray: ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."*** Amen.

If I were to begin a sentence with: *"A little knowledge is..."* you would undoubtedly finish it with: *"a dangerous thing."* That's the expression. *"A little knowledge is a dangerous thing."*

While mostly true, it isn't a particularly nice expression. It's usually used to put someone down, to put someone "in their place." Yet when it comes to God's Word, that simple saying can be either absolutely right or tragically wrong. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, but whole bus-loads of knowledge can be just as deadly. No one is therefore immune from, or "above," the warnings of our text. Foolishness comes in all shapes and sizes. Even today the majority of the most highly educated men and women in the world believe that their ancestors were monkeys, and that life began from, well, dead stuff. The lesson here is that if modern man can be so wrong about something so basic, it ought not surprise us that men living a couple thousand years ago were also mistaken about a few things. In fact if modern man can actually deny the very existence of their Creator God, it shouldn't surprise us that ancient man couldn't recognize the Son of God when he was standing right in front of them.

And that's just what they did, isn't it? Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Savior of the world, was standing *right there in front of them* and they failed to recognize him. More accurately, they *refused* to recognize him. How? Why? Because, at least in their case, their little knowledge was indeed a very dangerous thing.

It's actually quite startling how the highly educated Jewish leaders rationalized their rejection of Jesus - fascinating how they justified their denial in their own minds. This man was clearly saying and doing things of which no ordinary man was capable, and yet they adamantly refused to admit that he was anything but a deceiver. Instead, they publicly ridiculed anyone who pointed out even the most basic, observable facts concerning Jesus. Yet if you read carefully, they never actually addressed the question, did they? Rather than allow the evidence to persuade them, Jesus' enemies condescendingly mocked those who simply accepted the proof Jesus offered. ***The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" 46 The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" 47 The Pharisees answered them, "Have you***

also been deceived? ⁴⁸ **Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him?** ⁴⁹ **But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.**" Such is the nature of unbelief. It is fully capable of blocking out even irrefutable evidence if that is what is necessary to justify their unbelief. Make no mistake. Unbelief is, in large part, a choice. A tragic, damning choice.

In our text it was fascinating to watch the Jewish leaders struggle with the facts. Did you catch their basic justification for refusing to believe that Jesus was who he said he was? He was a Galilean. Why should that have made any difference? This was more than just petty prejudice. This is where the "little knowledge" part comes in. The Jews knew from Micah 5:2 that the Savior was going to come from David's line and that he would be born in Bethlehem. **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."** These men knew their Old Testament Scriptures. We are told that many memorized entire books and could recite them verbatim. Remember how Herod inquired of these same men, when questioned by the Magi as to the birthplace of the Messiah, and how those Jewish scholars were able not only to give Herod a Scriptural answer, but Herod believed and acted on that information.

The problem was that Galilee was not part of the territory ceded to the Tribe of Judah, and the Prophet Micah had clearly foretold that the Savior would be born in Bethlehem, a city of Judah. Nazareth, the city where Jesus was raised, lay far to the north and was part of the territory given to the Tribe of Zebulun. It is reasonable to assume that Jesus had a Galilean accent. The Jewish leaders used this "knowledge" to reject Jesus as the Messiah. End of discussion. Unbelief is not only blind, it is also very stubborn.

In our text we read that **"there was a division among the people over him (Jesus)."** Then, at the end of our text, we read these tragic words: **"Then each went to his own home."** Don't miss the ominous importance of these words. They are more than just informative; they hold the key to rightly understanding both the problem and the key lesson of this text.

There was a general belief among the Jews of Jesus' day that Galilee was what elites today would refer to as "fly-over country." We today associate Jesus with Nazareth, a village in Galilee, and therefore the city and region take on a certain majesty they didn't otherwise possess. The Jews of Jesus' day just did not believe that anything good could come from there. One of Jesus' own Apostles agreed. Remember how Nathanael, before he

was first introduced to Jesus, said to Philip, **"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"** What did Philip reply? **"Come and see."**

That was the key, wasn't it? That was where the religious elites of Jesus' day went wrong. It's where so many of the educated of today go wrong. They refuse to go to God's Word to find their answers. Had they done so, the question about Jesus' hometown and lineage was easily answered. The scribes and Pharisees refused to do that. They were content with their "little knowledge" because it was what they wanted to believe. Their misgivings could have – would have – been easily answered by a visit and a question: **"Jesus, the Prophet Micah told us to look for a man from Bethlehem. How can you be that man when you are a Galilean?"** Simple question, and Jesus would undoubtedly have given them a simple answer: **"I was born in Bethlehem and moved first to Egypt and then to Galilee."** The Jewish leaders would undoubtedly have also been familiar with Hosea 11:1, **"Out of Egypt I called My son."** Matthew reveals to us that this too was a prophecy about Jesus, but the Jews didn't want to hear it. In Matthew we are also taught that there were well-known prophecies that foretold that the Messiah **"shall be called a Nazarene."** It was also spelled out in Isaiah 9:1-2: **But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.** The bottom line is that doubters just needed any old reason to "justify" their unbelief, and they were perfectly content to dismiss Jesus based on their "little knowledge" of one passage. Rather than search further, they simply retreated into their own preconceived opinions and ideas - **"Then each went to his own home."**

You and I today face the same danger and temptation today. We live in the information age where doubts and questions spread with shocking speed to all corners of the planet. These errors need to be addressed, both in your own heart and mind, and with our neighbors. A thorough understanding of God's Word will therefore not only protect each individual Christian from faith-destroying error, it will help to equip us in our calling to **"give a reason for the hope that is in us."** Each one of us therefore has an equally tremendous opportunity to serve as a solid spokesman for God's Word in an era of rampant skepticism, misinformation, and uncertainty. Yet how can we serve our Lord faithfully if we do not know, and how can we know if we do not study, and where can we learn the truth but from his Word? A little knowledge

can be a dangerous thing, but knowing little or nothing about God's Word can have catastrophic consequences, both for us and for those who do not know their Lord. If too little knowledge was a dangerous thing for the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus day, it certainly poses the same danger for us today.

So we ask again the question with which we began: *Where is your home? Where will you seek spiritual safety and security?* Understand that you too will be tempted to retreat to the comfort of your own thoughts, ideas, and opinions. How tempting to assume that the little we know is the sum total of all that our Lord wants for us. *"I have a little knowledge. It is enough. I will hide myself in the little I know."* This is both right and wrong, and we need to know the difference.

First, and most importantly, saving faith is not a matter of how much we know; it is a matter of what we do know, what we believe. Saving faith is not complex; it is amazing in its simplicity. While most of the scribes and Pharisees refused to just go to Jesus and ask him questions, one actually did go – Nicodemus – the same Nicodemus mentioned in our text. To this man Jesus summarized the simple truth by which we are saved: ***"God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."*** There's the proof that even just a little of the right sort of knowledge can be the most incredible, life-saving, life-changing truth and power that anyone will ever know. Whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. Thanks be to God for the profound simplicity of the Christian faith. Our sins have been erased from God's sight forever. Jesus did that for us. Full and complete forgiveness and salvation are ours because of what Jesus did, not because of what we now do or don't do. No one can change that simple fact, and it is through faith or trust in that simple fact alone that we are saved. Even that faith itself was a gift, freely and undeservedly given to us by the Holy Spirit. That means that the very same heaven that *we* should have earned by perfect obedience to our God is now ours because of *Jesus'* perfect obedience. We failed, Jesus succeeded. We sinned, Jesus paid for our sins. We ruined our relationship with our God, Jesus restored that relationship.

While we need nothing more to be saved, the godless need more from us. They will bring challenges that must be met, questions that must be answered, error that must be corrected. That's why God's Word continually encourages ongoing instruction and growth. This we cannot find in ourselves. Our homes can't be our own minds, thoughts, ideas, opinions. God-pleasing growth and strength we find only in God's Word. That's where our home needs to be. That's where we flee for refuge,

safety, and instruction. So we ask one more thing of our God this morning. We ask him to help us to grow daily in the knowledge of his Word, that not only *we* might be strengthened, protected, and preserved in that simple, saving faith, but that we too might be fully, completely equipped not only to share with others that simple reason for the Christian hope that is in us, but to address also the error and misinformation that fills their world. So also we pray: *"Equip us for our great calling through your Word, O Holy Spirit, until we join you in our permanent home."* Amen.

ESV **(Jeremiah 18:1-10)** The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. ⁴ And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁶ "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. ⁷ If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸ and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. ⁹ And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.

ESV **1 Corinthians 8:1-13** Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up. ² If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But if anyone loves God, he is known by God. ⁴ ¶ Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that "an idol has no real existence," and that "there is no God but one." ⁵ For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth--as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"-- ⁶ yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. ⁷ ¶ However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ⁸ Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. ⁹ But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? ¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. ¹² Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. ¹³ Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

ESV **John 7:40-53** When they heard these words, some of the people said... "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee? ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him. ⁴⁵ ¶ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee." ⁵³ Then each went to his own home.



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The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – July 2, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 575 (Red Hymnal)

"Before the Lord We Bow"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 18:1-10) Our actions have consequences. This is the message our God conveys to us in our first reading this morning. Our God loves us too much to allow sin to steadily destroy our Christian faith – which it certainly will if we allow it to rule over us. His message to the Jewish people was simple: Continue in sin and I will bring calamity. Turn from your sin and I will have mercy.

Psalm 146 (Supplement page 41) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (1 Corinthians 8:1-13) In our second reading Paul addresses a problem in Corinth. They had a disagreement in the congregation about buying and eating meat from animals that had been sacrificed in pagan temples. Both sides evidently believed they were wise or more knowledgeable than the other. Paul's message to them (and therefore also to us) was that knowledge has to be based not only on fact but on loving concern for those around us, remembering that others are affected by our actions.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 517 (Verses 1-2) (Red Hymnal)

"The Will of God Is Always Best"

The Sermon – Text: John 7:40-53 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Where Is Your Home?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 517 (Verses 3-4) (Red Hymnal)

"The Will of God Is Always Best"

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 and around the world. 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 (47) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Roehl has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire (see note below).

Organist Out of Town – With our organist scheduled to be out of town next weekend, the music for next week's service will be pre-recorded. As has been our custom in those rare instances, Holy Communion will not be celebrated next Sunday. Our next communion service is scheduled for July 23rd. As always, private communion is available from Pastor Roehl at any time.

Summer Events – A wide variety of family events and retreats have been scheduled for this summer and fall by various groups and congregations in our Synod. See Pastor Roehl for a complete listing. Also a reminder that our Summer VBS is scheduled for July 31 - August 4, and our Annual Church Picnic for August 6th. We will also be looking for volunteers to distribute flyers prior to our VBS.

Call – As noted in the CLC News, Pastor Roehl has returned the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. The divine call procedure in our fellowship is often a difficult and taxing process. Since the Lord has not promised his New Testament children immediate/direct revelation, we must struggle to know and do his will as best we can. Every call serves a purpose. Having been convinced that it is in harmony with God's will to continue kingdom work in this field, this call serves to encourage us to redouble our efforts here in Bismarck – to *"work while it is day."*