



## THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

October 7, 2012

*“THE SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS AND FORBEARANCE”*

**Sermon Text: Luke 9:51-56**

*“And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.”*

Fellow Redeemed in Christ,

Of what manner of spirit are we?

It has been said that the difference between the Muslim religion and the Christian religion is that in the Muslim religion, a father must send his sons to die for god in order to gain heaven for themselves and the Christian religion teaches that God the Father sent His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die for the sins of all man-kind and thereby gain heaven for the whole world.

The first is a man-made ‘religious’ philosophy born of force, violence, and war against one’s fellow man. The ‘true Muslim’ does not seek to save others. Rather he walks the path of war, and teaches that those who are not Muslim; be they man, woman or child, are to be cut down with the sword, destroyed with terrible violence.

The latter is the Religion whose foundation is the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the complete and completed reconciliation of sinful man with God, the personal apprehension of this free gift by faith and the possession of true peace with God through the sacrificial blood atonement for the world's sins by the God-man, Jesus Christ, on the cross of Calvary. It seeks not to destroy, but to save that which was lost and condemned.

Now, there are many today who call themselves Christians, but at the same time teach and practice or tolerate false doctrine – that is, any teaching that is contrary to Scripture. We Lutherans call ourselves Christians too – Lutheran Christians. And perhaps it is well that we do so. For the true Lutheran Church is evangelical. That is, it is profoundly loyal to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in both word and spirit.

It seeks to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *not* through violence, but by patterning itself after the example that Our Savior, Jesus Christ, has given us in the Bible. And we not only preach the Gospel message, but we carry on our church work in an evangelical spirit as well, seeking to draw unregenerate man to God, *not* by force, but by the sweet Gospel message. Our mission – the sole purpose of our ministry – is to win and to keep souls for Christ in and by the same spirit of love and humility that Jesus Christ demonstrated in His ministry for us here on earth.

Unlike the dictatorial methods of the Roman Catholic Church, the rationalism of the many truly unchristian cults of our day, legalistic Protestantism or any other perverted form of Christianity, which seek by man-made moral imperatives, threats, or even bribery to drive men into taking for themselves truly damnable philosophies as are so widely practiced in our day – unlike these so-called "religions" that teach that natural man has it within himself to cooperate with God in working out his own salvation, or that he must do good works to gain God's favor and the blessedness of everlasting life in heaven – the evangelical Lutheran Church presents the Grace of God in Christ Alone, apprehended and appropriated by the gift of Faith Alone worked in man's heart by the Holy Spirit through the hearing of the Gospel as the only motivation for Christian conduct and good works.

And it is the true spirit of Christ – that meek, tender, soul-seeking spirit – that really ought to characterize and dominate our attitudes and rule the spirit of our hearts, our minds, *and our tongues* in all our relationships with our fellow men, be they within the church or without.

But sadly, this is not always the case, even among the most spiritually mature Christians. Perhaps even within our own congregation there may be those of us who because of the law of sin warring in and against our minds and souls on occasion back-slide into being prideful, harsh-minded, impatient, and prejudicial in our relationships. Hence we need the continued instruction and encouragement that God's precious Holy Word has to offer us. And so I would direct your attention to our text, which presents to us:

#### THE SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS AND FOREBEARANCE

1. It must achieve the mastery over our inborn pride, prejudice, and impatience.
2. It flows from a God-given appreciation of the Gospel and our mission as soul winners.

Our text takes us to a critical point in Jesus' ministry. The time had come for His return to the Father. His mission here on earth was soon to be completed. And so Jesus sets forth, resolute in His determination to go to Jerusalem, where His enemies wait for Him.

Jesus' disciples are filled with apprehension and fear, for Jesus is determined to go where, as He tells His disciples: *"...the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit on him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again."* (Mark 10:33,34)

Now, Jesus' journey to Jerusalem leads through Samaria, a land of mixed peoples, who – for the most part – have fallen away from the Jewish Church. They accepted only the five books of Moses as being the Word of God and therefore did not worship in Jerusalem and thought little of those that did. As we know from Scripture, there was no love lost between the Jews and Samaritans on account of this. In fact, the hostile attitude of the Jews and Samaritans towards each other was such that they would not speak with each other, much less even ever consider drinking from the same water jug. Common courtesy between these two parties was unheard of.

Sounds a rather prejudicial, doesn't it?

But Jesus sends His disciples ahead of Him into a Samaritan village to arrange for a place for them to take food and rest from their days of travel. In doing this, Jesus offers the Samaritans an opportunity to be in His presence, to hear His Word, and to learn from Him. But the villagers flatly refuse Jesus and His disciples a place because they know He is a Jew heading to Jerusalem, presumably to worship and to honor the religious capital of their rival, the Jews.

James and John, whom Jesus had surnamed Boanerges, which is "the sons of thunder", when He had first called them to be His disciples, (so named because of their fiery temper), are completely incensed by this apparent insult aimed at their Lord and Master.

Recalling the record of Elijah's encounter with the Samaritans in Second Kings 1:10-12 during which Elijah had twice called down fire from heaven to consume over 50 soldiers at a time sent to do him harm, James and John seek Jesus' permission to destroy the people of the village in the same way. You can almost hear the impatience in their question as boldly they ask: " Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?"

Dear Ones, do we not, each of us, possess some measure of this same "sons of thunder" spirit?

Natural sinful man is self-centered and loveless towards all, except the closest friends and perhaps those from whom he might receive some benefit. He is, by nature, selfish and easily moved to anger when those around him disagree with him or criticize him.

And we Christians – because we still have that 'old man of sin' dwelling in our flesh – we too, at times, can seem easily provoked to a spirit of lovelessness by what we perceive as ignorance, indifference, ingratitude, and a seeming lack of even basic morality in those with whom we come into conflict over some issue – don't we. And how prideful, impatient and legalistic we can become over seeming slowness, or an apparent lack of understanding by others in our schools, places of work, homes, or even our own congregations. Our pride, prejudice, and impatience welling up within us, we too may readily give vent to our emotions – angry words hastily spoken, the breaking off of any and all communication with those who have offended us as a way to wreak our own brand of vengeance upon them.

Allowing our emotions to control us, we may thoughtlessly sever friendships, family ties, and communions. And all this based upon how *WE* feel and how sorely *WE* have been slighted. But do we ever take into account the stumbling block *we* create and the offense *we ourselves* cause by what we do and how what we do reflects so negatively upon ourselves, our church, and the very name of Christ?

In our self-righteous zeal and thoughtlessness, we may actually drive people away – away from ourselves, away from church and – worse yet – away from Jesus Christ and the free gift of eternal life.

Let us repent of this sin and be reminded that it is *the Gospel* that produces the fruits of faith – not a hasty misapplication of the Law or by anything else.

Let us be reminded – just as James and John were – of what manner of spirit *WE* are, *as followers of Christ*. For that is what a true Christian is – he is '*of Christ*'.

Jesus' rebuke to James and John: "*Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.*" is such a reminder. Let us likewise be so reminded, for Jesus here is referring to His own spirit and we, as God's Children through Christ, are to be *of His spirit*.

Jesus was ever the gentle, tender, compassionate Christ, who did not *drive* men – as we are so often wont to do – but our Lord *drew* sinners to Himself by His loving kindness and tender mercies.

True, Jesus did not mince words in pronouncing and explaining the Law – and neither should we – *when Scripturally called for*. Jesus could, indeed, speak very sternly of the Law and its condemnation – *when needed*. But that was to the stubborn resisters of His grace. When the disillusioned, the weak and the penitent – those whose consciences had been struck by the Law and were in sorrow over their sin (repentant), despairing of salvation – they always found a welcome and safe harbor with Jesus. Jesus was gentle when others expected sternness. As we read in Luke 7:36-50:

*“And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my*

*feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."*

Let us plainly see and clearly understand this: Jesus came, *not* to destroy, but *to save*.

And this spirit should also characterize each of us – we who call ourselves Christ's followers.

While there must be absolutely no compromise with or glossing over of sin, there must always be a tender solicitude for the sinner's eternal welfare. Our mission is *not* to 'punish' sinners with the very real threatenings of Law. We are not given any command of God anywhere in Scripture to make a 'personal determination' as to whether the sinner expressing repentance of his sin before us is 'penitent enough'. Nor are we to leave a penitent person in despair of his salvation by refraining or even delaying to speak to him of the blessed hope that is freely his in the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

No, My Dear Friends! When the preaching of the Law of God has done all it can do – bringing a person to the knowledge of their sin and showing them they are indeed lost and eternally condemned on account of their sin, so that they sorrow over their sin and repent – then we are to immediately shut up our mouths from speaking any more of the Law against them and freely give forth – springing, as it were, from the fountain of God-given faith in our hearts – the healing balm of the sweet Gospel message of salvation in Christ Jesus. For our God-given mission is to be *soul winners and soul keepers for Christ!*

Hence the ever recurring admonition in Scripture to speak the truth *in love*, to *build up* the individual in Christ – *not* tear him down – to practice long-suffering and gentleness as a fruit of the Holy Spirit – giving evidence of His work of faith in our hearts – employing moderation in our lives, knowing that the day of the Lord draws nigh; and showing mercy, meekness and forbearance as we are told in Colossians 3:12-15 : "*Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy; kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be thankful,*"

As Christians – as His dear Children by faith – God wants us to adopt this spirit of Christ and put it into practice as a fruit of that faith. The priority in our thinking, the manner in which we relate to those outside our church and within our own congregation must then ever reflect our *Savior's* will and objective – the salvation and preservation of men's souls – which can be accomplished *only* by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Dear Friends, If we will allow the spirit of Christ to rule our hearts and minds, it will aid us in overcoming our natural inbred pride, prejudice, and impatience with others. And these shortcomings will be replaced with genuine gentleness and forbearance towards one another. Furthermore, an honest examination of ourselves, understanding the gravity of *our own* sinfulness – how much we, ourselves, are in continual need of God's mercy and the forbearance of our fellow man – coupled with a full appreciation of all that God has done in for us Christ will cause us to work to be ever more Christ-like towards all others, and especially our fellow Christians.

My Dear Friends, by the Grace of God, may we always be mindful of what manner of spirit *WE* are ... *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be thankful.* Amen.

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And now may the Peace of God, the Love of Christ, and the Communion of the Holy Spirit keep your hearts and minds in the spirit of Christ Jesus. Amen.