

Sermon for Exaudi (Easter 7) – John 15:26-16:4

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering a service to God.” In this world you will have hardships. Jesus says it will happen. And He warns you of it today so that you will not fall away. Why? The hardships of this world have a tendency to choke faith out. When the job is lost, when the diagnosis is dire, when the prayer is not answered as you would have it be answered, when the loved one dies too soon: have you not then doubted the Lord and his care for you? Have you never wavered, never fallen away? Have you never been blinded and confused and scandalized by the lies the world tells about these hardships?

The world tells a tempting story about hard times and what they mean. And the world wants you to believe it. It may seem like a convincing tale at first, but look closely and you will see that it is all lies. For this world has everything backwards: as Jesus says, the world even thinks it is doing God a favor by killing His Christians. And if the world gets this wrong, is it any wonder that it gets so much else wrong as well? The world would tell you that your worth is determined by how much you make, rather than by how much charity you show. The world, via its Scriptures of television and movie screens, tells our young people that rather than the mysterious union of husband and wife for the procreation of children, God's gift of sex is really just a toy like any other to be used as we wish. For instead of seeing our bodies as the Temples of the Holy Spirit, the world claims that we in our bodies are really nothing more than apes with clothes on. The world tells husbands to abandon wife and children if it suits him, and it tells mothers they may abandon their children even while they reside in the womb.

And those are only the big ticket items that prove beyond any doubt that the world really is crazy. It's crazy because it's broken down with sin. But that world resides in each of us as well. And though you may well thank God that you have avoided these obviously worldly sins, you will still have reason to kneel before God and pray, “Have mercy on me, a sinner.” For make no mistake: our Lord says that cruel words against your neighbor are just as murderous as abortion, lustful thoughts are just as adulterous as abandoning your spouse for another, and the love of money is, of course, our real national past time.

So come on out of the synagogues of the world and don't worry what others will think of you. Indeed, when the world kicks you around, when hardships of all sorts come, when friends despise and forsake you for Christ's sake: rejoice. Rejoice because in each of these hardships the Lord is teaching you to leave the synagogues of the world. For they are not your home. In each of these hardships the Lord would remind you not to get too comfortable here. Your citizenship is in heaven, your life is hidden with God in Christ.

Yes, the world will mock you for following a God who goes and gets Himself killed on a cross. Yes, the world will think you are nuts for believing that the Almighty God of the universe delights to be called your Father and counts the hairs of your head. Yes, the world will be falsely pious and call you bigoted for daring to say that salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ alone.

But that's just what the world doesn't understand: this is exactly what Jesus came to do: to take all the sin and sorrow of the world upon Himself. For He came to take away the sins of the world. Jesus came to bear in His body all your fears, all your alliances with the sinful world, all your lies, all your brokenness and sin: He came to bear it all that he might take it all in his death.

And that is the wisdom of God. That is how God saves you and all the world. He paid no homage to the world's wisdom and didn't care that it called Him a fool. For He let the world do its worst to Him so that it can never do its worst to you. For our Lord Jesus Christ took all the sins of the world down to hell and left them there by rising from the dead. Sin and hell and death now have no mastery over you because they have no mastery over Him, and you are in Christ by the power of the Helper, the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. He has drowned you in baptism and left your sins at the bottom of the font while drawing you forth to new life. For in your baptism you were plunged into Christ's death and resurrection. Those realities are now real for you. You are forgiven and free. You are a baptized child of God. You are risen from the dead.

And so this world cannot touch you. Its threats are meaningless. The devil, the world, and the flesh may prowl around like a roaring lion seeking whom they may devour: but for those in Christ, all the devil may do is roar for he has had his teeth and claws pulled out. So do not be afraid when hardship comes. Do not think for a moment that your heavenly Father has abandoned you. For He loves you and has saved you for his own Name's sake. He has gathered you out of the world's synagogues to be His own Holy Church, the spotless Bride of Christ washed clean in the waters of baptism flowing from the spear-pierced side of her Husband. He has replaced your stony heart with a heart of flesh and breathed into you a new spirit. For though your heart and flesh are corrupt, He gives you the incorruptible Body of Christ for your food and fills you with the Blood of Christ for your drink. Though your spirit was foul and twisted, He has filled you with the His Spirit in Baptism - and indeed He breathes this sweet breath of the Spirit over you again and again as you come to receive Holy Absolution.

The Lord always has a gift to give. And you have come to the right place to receive them. For here, in his Holy Church, the Lord offers to you all He has, for He offers you all that He is. The Lord is your strength, your life and your light - and He is here again to fill you with his forgiveness, love, and mercy. For that is what the Divine Service is: the Lord's service to you. That Service to you was performed on the cross - but now what Jesus did for you on the Cross, His Divine Service, is delivered to you here as His Divine Service comes to you personally, as he gives you the very fruits of his cross in his Body and Blood. This is real reality. This is where all is set right and pure, where the madness of the world and its lies is held at bay. For where Christ is, here is your home, your peace, your comfort, your joy in all hardships, your key to eternal life, and your promise of the resurrection. Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠

*This sermon (with only slight modifications) was preached by the Rev. H.R. Curtis at Trinity Lutheran Church, Worden, IL and Zion Lutheran Church, Carpenter, IL where he serves as pastor.*