

Sermon Reading Service: Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost, Series B

Text: Ephesians 4:17-24 (vv.22-24) -

Theme: Learning the New Attitude

Dear Friends,

Mom and dad looked out the car window as they drove off from campus. Left behind at the university was their only son, a freshman. He stood in the parking lot waving goodbye. "In just a few months we will see him again," Dad said to Mom. "It's such a big place," said Mom. "Will he be all right?" This is such a different place from home she thought as they passed a two men holding hands on the sidewalk. A line was forming outside one of the college bars. "Have we taught him enough about the world out there? I hope he has the right attitude about all this." As they got on the expressway they prayed God would watch over their only child.

There's a lot more to being a parent than paying for college. To survive on our own in a world hostile to the gospel of Jesus Christ we need an orientation toward the opposing spiritual forces that are at work everywhere around us.

Chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians speaks of a new attitude that the Christian possesses which keeps him from being consumed by the excesses of the world around us. God's word warns us not to try to survive the world by accommodating ourselves to its ways. We are to be made new in our attitude so that we do not succumb the standards of the world, but live by the standards of God.

Our text today says we are no longer to live as the gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from God because of the hardening of their hearts. Now Gentile means the way of life or attitude of one who does not

belong to the true God. We commonly call this being "worldly" as opposed to being godly.

Worldliness and godliness are opposed to each other. Worldliness is centred on self. Godliness is centred on God. Worldliness works for gain. Godliness works for God. Godliness seeks to do the work of God. What is that work? In the gospel for today Jesus says "the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29).

The attitude of worldliness is darkened in its understanding, separated from the life of God. It is hardened in its heart, just as in the story of the Exodus, the heart of Pharaoh was hardened to letting God's people go, even though the truth was everywhere around him in the plagues on his people. Still he would not obey the Lord but gratified his own pride.

Worldliness is given over to its own ways, living out its twisted desires in immorality of all kinds, thievery, violence, and vandalism constantly has to be dealt with in the public world, and many homes suffer the effects of adultery, alcoholism, sexual immorality, broken promises and divorce.

This is the way of worldliness. It promises that we will be free and fulfilled if we follow our desires, but each new impurity raises up a continual lust for more. In the end we are left miserable when we find that our desires in themselves cannot bring us peace.

Contrary to worldliness is godliness. Godliness is a new attitude God creates in us toward the world outside of us and the desires inside of us. It shows us that there is no peace that comes from gratifying the worldly desires in us. Peace must come from outside, from God.

Godliness is an attitude that is oriented above, to God, who loves each of us. His love is so great that it led him to subject himself to the

worst of our worldliness. He suffered under it, bled under it, and died under it, in order to rise above it and conquer all worldliness. Now he reigns over the world and over us, and lifts us above it all.

God leads us to see that the greatest peace is to be filled with his purposes. God calls us today to rise above the world. While the Christian does not participate actively in his justification before God, that is, it is the grace of God alone in Jesus Christ that declares us to be free from the penalty of our sins, the Christian is active in his or her sanctification. This means that as forgiven children of God, we are commanded to put off the old sinful ways and put on this new attitude towards the world.

Jesus said, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. I have chosen you out of the world, and it hates you." (Jn 15:19).

The way to gain this new attitude is by daily repentance over our sins and remembering the mercy of God. We have to go back and remember what we learned when we came to know Jesus. In Him is the fullness of God. And we have to equip our children for a godly life in a worldly environment. We do this by teaching them the ways of the Lord.

Parents, your task is great. Don't give in to just surviving. See your real task being a parent as growing a plant. You have to plant the seed of the word of Christ, water and cultivate by teaching the Bible in your home, pull the weeds by Christian discipline, and await the harvest of seeing your child grow into a responsible adult. If you don't teach them the way of Christ, the world will teach them its ways.

School teachers in the public schools are entrusted by God with shaping children and youth. Christian teachers are to do their best in whatever capacity their situation allows. In everything they must

model the love of God. God chose them to represent Him in the classroom. What an honourable work they have been called to!

Retired people, grandparents, godparents, aunts and uncles, God is using you to reach the children today. Live your life in a way that is an example of obedience to God and love for your neighbour. Put off the ways of the world and be filled with goodness. Let your words be pure and filled with the grace of God.

Let's get serious with the word of God. Let's get serious about coming each week to church. Let's get serious about getting the kids to Sunday School each week. Let's get serious about teaching the catechism to children, not just in seventh and eighth grade, but beginning at home when they are little and learning it again with them. Let's get serious about family devotions around the dinner table at home.

We have a great challenge before us. God calls St. Thomas Lutheran Church to be a congregation of families dedicated the word of God. Where the word calls us to repent, we must repent. Where it calls us to believe, we must believe. Where it calls us to forgive, we must forgive. Where it calls us to love, we must love.

We have been given much as God's people. This is a golden opportunity to be the best we can be. The past is behind us. God calls us to put off the old self, and put on the new, being made new in the attitude of our minds.

Let us all work together, in our homes around our tables, and here in the house of God, around His table, to raise up another generation that knows the difference between worldliness and godliness, and seeks the greater. And God will be with us as we learn the new attitude of Christ. Amen.

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– St. Thomas, 09 August 2015, Reading Service