

6th Sunday of Easter – B
#508 v.1-5
Text – Acts 10:42

LSB

And He commanded us to preach to the people & to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the quick & the dead.

THE QUICK & THE DEAD

The breaking news this morning is that five terrorist cell groups have been uncovered that were operating in several churches here in the United States. Their plan was to come into these churches disguised as Christians, working within those churches to steal, to kill & destroy.

The cells groups, who've been trained for suicide missions, are associated with Osama Bin Laden. Their purpose is to destroy the body of Christ, & the names of the cells have just been released: Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, & Bin Missin.

As the joke sinks in, you'll realize that each of us belongs to several of those groups, if not all of them. Much of the time we're not consciously aware of it, but if we could see our actions from outside ourselves, as others do, it'd be clear how we contribute to steering people away from Jesus Christ.

For all who will tolerate nothing but a warm & fuzzy Jesus, a Jesus who sweeps under the rug any sinful behavior, it will be a sobering message to hear that God's Son was appointed to be the judge of the quick & the dead. The fall into sin gave all of us hearts that are naturally giddy with self-importance, with pride, & with a severe lack of humility.

Opposite the warm & fuzzy types are those who like everything to fall into neat, black & white categories. For all those wanting a Jesus who draws a very sharp line,

cutting off from grace anyone who dares to transgress that line, it'll be a bitter message as they hear that everyone who simply believes in Jesus, "...receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

The fall into sin gave us hearts that are cold, selfish & hypocritical, blind in the highest degree to our own faults, while seeing the tiniest speck in the eye of another. Demanding that others pay the price for their sins, while overlooking & ignoring our own, is not how Jesus calls us to live. All of God's children regularly need to hear that Jesus is the one appointed by God to be judge of the quick & the dead.

No one else's sin will impact how Jesus judges you & me. If we've Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, & Bin Missin, then we are guilty. There's no chance of being judged any better than anyone else. There's no possibility of earning merit or favor in God's sight. One sin damns us all.

For people who are afraid to confront others with the Law, the sermon text tells them, "...He commanded us to preach to the people & to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the quick & the dead." Jesus is not just a warm & fuzzy prophet. He is the holy Son of God who suffered death because of our sin. He did not sweep anyone's sins under the rug.

On the other hand, Jesus did not uphold the Law in order for us to earn our way to heaven by it. Nor did He uphold the Law so that we might condemn others by it. Looking down upon others, thinking less of them, condemning them, that is not our prerogative. It is solely the job of Jesus Christ to judge the quick & the dead.

Our chief purpose in using the Law to confront people is to show them their inability to bypass God's judgment. Around human beings we can sweep sin under the rug, but that will never happen around our heavenly Father. The way to avoid hell is to receive, & put to use, the gifts of humility & repentance that He grants to all of His children.

So when the Law has done its proper work, then the Gospel will bring to life humility & repentance. That should be the goal of all our actions as the verse immediately after the sermon text puts it, "To [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name." Jesus does not overlook sin or sweep it under the rug. Rather, He pays the price for it with the suffering & death of His own flesh & blood. *PAUSE*

The 10th chapter of the book of Acts begins with the story of the Roman centurion Cornelius, a Gentile. Martin Luther wrote of him, "He did not observe the Law God had given to the Jews, nor did he even think about it. It did not pertain to him. Yet he was justified by God & received the Holy Spirit."

Between Cornelius the Gentile & Peter the Jew, it took the appearance of an angel & a miraculous vision to get the two of them together. It was a meeting that was definitely outside the box for either of them. The lesson for us is, spiritually speaking, it is good to ask, "What boxes am I defining my life with that are not from God?"

One issue that many Christians have struggled with was the switch from the King James Version of the Bible to any of the newer English translations. In speaking of Jesus the King James Version of our sermon text said, "He is the one appointed by God to be

judge of the quick & the dead.” Newer translations say, “...judge of the living & the dead.”

The ‘old’ version of the Apostles Creed, said, concerning Jesus, “From thence He will come to judge the quick & the dead.” While serving in North Dakota one of my members asked me about the Apostles Creed, “Whatever happened to the quick & the dead?”

I told him that the old English word ‘quick’ simply meant living, so in today’s English we say, “From thence He will come to judge the living & the dead.” The meaning is the same. More people today understand what the word living means, & this isn’t some liberal method of trying to pervert the teachings of the Apostles’ Creed.

In some denominations though, it’s taught that the King James Version is the only true word of God. Yet to the old German Lutherans, any form of God’s Word in English was considered to be directly from the devil himself. “What boxes might you be defining your spiritual life with that are not from God?” **PAUSE**

Some people say that all Christians are hypocrites, so they avoid church. Some teach that the only valid prayers are directly from one’s heart. Others teach that any prayers directly from one’s heart are sure to be corrupted by our sinful nature. Some would teach that anyone associated with the University of Michigan cannot be saved. Others say the same about MSU.

Consider the topic of homosexuals, or drug users, or gossips. Think about abortion, euthanasia, or politics. There are hundreds of controversial topics, if you find the right mix of people, & you’ll always be able to find people on both sides, of every

issue. For that reason Christians do not determine the truth, or the validity of a teaching, from public opinion.

We turn solely to the Word of God in that endeavor. Yet even with that there are boxes we devise. Often, members just want their pastor to tell them what to believe. Certainly there's a time for that, but not to the exclusion of studying the Bible for yourselves.

Jesus wants each of us to wrestle with the Word of God because through that wrestling He changes our hearts with it. If we only listen to what we're told, how do we know if that is the truth? All his life Peter believed that Gentiles were unclean & not to be welcomed into the kingdom of God. Today's word from Scripture judged Peter's thinking as too restricted.

Are the restrictions you have placed upon God's Word limiting the growth of your faith in Jesus as Savior from every sort of evil in this life, & especially from the evil within your own heart? In the kingdom of God have you Bin Sleepin, Bin Arguin, Bin Fightin, Bin Complainin, & Bin Missin? All of us are guilty, but Jesus paid His life to remove our guilt.

Our sinful nature always looks for a Jesus to sweep our sins under the rug. Our sinful nature doesn't want a Jesus who died for them. That's too costly. But when our Father in heaven creates faith in Jesus within us, & as we appreciate the depth of our sin, the depth of our corruption, then we long to hear the life restoring news that Jesus has taken our sins away. Hearing the Gospel in that context changes our heart, takes us outside of the box we've surrounded ourselves with, & causes us to share God's love with our neighbor.

As the Gospel reading put it, in the form of a promise, “You did not choose me, but I chose you & appointed you that you should go & bear fruit & that your fruit should abide...” One of the fruits of faith is a repentant heart. A broken & contrite spirit God will not despise. The last shall be first in our Savior’s kingdom.

The preaching of the Gospel is meant to bring about repentance & comfort, & the courage to live that sort of life. Our Savior’s radical, life giving love, cannot leave us stranded in the middle. It compels us to move one way or the other, towards God or away from Him.

Unbelievers hate it so because it leaves no middle ground, no place to hedge one’s bets, no place to straddle the fence. Jesus’ love compels them & their sinful pride hates being compelled by anything outside of themselves. To counter such pride, in unbelievers, & in Christians, God’s Word tells us:

“... [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people & to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be judge of the quick & the dead.”

But that warning is preached for this purpose, that your heart & mine might hear this word as well, “To [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” Amen.

The day is surely drawing near when God’s anointed shall appear as Judge whom God appointed. Then fright shall banish idle mirth, & flames on flames shall ravage earth as Scripture long has warned us. Then woe to those who scorned the Lord & sought but carnal pleasures, who here despised His precious Word & loved their earthly treasures! With shame & trembling they will stand & at the judge’s stern command to Satan be delivered. My Savior paid the debt I owe & for my sin was smitten; within the Book of Life I know my name has now been written. I will not doubt, for I am free, & Satan cannot threaten me; there is no condemnation! Amen.