

***Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost – October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
BE ASSURED!***

***Prayer***

Abba, remind us constantly that you've got us, and you won't let us go!

AMEN

***Introduction***

Now for the more adult version of the sermon – same message, but with a few more details.

***What Condemns Us?***

If you were to ask most people why others were going to hell, they would typically respond with answers focusing on what the other people either have done or haven't done – sins of commission and those of omission. A Roman Catholic priest might say that if the person dies with an unforgiven, unrepentant **mortal sin**, they go directly to hell for eternity; If they had merely unrepentant **venial sins**, they would go instead to purgatory until they merited heaven. This reflects our general societal attitude – some sins (like murder) are worse than others (like lying). However, scripture is clear that sin is sin and that in breaking just one of the commandments, they are all broken.

***Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost – October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2024***  
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A good Calvinist would respond that it's because of God's election to damnation, which is a very scary thought.

The Lutheran answer is quite different – NONE of the sins that we commit in thought, word, or deed condemn us – Christ took them ALL to the cross and paid the ultimate penalty for those sins – death. Every sin of every person who has lived, is living, or will live. Gone. Paid For. Your sins are forgiven! Lutheran theologians call this objective justification.

But Lutherans do believe that people end up in hell, by their own choice, in their rejection of the forgiveness offered – by their unbelief; their disbelief that it is so simple. Sometime this is evidenced by disbelieving that forgiveness is free and that God looks upon His children with favor; instead, they think they must by their own works or merit earn God's favor. This is evident in today's Gospel reading, where the man thinks that by his actions in keeping the commandments – insofar as he understood them – would allow him to inherit eternal life. Other times, as we talked about a couple of weeks ago, it may be the complete rejection of the spiritual world, believing only in what can be seen, tasted, touched, heard, or felt. It may also be a trust not in Jesus, true

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God and true man, but in one of the many false gods that mankind has created for himself.

God works through means, most assuredly through the Word and Jesus, the Word made flesh. He has promised that His word will be effective. The same sun bakes clay into hard bricks and melts ice into flowing water. Exposure to the Son of God and the words that have been written about Him (i.e. the entire Bible) either hardens a person's resolve to reject the gift or strengthens their faith to trust in the promises that God has given them that the Jesus's work is sufficient and for them.

***Be Assured!***

Satan likes to make us disbelieve and question God. If we were to take verse 14 out of the context of the whole of scripture, it might trouble our consciences. To refresh your memory, the verse goes like this:

*For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.*

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Satan would have us focus on the conditional – IF we're faithful TO THE END. Some therefore might ask themselves, "What if I'm not? What if my trust slips?" Well, that was the reason for the children's message. God is our heavenly Father; we know from other passages that once He has taken hold of us, we can squirm, and yell, and try to get away, but to no avail. Satan and the cares this world may try to pull us out of His grasp, but God has promised that he is faithful and will not let go of us - with one exception. We are always our parent's children, but there is process whereby we can formally disown and disassociate ourselves from them, but it is a conscious, often difficult decision to make and then implement. In the same way, God allows us to disown Him by an action theologians call apostasy – a formal renunciation of belief – an act of explicit disbelief and rejection. Even then, the Father longs us for and would welcome us back if we changed our mind and wanted again to be reconciled to Him.

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***What Preserves Us?***

So how do we know that we are one of God's children? Theologians call this realization – that Christ died **FOR YOU** – subjective justification, and it's the work of the Holy Spirit. While the Holy Spirit works as He will, in the ordinary course of events, He works through means.

For most of us, this realization and our relationship with God began when we were baptized. By water and the word, God adopted us, making us His child, sealed us with the indwelling Holy Spirit and gave us gifts and abilities to be used for the building up of His body, the church.

We continued that relationship as we grew older – sometime around the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, we confirmed the promises and beliefs, confessed at our baptism on our behalf, with words that we ourselves spoke. Either at this time, or possibly earlier, we began to partake of the Lord's Supper – called by Augustine "the visible word." This meal was given to us because we are a frail and forgetful people – but are reminded of the reality of God's forgiveness in the tangible and undeniable eating and

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drinking of the very Body and Blood of Christ, given and shed for the forgiveness of your sins and mine.

Finally, we hear the Word, read from the lectern, preached from the pulpit, or spoken by a fellow believer in Christ in the mutual conversation and consolation of the brethren. And scripture tell us that faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God.

Therefore, it's my prayer for everyone listening that their faith would indeed be strengthened by God through these means unto everlasting life with Him, who is our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier.

AMEN