

Sermon: 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 9:38-50

Theme: Jesus warns us to escape from hell

Goal: How to escape from hell and to reach heaven

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Do you still have both of your hands? Do you still have both of your feet? Do you still have both of your eyes? Have you never sinned with your hands, with your feet, or with your eyes? Of course you have... and I as well. Why didn't we cut our hand and foot off nor plucked our eyes out ???

I – We cannot excuse ourselves

This is a severe warning of Jesus against sin and its consequences. We are not as good as we sometimes think about ourselves. We are still sinners – even as Christians. Look, Jesus is talking to His closest disciples. He is not talking to tax collectors or to the Pharisees, who were considered notorious sinners. The big sin mentioned here is to cause scandal to the little ones in faith (children or new believers) so that they fall apart from faith. We must not be stumble blocks on the way of other Christians. *Discouraging someone who believes in Christ is a way to make them stumble.* (ABC 1188). This text is directed to church members and to their (to our) behavior.

Sometimes we try to justify ourselves, like Adam and Eve did. “It was not I, but... the woman that you put here with me... It was not I, but ...the serpent that you created deceived me...” Eventually, God Himself was blamed for the sin of Adam. NO! We have to be honest with ourselves and admit that we are “*poor and miserable sinners*”, as we do at the beginning of each Service.

It is not our hands that cause us to sin! It is not our feet that cause us to sin. It is not our eyes that cause us to sin. It is we who sin! (Series B,p.234). Jesus said in Mark 7:21-23: “For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.” Hands, feet and eyes are just illustration how the sin that was conceived in our hearts gives birth to outside and visible sins. (James 1:14-16). And these sins can cause someone to fall apart from the church and from God's grace.

II – Sin condemns to hell

Jesus uses a drastic picture to describe hell in this text: “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” It's a quotation of Isaiah 66:24. Sin condemns to hell. *It is not fashionable to play down the reality of hell.* (ABC 1188). We cannot ignore it. It's biblical. Salvation wouldn't be necessary if there was no hell. Jesus came to save us from eternal damnation in the hell and to give us place in His kingdom. *The alternative to enter the Kingdom is eternal damnation in hell.* (ABC 1188). There are only two ways, no others. It's a matter of belonging to God's Kingdom or not belonging to His kingdom and remaining outside the door when He comes again to invite His people to enter the presence of the Father. We need to be aware of this. Jesus' goal when He teaches this is to warn us against sin and hell, and to show us the right way to heaven.

III – Jesus is the way to a new life

Martin Luther wrote that we don't have to worry where is hell and where is heaven, if upwards or if downwards; or how things are in hell and how things are in heaven. But we have to be concerned how to avoid hell and how to reach heaven. And the Bible is clear, very clear to show us the right way! (free quotation).

Jesus presented Himself as the Way, the Truth and the Life. “No one comes to the Father except through me,” He said. (John 14:6). At the same time He was warning His disciples against sin and hell, He was also

teaching them about His vicarious death and glorious resurrection. There is no way for man to free himself from sin and its consequences. God provides freedom and salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. The sin that condemns is forgiven when we acknowledge it, confess it to God, and believe that He can forgive us for the sake of Jesus. This is our daily struggle against our sinful nature in us. This is our daily victory through Jesus to begin a new life according to God's will. Luther said that we are *at the same time justified people but still sinners (simul justus et peccator). We are always becoming; we have not arrived. (Ein Christ ist immer im Werden.)* (Series B p. 234).

When Luther explains the Baptism, he asks and answers:

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Where is this written?

St. Paul writes in Romans chapter six: “We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Rom. 6:4)

IV – Be salt

This new life is portrayed by Jesus in our text as “to have salt in yourselves and be in peace with each other... Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again?”. We all know well the teaching of Jesus in The Sermon of the Mountain when He said: “You are the salt of the earth.” (Matthew 5:13). As salt, we Christians give a special taste to the world and we help to preserve the world. But if we don't accomplish our faith as Christians living a godly life, what can we say? *To have salt in yourselves is a charge to the children of the Kingdom to live up to their calling and to serve as worthy examples in a sinful world... The positive quality of life among believers should serve as a*

hope or 'salt' for the world. Factions and divisions among believers in Christ have a destructive affect upon their (our) testimony. (ABC 1188).

I shared with the Bible Study Group a nice text from one of my Bible Commentaries about the new life we have in Christ: *“Faith should express itself in concrete action. Society judges Christians not on the faith they profess but on the way they live. For His part, the Lord, who is coming back soon, will judge us on the works that result from our faith in Jesus Christ. We are not saved by these works, but we will be held accountable for them.”* (ABC 1515).

Conclusion: When the Bible teaches us about hell, its aim is not just to scare or to frighten us, but to warn us, to call us to repentance, and to offer us the good alternative of heaven through the faith of Jesus. Life is not just eating and drinking, working and getting married. Life has a spiritual sphere which we can never ignore. As we care for healthy food, good education and security for us and for our children, we also have to care for our spiritual needs and for the needs of our beloved ones. This is the main task of the church as the Word of God is preached and the Sacrament are offered. Jesus Himself is offered through these Means of Grace to help people in their lives till we enter eternity. To be part of a church is more than to be part of a club or of a society; but it is to be part of God's visible Kingdom among us to accomplish His will where we live and where we work. It is a big privilege for us to have a church and to have regular Services to nurture our faith and to guide us on the right path. We enjoy also our Christian family, we enjoy the company of our brothers and sisters in Christ, which gives strength to each other. We become too weak if we stay alone at home by ourselves. We need each other, we need the love and care we practice among us and to outsiders as well, we need the fellowship. It is like red hot coals: together they heat and make a good braai; a coal alone goes out very fast... Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle

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