

10/11/20

18th Sunday after Holy Trinity
“David’s Son and David’s Lord”

Matt. 22: 34-46

But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment of the law?”

Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” They answered Him, “The Son of David.”

He said to them, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying:

‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make your enemies Your footstool.’ (Psalm 110:1)

“If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his Son?”

And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Savior’s instructive words to the Pharisees in our text were spoken, Matthew tells us, after they had heard that our Lord “had silenced the Sadducees,” and we are thus introduced to the two major parties among the religious leaders of Judea in Jesus’ day. The Sadducees had imbibed the Grecian culture which had been brought into the region at the time of Alexander the Great, and the skepticism of Greek philosophy had permeated their religious thinking. They accepted only the Books of Moses; they rejected all the prophetic promises that the Lord would send a Messiah to His people; and they also denied that there would be a day of resurrection. It was on that point that Jesus had demonstrated their error in front of the crowd. It tells us much about the deplorable state of religion in Judea at that time that most of the temple-priests belonged to this party of the Sadducees.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, accepted not only Moses but also the Prophetic writings. They looked forward to the coming of the Lord’s

Anointed One, and they held firmly to the truth that the dead will indeed rise on the Last Day.

We might think that they would have been delighted when Jesus silenced the Sadducees by making them look foolish and ignorant of Scripture, but that was not the case. It turns out that the one thing that could unite these two groups who otherwise opposed each other was their common enmity against the Prophet from Nazareth. And so, instead of thanking Jesus for putting their rivals to shame, the Pharisees send one of their own to “test” Him—to question Jesus with the intent of catching Him in a mistake in order to embarrass Him in front of the people. That is the background for the encounter between Jesus and the expert in the Law of Moses which is our text for this 18th Sunday after Trinity—an appointed Gospel in which we receive our Lord’s profound instruction in the teachings of Law and Gospel.

I

“Teacher,” the expert in the Law asks our Savior, “which is the great commandment of the law?” Is it the command not to make graven images? Is it the command not to murder, or is it perhaps the command that we should honor the Sabbath Day? The man’s real intention is simply to put our Savior to the test in front of the people gathered there; whatever answer Jesus will give, this expert in the law will accuse Him of slighting the other commandments. And behind even this disingenuous purpose there lies a complete misunderstanding of God’s Law. This expert views the Law as a collection of disparate and only tangentially connected rules of varying importance which are meant merely to govern our outward actions. For all their knowledge of Scripture, this was the superficial view of most of the Pharisees. That especially was the reason that so many of them were sure that they were perfectly obeying the Law of God. That especially was the reason that so many of them thought they had no need for a Savior from sin and why they resented Jesus for suggesting otherwise.

But the Pharisees were not the only ones to adopt this view. Also today, people use that same kind of reasoning. “I have never killed anyone,” one hears them say. “I have not stolen anything; I have not committed adultery, and I haven’t bowed down to worship a statue. I must be keeping the Law of God very well. Those others—those evil robbers and murderers and adulterers over there—they are the ones who need a Savior. They should really go to church; but as for me, I just don’t need to do that.”

But the answer which our Savior gives to this Pharisee dispels that kind of thinking completely. The great commandment of the Law, Jesus says to this man and to us, is to love the Lord our God with our whole being. And we embody that love for God by showing love to our

neighbors—actively serving them, doing what is best for them. Jesus’ answer to the lawyer’s question gives to the Law its power to be a mirror to us which shows to us, if we are honest, how far short of the mark we actually fall. “By the Law is the knowledge of sin,” St. Paul tells us, and Paul means the Law of God not as the Pharisees thought of it but as Jesus explains it here.

II

Now Jesus asks a question of these same Pharisees, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?” and they answer, “The Son of David.” Also this answer reveals the flawed and self-righteous thinking of these Pharisees. The Anointed One promised by the God of Israel would indeed come from King David’s royal line—and that was all they wanted. They were hoping for a warrior-king who would free them from the Romans and establish an earthly kingdom in Judea. In their own minds, that was the only kind of Christ they needed, the only kind of Christ they would accept.

Therefore our Savior asks them a question which reveals the true nature of the promised One and which leaves them unable to reply to Him at all, “How then does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord?’” And Jesus cites for them the words of David himself in Psalm 110, “The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” The fact is that the Old Testament writers everywhere speak of Christ as so much more than a human descendant of David. He would be, as Moses had written, the One who crushed the head of Satan. The second Psalm proclaims Him to be the Son of God, and in this Psalm which Jesus cites, King David calls Him his Lord. The prophet Isaiah calls Him “Immanuel—God with us.” Throughout all His prophetic Scriptures the Lord God of Israel had proclaimed the divine nature of the promised One, because that is the kind of Savior we must have. We need and must have a Savior who could take our place under that Law of love and live a perfect life in our stead; One who could sacrifice Himself on the cross to redeem the likes of you and me; One whose divine-human blood could cleanse us from sin and free us from Satan’s grip; One who could rise in triumph from the grave and thus smash the power of death over us. And that is the Son of David who is also David’s Lord—Mary’s Son who is God’s Son, the One who would accomplish our salvation and then ascend to sit at the right hand of the Father—to fill all things and to rule all things, just as David had foretold.

III

In this way, our Lord here provides to us this ideal summary of what Scripture teaches—the Law as the mirror into which we look to see our need for a Savior, and the Gospel which offers that Savior to us in Christ

Jesus, David's Son and David's Lord, sent to rescue us from our sin and from our fallenness and from eternal death. Law and Gospel—that is to be the preaching of His Church today.

We should note that this precious instruction was given by Jesus during the last week of His life. He had already entered Jerusalem on the Sunday before, riding on a donkey as the lowly King of whom the prophet Zechariah had spoken. Now, during the last days before His arrest and His trial and His death, He was teaching the people—with parables, in discussions, and through prophecies about the end of time and the final judgment. He taught in the temple and in the streets of the city. He taught His disciples, He taught all the people who came to Him, and—in His self-giving love—He sought also to teach these Pharisees who were plotting against Him and who would join with their rivals, the Sadducees and priests, to have Him crucified. So great is our Lord's self-giving love that, in the last days of His earthly ministry, He tried earnestly to bring also to those who hated Him the forgiveness and life He had come to win for us.

And the end of our churchly meditation on Law and Gospel is that we are now to walk in His footsteps on that path of His—that path of love for God and our fellow human beings. In humble and penitent faith we receive the pardon Christ Jesus purchased for us on the cross and the life He won for us on that first Easter morning. And through such faith in Him we receive His Spirit into our hearts to lead us and guide us to act in the same kind of love which forever fills the heart of David's Son who is also David's Lord.

May the Holy Spirit grant that to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.