

Pastor T.C. Arnold
8th Sunday after Trinity
Matthew 7:15-27
July 29th, 2012

The Gospel text for today includes the last Words of Jesus from His Sermon on the Mount. Yes, *that* Sermon on the Mount – “*Blessed are the poor in spirit... Blessed are those who mourn... Blessed are the meek...*” And there is something important I would like for you to know about our Savior’s Sermon. These words describe the way people who have already received the Kingdom of God (believers) now live. In other words, they are for people like you... the faithful who believe in the salvation that only Jesus provides.

In these closing words of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus expresses a deep concern for His disciples, cautioning them lest they be deceived by a *double* trap. Yes, I said a double trap. There are two traps at the end of Jesus’ sermon. The second is not mentioned in the text appointed for this day but it is rather important... so I will read it to you. You know these words... the last words of the Sermon on the Mount: “*Everyone then who hears the words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*” So, the first trap in the text is the fatal seduction of false prophets (the text heard as the Gospel reading). The second is to think we can build a life apart from the Word of God. Beware, brothers and sister in Christ, of both of these traps waiting and lurking about, ready to do you in.

I just had to read this last part of Jesus’ sermon. The reason is this: if you build your life apart from the Word of God (on the shifting sand of popular fads and meaningless pleasures) then you will for sure be more likely to listen to those wolves in sheep’s clothing... and be deceived by them. Building a life apart from Christ and His Word is a lot like building a sandcastle for your house. It won’t last. And those disguised wolves will be harder to recognize. Beware of wolves and sandcastles.

For the past few weeks at our Sunday morning Adult Bible study we have been studying apologetics – the defense of the Christian faith. The reason for this is because there are times we are approached by “false prophets” who attempt to convince us of something other than what the Bible clearly teaches. Sometimes people would love to convince you that we don’t have a loving God – and that is why some crazy person can enter a crowded movie theater and open fire on innocent victims. If God is God – and He is all powerful like you believe Him to be – then He would have for sure stopped something as terrible as that from happening. And then there are others who would like you to believe that Jesus is something other than what He is. “Jesus is not really God,” they will say. “If He was, He wouldn’t have been so inferior to the political powers of His time – He wouldn’t have saved you by suffering and dying. What kind of God bleeds to death on a cross?” You may know better than to be deceived by such claims like these.

But what about when those wolves in sheep’s clothing start to sound quite reasonable? What happens when we start to become convinced of these false claims with the idea that if I just don’t take it too far, I can do what I want and not hurt myself or anyone around me. If I just don’t talk too much about that person and only say a few harmful words – or maybe couch those words to make it sound as if they didn’t originate with me. If I just cover my tracks and be careful about what I – what I’m trying to get away with – no harm will come. If I just go along with the deception for a while... if I can justify what God clearly says is wrong by convincing myself that it will somehow benefit me or others in the long run... if I can manage to live the lie, try not to talk or

think about it... then the wolf won't be able to get his fangs in me. My house will stay standing with its foundation secure. I should be untouchable. I should be able to get away with it.

Beloved in the Lord, don't live life with disguised wolves – telling yourself that they look enough like sheep to be sheep. Don't live life in castles built on sand. Nothing good can come from this. Instead turn to the truth. Rely on what God has said is truth. Don't make it up as you go along because this kind of word, a made up word, will never turn out to be truth in the end.

You are here today because you know the truth – that there is truth – and that this truth stands against false/made-up words of wolves and unstable foundations. The world's words can deceive you. For example, it is easy to believe that a mother and a father that raise their kids and gave them everything out of love and sacrifice are the best kind of parents. Yet if they have not taught their child one thing about Jesus, they have given their children nothing of great and lasting value.

I heard one parent said that my child has a bright mind and that's all they need for a good life. A wolf dressed as a sheep will deceive with words like that. The simplest minds among us that have faith and hold steadfast to the hope and salvation that only God provides make for the best life – because with that we have a life that lasts forever in heaven.

There is so much to deceive us out there. And it doesn't all look like a ravenous wolf. That's why Jesus said they come in sheep's clothing. Once you were a people led by deception; now you are children of the truth, letting others see the good works that proceed from your faith that they might glorify God themselves rather than be misled into darkness. You can show the true Sheep – the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. Yes, that Sheep that St. Peter says, "*bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*"

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus is showing the faithful how to live their faith – how to beware of that which attempt to deceive and mislead. Jesus is talking to us – "*Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*" He is talking to us – "*blessed are the meek, blessed are the lowly, blessed are the peacemakers...*" Jesus is talking to us, "beware of false prophets... beware not to build your house, your life, your family, your friends, your vocation... on the shifting sand." Build on the foundation He gives you here. You see, a foundation built on Christ never fails. When life fails, the Word will not.

In Christ, this Word we have is good for all seasons and all stages of life from the cradle to the grave. When wedding bells ring; when sorrow begets brokenness, and brokenness returns the favor; when dreams dissolve and friends are gone; when life seems devoid of any reason to go on, this Word is still here. In the hour of guilt it judges, and then turns to grant forgiveness. In the time of storm it gives solitude; in time of grief it provides comfort. When all else passes away, it continues to shine as the star of hope. Everything will burn out, but not this Word.

Beloved, traps are hard enough to avoid. Jesus tells us about a double trap – wolves and sandcastles. Beware beloved. And be aware of the truth – the true work – the true life – the free gift that does not deceive. While entrusting our life to Christ, we will see that the He really does know what He is talking about. Your life can sustain whatever comes your way. The wolves and the sandcastles may have their day but soon fade away, dissolving into what they always were – the dust of the earth, not the rock of salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen