

# "Friend or Enemy"

Text: Isaiah 44:6-8

God grant that each one of us, like Paul, perpetually determine to regard Jesus Christ and him crucified as the sum and substance of our entire existence. Amen.

Fellow sinners who have been declared holy in Jesus Christ:

Amicable isn't always all it's cracked up to be. Lot tried to live amicably with the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah and it cost him his wife and livelihood. Samson tried to live amicably with his pagan wife and her people and it cost him his strength, his eyes, and finally his life. Eve tried to have an amicable discussion with the devil himself, and it cost her and all mankind God's perfect creation.

Yet the Church today is told that we must do much the same with unbelief and perversion – sin and error of every imaginable sort. We must live amicably with it, never "judging." Many have bought into this demonic plan, and countless souls are now paying the horrible price.

The hard cold fact is that whenever and wherever no distinction is made between right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error, there mankind will naturally and invariably make friends with evil. Separating from evil and error is the immune system of the Church, and when the immune system is compromised, souls die.

This is not alarmism. It is not outdated theorizing. This is fact, borne out by history. It has been demonstrated over and over again since the fall of man into sin. God told Israel not to make friends with their pagan neighbors but to drive them forcefully from the land. Israel chose to try to live amicably with evil, and souls will spend eternity in hell as a result. All who try to give evil a friendly hug will invariably be crushed by it.

You would think that by now we would have learned. With centuries of history screaming out the truth that the buddy-system with the world never works, still we are told that Christians are to bend and blend; we are to adapt and adopt, we are to accept and thereby be accepted. The result is that even when we hear words from God himself that are anything but conciliatory toward evil, we somehow shy from them. We find ourselves a bit uncomfortable with them. This is, in other words, a problem that absolutely needs to be acknowledged, confronted, and fixed.

That is exactly what we will attempt to do on the basis of our text for this morning. Here we will be reminded of the two sides of our God, and therefore the two possible relationships that our God offers. He is the God of Wrath and destruction (and therefore our worst possible enemy) or he is our loving Father and greatest friend and ally. He cannot be both and he cannot be neither. That part of God's Word that will instruct us this morning is found in 44<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 44:6-8** *Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. <sup>8</sup> Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."*

This is God's Word. Trusting the Source, we trust the Word. That our God would guide and bless us through the study of these his words this morning, so we pray: **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Would you think me friendly if every time I saw you I turned away and ran, refusing to have anything at all to do with you? Not so much? Then what makes Christians today imagine that God wants us to be friendly toward evil? Always we are warned to **"flee"** to **"turn away"** to **"cut ourselves off"** and in general to avoid at all costs. **"Come out and be separate"** Scripture tells us. Nowhere in God's Word are we encouraged of be friendly with sin or error. Those who teach and promote error (false teachers) are not only supposed to be identified but *avoided*. The same with those who have given themselves over to sin. As Paul told the Christians in Ephesus: **Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.** (Ephesians 5:6-8) To help understand this better, next time you are driving along a highway look in the ditches and note how many obstacles have been marked with a post by the Highway Department – things like culverts, drainage ditches, and underpasses. Do you suppose they do that so that mowers and maintenance workers *go* to those areas or so that they know to *stay away*? Do they put them there so that people get hurt or to protect them? How much more than in

connection with those things that God has marked as dangers not just to the body but to the eternal soul?

Yes but didn't Jesus associate with sinners? Didn't he even adopt the title of "friend of sinners"? Absolutely, but the goal of that contact was always to draw them out, never to join them and never to compromise his own perfect understanding of right and wrong. His goal was always to untangle the sinner from the net of his sin and unbelief.

In fact do you want to guess which word is *never* used *anywhere* in Scripture? "*Compromise*." Not once in any of the dozen or so English translations that I checked. Nowhere. Ever. And yet that is the sacred mantra repeated over and over again by our perverse society – almost to the point that you and I are made to feel guilty and evil if we do not compromise in the things that God's Word tells us are true and sacred and right.

Hear this well: there can be no compromise with evil, no negotiation with sin, no truce or peace pact with what is false. To compromise with evil is to lose – always and only. To yield in what is right is to embrace what is wrong.

Obviously we ought to be taking our cues or guidance from God in these things, rather than from the unbelieving world. God obviously has a better handle on this sort of thing than does, say, that part of his creation that rejects his very existence. So it is that God himself in our text first draws a picture of himself that is grossly at odds with the caricatures drawn by the world around us. In case you missed it during the first reading of our text, we'll go back and take a closer look.

In the first verse of our text God refers to himself as "***the LORD of hosts.***" You will recall that the word "lord" has a variety of meanings in the Bible – everything from "master" or "boss" to "God." Yet whenever you see LORD (all capital letters) what you are reading is the personal name that God used to identify himself. This is the great "I Am" by which he told Moses to identify him to Pharaoh. Jesus associated himself with this same personal name in John 8 when he said, "***Before Abraham was, I am.***" That's undoubtedly also why the Jews reacted so strongly to that statement. They knew that Jesus was thereby identifying himself as the one true God of Israel. That is the word used in the first verse of our text when God refers to himself as "***the LORD of hosts.***" He is thereby calling himself the one and only God – the only God that truly exists.

Yet the greater challenge here is to remember what "***hosts***" really means. Most, when asked, think of "*heavenly hosts*" or angels. Sort of, but that "host" is not made up of the flowery, passive, cherubic creatures portrayed in books and movies. Picture not weak, chubby-faced harp players but unimaginably powerful creature outfitted for war. In fact the term would better be translated "*the God of War*" or "*the Lord of the Armies.*" "***Hosts***" actually refers to legions gathered for war and it is a martial, intimidating term.

Why would God choose to use such a term here? Why would he not use a more pacific term like "LORD of mercy" or "LORD provider"? Because here he is speaking to evil – the sins of idolatry and unbelief, and to the promoters or teachers of that which God hates. God is never gentle or compassionate when dealing with such things. How could he be? How could the God who truly knows all things ever deal gently or amicably with that which he knows full well is not only wrong, but which carries the power to destroy eternally the souls of those he cherishes? While idols exist only in the mind of man, the sin of idolatry is both real and deadly. While idols are fabrications of Satan, the devil uses them to tear down and destroy anything and everything that is good and divine – everything that is cherished by God. That means he also seeks your soul and your eternal destruction. When God here used the term "***the LORD of hosts***" he clearly meant to convey exactly how he feels about sin and those who promote evil. Their end will certainly be eternal destruction. This is the first picture or aspect of God in our text – the "God of the angel armies" picture, the God who hates sin and evil in every conceivable form.

We miss or overlook this sort of truth often in Scripture, don't we, even in connection with Jesus? Mankind today draws their picture of our Savior very selectively. They focus on the Jesus drawing in the dirt and refusing to condemn to death the woman caught in adultery. They refuse to include the Jesus who also then told the woman to "***go and sin no more.***" They ignore the Jesus who violently drove the money-changers from the temple. While Jesus did deal patiently and lovingly with souls caught up in sin (always with the goal of extracting them) he reserved some of his most strident words of condemnation for the religious leaders who taught the people error, most notably the error of imagining that man can earn heaven by his works. With the scribes and Pharisees there was no compromise, no words of conciliation or appeasement. Read through Matthew 23 and you will be left with not a shred of doubt.

You and I need to learn from this. We need to learn that compromise with sin and evil will always result in further sin and eventually the loss of saving faith itself. As soon as the lines that sharply divide good and evil are blurred, man will naturally choose evil. There is no clean, acceptable side of sin.

And yet just as unbelievers (and indeed our old Adam) are right to quake in abject fear at the Supreme Omnipotent Being that describes himself as **"the LORD of War,"** so also the child of God now finds in those words incredible comfort, peace, and hope – because of the other picture that God draws of himself. The **"LORD of War"** is the one, true God, but this is *our* God, *our* Father. This is the one who revealed himself to us not only as the one who hates evil, but the one who loved us so much that he determined to rectify our tragic mistakes by punishing his own dear Son in our place, as our Substitute. He is indeed **"the LORD of War,"** but he is *our* LORD of War. Because of what his Son has done for us, he does not now wield his unimaginable power *against* us; he uses it *for* us.

In our text God does describe himself as **"the LORD of War"** and includes harsh, unyielding words for those who give themselves over to sin and the worship of anything but him alone, but then he goes on to say, **"Fear not, nor be afraid."** After such a powerful condemnation, how can he then say, **"Fear not"**? A good rule of thumb here and elsewhere in Scripture is to "follow the eyes." Identify the target audience that God is addressing (where his gaze is directed) and you will immediately notice a profound difference in both his tone and in his message.

God's enemies have everything to fear; his children have nothing to fear. In fact it is even more profound than that. The very power and pure sense of justice that once so terrified us now gives us unparalleled comfort and security. This is true because we now know that the power that once terrified us on account of our sin now comforts and protects us because Jesus Christ, his Son, has restored our relationship. Our sins, one and all, have been forgiven by our God. The fact that he now sees us as holy and righteous means that he bears no animosity toward us. His awesome power is not now directed against us, it is directed toward anything and everything that threatens us.

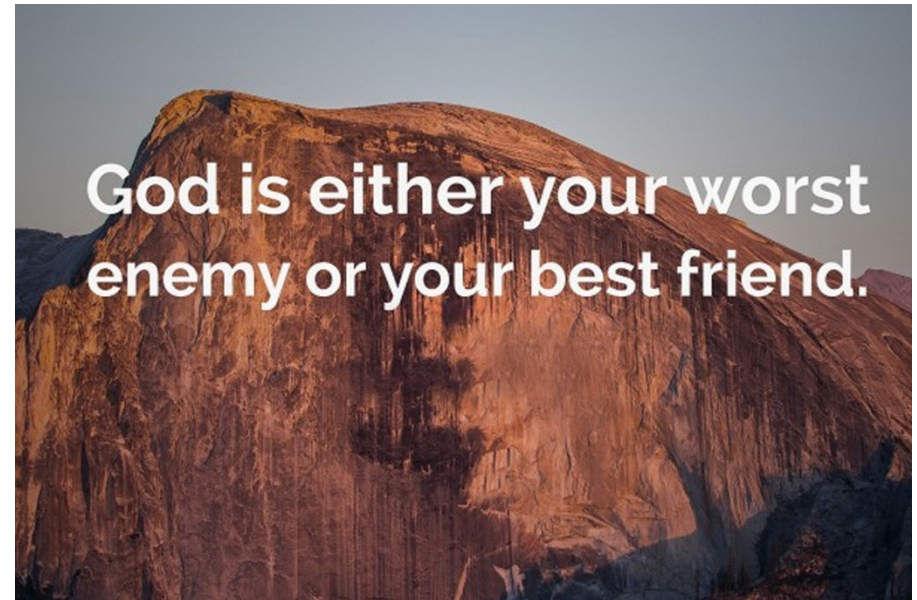
That's also why in our text, when our God shifted from the stern look of righteous anger to the conciliatory **"fear not, nor be afraid"** it was because his gaze shifted to that ever-present remnant of believers who still looked for and trusted in the promise of a Savior. Those are the ones – the only ones – who had no cause to fear, no cause to shrink back in terror from the LORD of War. Because he was their friend.

Those same words of comfort and peace are repeated to you and to all who trust Jesus for the full payment of their sin debt. Also now in the New Testament we are reminded that **"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."** This is the promise of the one true God, our Father. His gaze, directed upon you now, holds no animosity, for you are holy and sinless in his sight – a gift earned for you by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ as your Savior. Once the unimaginable power of Almighty God held terror for you. Now it is and should be your greatest source of comfort and assurance. Almighty God, the all-powerful Lord of War, is your Father, your protector, your **"redeemer,"** your friend. Amen.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 8:18-27** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. <sup>19</sup> For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. <sup>26</sup> ¶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43** He put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' <sup>28</sup> He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' <sup>29</sup> But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" <sup>36</sup> ¶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." <sup>37</sup> He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Isaiah 44:6-8** Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. <sup>7</sup> Who is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and set it before me, since I appointed an ancient people. Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen. <sup>8</sup> Fear not, nor be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? And you are my witnesses! Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any."



## ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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Michael Roehl, Pastor

**The 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – July 23, 2023**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 536 (Red Hymnal)

"Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun"

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

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

**The Epistle Lesson:** (Romans 8:18-27) It is always helpful in our day to day lives to focus not on the hard things in life but on the good things – especially the eternity that is waiting for those who die in the Christian faith. It is also frustrating for Christians to see so much injustice and blasphemy all around us, but our first reading assures us that all will one day be made known and set right. Until that time we have the continual support of the Holy Spirit, who continually works on our behalf in ways that are routinely beyond our understanding or comprehension.

## Psalm 118 (Supplement page 29) (Brown Hymnal)

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 ) Christians have always wondered why God does not immediately punish those who do evil and reward those who do good. Our Gospel reading gives us one reason, which is God's love for his children. God's purpose in not punishing evil is the protection and preservation of his children, who would also be hurt. His patience is a testimony to his mercy. The danger is that we allow the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh to gradually convince us that God really doesn't care about sin. As he punished his own Son for sin, so he will punish every unbeliever at the final Judgment.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed (Supplement page 5)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 743 (Brown Hymnal)

"Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise"

## The Sermon – Text: Isaiah 44:6-8 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Friend or Enemy"

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn – 528 (Stanzas 1-2 & 5) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be For Me"

## 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 – 52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

## 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 Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone 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 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, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

## Attendance – Sunday (27) Average (42)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Church Council Meeting
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service
	<b>-11:00 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Hour

**CLC News** – Pastor Samuel Rodebaugh is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor James Albrecht is considering the call to Calvary of Marquette.

**Daily Rest and Lutheran Spokesman** – Payment for subscriptions for Daily Rest (\$15) and the Lutheran Spokesman (\$14) can be placed in the offering box and need not be specially labelled.

**VBS and Church Picnic** – Vacation Bible School is scheduled for July 31-August 4, and the annual Church Picnic for Sunday, August 6.

**Application for Membership** – After a course of instruction, Mr. Allen Nitschke has expressed his agreement with the teachings and practice of St Paul Lutheran Church and has applied for communicant membership.