

September 7, 2008

Messiah

Pentecost 17 - A

Matthew 18:1-20

“God is Serious about Saving”

Introduction

1. On August 11, my first grandchild was born – Anastasia Christine Baneck
 - a. I didn’t realize it would be such a overwhelming joy to hold this wonderful, warm, tiny, gift of God in my grandfather arms...
2. Go to the other end of life – as this past Wednesday our own member Lyle Rutten has left this veil of tears and has gone to heaven
3. The question I lay before you is this: what about those in-between years: between birth and death? What happens to us from birth to death?
 - a. The Scriptures tell us that at the beginning of life - from the time we are conceived we are steeped and absorbed in sin and death
 - b. And at the time of death – when there are only two directions: heaven or hell – how do we deal with the passage that says, “The wages of sin is death?”
4. As we examine Holy Scripture today from St. Matthew, chapter 18 on the EDUCATION RALLY DAY – Jesus gives us the answer to the dilemma – the dilemma of being a sinner – from birth to death
 - a. God has a plan for this most awful dilemma – it is more than a plan...
 - b. This plan was flawlessly implemented, carried out in absolute perfection – the plan of saving each and every one of us
 - c. There is no doubt about it – God is serious about saving – it is what God is all about: Creating, saving, and sustaining His children!
 - d. But I would propose to you that as serious as God is about SAVING – God’s plan is FOOLISH, EXTREME, RIDICULOUS, and INCONVENIENT!

I. **God IS serious about saving – but it seems so FOOLISH!**

- A. The disciples came to Jesus asking who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven
 - a. Now – that was a foolish question – because the idea that there is one who is the “greatest” reverts back to how great and good someone must have been on earth to get to heaven – the question relies on man’s impotent good rather than God’s omnipotent grace
 - b. But Jesus answers the disciples in a way that seemed so foolish!
 - c. Jesus called a child to Himself, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”
 - d. Children believe things by pure faith
 - i. If Myrna taught her first graders that in order to get to heaven you have to do good deeds, they would believe her
 - ii. But as Myrna teaches these children the truth that Jesus Christ, and Him alone, gets us to heaven through His death and resurrection – they believe her in faith
 - iii. How important it is to have our children sit at the feet of faithful, honest, and truthful teachers, and pastors, and churches!
 - iv. The point is this: children believe by faith! – trusting solely in Jesus because the Bible says so

- B. But do you want to hear something even more FOOLISH?
 - a. God is so serious about saving Anastasia Baneck, Lyle Rutten, and everyone in between life and death...
 - b. That He Himself became a child – how foolish is that!
 - c. In order to save mankind – Jesus became man (a baby man) – in man’s place – and suffered the punishment and curse put upon Adam and Eve, and every descendant thereafter
 - d. God became a babe in Bethlehem – He was so serious about saving you and me, and all creation – that He became a child, in order to die a man, so that we could be elevated to heaven with God!

- C. In the eyes of the world – Christians are so FOOLISH for having a raw and pure faith in Jesus Christ
 - a. Speeches and news commentary in the last couple of weeks have laughed at Christians who believe in creation, who would not abort a baby born with deformities, and who rely on the forgiveness of Jesus Christ for premarital pregnancies
 - b. As we repent of our unbelief, we are humble, yet bold, to say “I believe in Jesus Christ, and I am so thankful that He is so serious about saving me”
 - c. Believing in God’s seriousness in saving us is foolish to the world, but the Book of Proverbs reminds us that “the fear of the Lord (faith in Him) is the beginning of [TRUE] wisdom”

II. **God is serious about saving – but it seems so EXTREME!**

- A. Who can bear the words of Jesus when He says, “If your hand or foot causes you to sin – cut it off!”
 - a. Don’t you think these words of Jesus are rather EXTREME!
 - b. Of course they are – because God is so serious about saving us – that our SOUL is so much more important to God than our flesh, which He will restore on the Last Day
 - c. Jesus is here using a literary tool called “hyperbole” – meaning, an exaggeration
 - d. He is not saying that if you steal a pack of gum to cut off your fingers, or if you have an affair with someone who is not your spouse to cut off your hands, or if you walk into an adult book store to cut off your feet, or if you gossip to cut out your tongue
 - e. If this were the case – ALL OF US – would be without any body parts – and this no joke!
 - f. But He is saying these things are sinful! – And these and every sin you and I commit every day CUT US OFF from God and heaven!
 - g. Just as God is serious about Saving us – He is serious about our sin
 - h. God IS Serious about Saving BECAUSE He is serious about SIN

- B. But I would boldly say to you – that just as extreme as these words of Jesus sound about cutting off body parts, are these words of Jesus, “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned into the sea”
- a. This one is very difficult to preach, because as a father of 4 children, I am tempted, and I sin everyday in damaging the faith of my children – and yet I realize the call God places upon me in being the primary teacher of the faith for my children
 - b. This summer my family went to Big Sky, the closest Missouri Synod Lutheran Church was about 60 miles away, I was 90% tempted to say, “that’s so far away, let’s not go to church today”
 - c. It was the mother of my children who insisted that we go to church, and when we got to the town of that church, we were 15 minutes late - she insisted we travel to the next town, to another LCMS church that started 2 hours later; that would change our schedule for the day
 - d. We went to church – and it was good, our souls were fed, my children saw the extreme measures – at least their mother would go through – in taking our children to church
 - e. I know how we are tempted to take the summer off from church, how we are tempted to allow our children to place sports and music over God, to give into the pressure and fight of keeping our children away from various TV programming, and even to give up the fight of keeping our children in the faith
 - f. Our children do not know how important it is to be in the faith; their minds and souls are still young and developing – how they will need God in peer pressure, when they are engaged in battle in Iraq, when they are in a bitter divorce, when their own children are in crisis, and even when they come to the end of their lives between heaven and hell
 - g. But we do – we know the importance, and we know the command and call of God to bring our children up in the faith: Sunday School, Catechesis, weekly worship, Martin Luther, youth group –
 - h. Who would argue with me – this takes EXTREME PARENTING!
- C. But if we want to look at extreme – look once again to Jesus
- a. Look at the cross – can you get any more extreme than that?
 - b. Many people have died on crosses – but none was innocent and holy – because no other was God!
 - c. How extreme that God would take the place of creatures He made with His own hands, the breath He breathed into them – and trade places –
 - d. How extreme when Jesus takes our sin, and gives us His holiness – making us ALL to be children – children of God through His blood and death and resurrection – poured over us in the waters of Holy Baptism!
 - e. How extreme that God was CUT OFF - cut off from the land of the living, that the Lord of Life would enter our death - into order to deliver us to the land of eternal living in heaven

III. God is serious about saving – but it seems so RIDICULOUS!

- A. Our society has been coined “the throw-away society”
 - a. Things are made to be thrown away rather than fixed – computers, microwaves, eyeglasses, and communion cups, and clothing, and even buildings
 - b. But this has been carried over to the ridiculous, and down-right sinful: throwing away life in terrorism, no value on children in abortions, throw away old people when it is thought they offer no more value to society, throwing away a spouse when we’re tired of them and want a new one, and throwing away relationships for our own gain

- B. But look at Jesus’ words today and the one lamb that goes astray out of 100
 - a. What’s one dollar over the other 99?
 - b. Why would a shepherd go after 1 sheep and leave the other 99 – after all it’s only a sheep? A new one can be born?
 - c. Put this into perspective, and look at Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who comes and looks for us everyday – as we are often straying and wondering lambs, going our own way – as we snoop around and enter into sin everyday
 - d. God is so serious about saving us that He would step down from heaven to earth, becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world
 - e. He comes to seek us out – because He does not want us lost, or damned, and eternally dead
 - f. Everyone does not automatically go to heaven, only those who believe in Jesus Christ and Him alone have eternal life
 - g. And everyone who does not believe in Jesus goes to hell
 - h. So God does the ridiculous by calling parents to teach their children the faith;
 - i. He establishes the church to keep calling, and gathering, and enlightening through the Word = which is the work of the Holy Spirit;
 - j. and He calls you and I to visit our unbelieving and unchurched family and friends – in compassion and love – inviting them to Christ, to church, and to heaven

IV. God is serious about Saving – but it seems so INCONVENIENT!

- A. When someone sins against me – I find it rather INCONVENIENT to deal with this sin as God commands me
 - a. My sinful flesh wants to hold a grudge; my stubborn heart wants to show how I right I am and how wrong the other is; my self-centered soul wants to use this sin for ammunition for pay-back
 - b. How inconvenient it is to deal with sin as Jesus says → to go to that person and try to work out our differences, to bring a witness with me, to take it to the church – is a relationship worth all that effort? Is a soul worth all that work?!
 - c. As Christians, baptized in Christ – the answer is yes! For this is who who we are, and what we value: love toward our neighbor!

- B. Here again is God's demonstration of how serious He is about saving us – Talk about inconvenience!
- a. Would you say leaving heaven for a stable manger is convenient?
 - b. Would you say dealing with hateful Pharisees in place of worshipping angels is convenient?
 - c. Would you say wearing a crown of thorns is more convenient than holding a kingly orb?
 - d. Would you say trading the glory of being the creator of all that exists in place of hearing those words "Crucify him" is convenient?
 - e. Would you say shedding His blood to make the guilty innocent is more convenient than shedding His grace and favor?
 - f. See how serious God is about saving us – How INCONVENIENT – this word doesn't even begin to describe what God did to save us – How He gave His life to free us from sin, death, and the devil
 - g. There WAS NO OTHER WAY – our own works, our own intentions, our money, our rationalizing how we are better than others, our debate that one sin is worse than another – nothing saves us except the cross of Jesus Christ, His death, and His resurrection!
 - h. But HOW CONVENIENT it is for us to be saved – to be washed with salvation with the water and the Word at the font! To eat and drink salvation with His Body and Blood in this bread and wine! To hear and be absorbed with salvation in His Word!
 - i. We don't have to go to mountain tops, we don't have to walk across hot coals, we don't have to attach bombs on our bodies, we don't have to pray to a statue, we don't have to recycle glass – not none of these saves us!
 - j. God makes it so convenient – salvation is HERE in His Word and Sacrament – because Here is Jesus Christ! Jesus saves us!

Conclusion

1. From Anastasia and every human conceived – to Lyle and every human who dies...
2. God has a care and a love to save us
3. Saving us is the culmination of who God is and what He has done for us
4. On this Rally Day – I call you to rally around Christ once again:
 - a. To commit yourselves to weekly worship
 - b. To commit yourselves to being in the Word
 - c. To commit yourselves to feeding on Christ's body and blood
 - d. To commit yourselves to living your baptism
5. To commit yourselves to a God who is foolish to become a child that we would be His children forever
 - a. To commit yourselves to a God who is Extreme in cutting Himself off in death to give us life
 - b. To commit yourselves to a God who is Ridiculous to come to earth to search us out to take us to heaven
 - c. To a God who did the most inconvenient to reconcile us to Himself, just we now reconcile to one another

6. To the world God may be foolish, extreme, ridiculous, and inconvenient
7. But to us – moms and dads, husbands and wives, children and teenagers, middle aged and elderly, single and married, newborn and widowed, man or woman...
8. To us – we rejoice that these words demonstrate how SERIOUS God is about Saving... about saving us... we are saved through Jesus Christ... and ours is eternal life through Him. Amen.