

Sermon Isaiah 29 11 19 13th Sunday after Pentecost Series B

Sermon: 13th Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Isaiah 29:11-19

Theme: Words and deeds (Stewardship V and VI)

Goal: To stress that Christians must be coherent in their lives: to practice what they confess

Dear Friends,

Introduction: The lack of coherence in the life of many Christians causes bad commentaries among some non-church going people. When they observe some Christians, they say: *What's the difference? They go to the church on Sundays, but during the week they break the same rules as all others, they speak bad things about each other, they deceive, lie, become drunk, have lovers...* If it's so with some who call themselves Christians, than it's better to them to renounce their faith instead of dishonouring God's name..., or, the better way, to repent sincerely and come back to the true way of Christ.

On the other hand, a good Christian behaviour speaks louder than a thousand words. If our life is coherent with our belief, people around us will note it and, maybe, will ask about the reason why we do this and that. This is the opportunity to give a good testimony about God's love in my life and why Jesus is important in my life.

God spoke against hypocrisy through Prophet Isaiah in our text and Jesus quoted it in our Gospel: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." To worship God as a duty on Sunday, but not to practice our Christian faith and love during the week is hypocrisy and doesn't please God.

Words and deeds, faith and love, theory and practice are stressed in the Biblical Stewardship Principles we have for today.

I – God’s stewards are *in* the world, but not *of* the world (#V)

The big challenge we Christians face is that we are still *in* the world, but we are not *of* the world any more.

On the one hand we are humans like all the others; we have our needs, we have to study, to work, to earn our salary, to compete with others; we become sick, depressed... we are not perfect, we are sinners...we have to face the daily traffic... and we are surrounded by all kinds of people, not only lovely people, but harsh, stupid, insensitive, people who even hate you!

On the other hand we are Christians, people blessed by God and forgiven by Christ. Jesus said that we are *in* the world but we are not *of* the world (John 17:15-18.) He even prayed for us in this situation: “My prayer is not that you (Father) take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world.” Note: He doesn’t take us *out* of the world, but He sends us *into* the world to give witness of His love and care. *God’s stewards recognize that the Lord sets them apart from the world and by the transforming power of the Gospel sends them into the world to live out the Gospel* (LCMS BSP, V).

The apostle Paul warns us in Romans 12:2 (the text I’m using in the home visits this year): “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

At the same time this challenge is a fight. We struggle daily against our own human nature to do God’s will and not to fall into temptation, as Luther explained it: *We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us so that the devil, the world, and our sinful nature may not deceive us or mislead us into false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things, we pray that we may finally overcome them and win the victory* (Small Catechism, 6th Petition).

The Gospel transforms our attitudes and helps us to take decisions according to God’s will. We have to worship God with our lips and to cling to

Him with our whole heart, so that our life will be a coherent life on Sunday and every day of our week.

II – God’s stewards are loved and loving (#VI)

The 6th Biblical Stewardship Principle matches perfectly with St. Thomas main Core Value: *LOVED BY GOD – LOVING OTHERS: God’s stewards are loved and loving. Secure in God’s love we are set free to love others and to bring them into fellowship with Jesus Christ.*

Coming back to our text, which says that we shall worship God not only with our lips but also with our hearts, St. John adds: “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue, but with actions and truth” (1 John 3:18). “If someone says, “I love God”, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this commandment: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21-21).

There is a well-known quote from Tertullian, a theologian from North of Africa of the second century, which describes how the gentiles saw the Christians. He wrote: *“Look,” they say, “how they love one another” (for they themselves hate one another); “and how they are ready to die for each other” (for they themselves are readier to kill each other).* (Tertulian, 160 -220 AD, Carthage/ now:Tunis – Wikipedia).

Can this be said about the Christians of the 21st Century? “Look how they love one another.” Or is there a big incoherence in many Christians as I presented it at the beginning of this sermon? The lack of love among Christians and the bad behaviour of some of them hinder many to search for a Christian church or to support Christianity or even to remain in the church.

God’s stewards recognize that their stewardship flows out of God’s love for them in Christ which empowers them, in turn, to love others in acts of Christ-like love. All activities of Christian stewards done in faith and love are properly Christian stewardship. (#VI).

Conclusion: Usually when Stewardship is mentioned people associate it with money, tithing, offerings. No, stewardship is much more than talking about money in the church. It is all about our attitude as Christians: how we see ourselves, how we see our fellows, how we see the world through God's eyes. First of all stewardship relates to people, not only to money. Offerings are a consequence of Christian stewardship. If I am aware of God's love for me in Jesus Christ, if I am aware that I am a new creature by God's grace and by faith in Jesus, my mind, my heart, my lips will be directed by the Holy Spirit to fulfil God's will in all spheres of my life: in the church, in the family, in my private life, in the society I live. We should not come to worship God only with our lips while our thoughts are far away, on our business, our problems, our leisure, our Sunday braai... but our heart should get on with our lips and God will accept our praise and worship. And He will fill our hearts and minds with His love in such a way that we will overflow love to those who surround us. His name will be hallowed and His kingdom will come to many.

I have recently come back from Mozambique, where the new Christians are searching for the path to worship and to serve God in the Lutheran way. They are not doing it in the old German Lutheran manner, as we do it with our 16th Century hymns. They cannot copy a worship style of other churches because their culture is different from ours and unique. But they are based on God's love in Jesus Christ and trying to do their best to share this love in life and songs, in attitude and fellowship, trusting that God will bless them as God's stewards in the bush with the small resources they have. They are thankful that Christians around the world are helping them and sharing resources so that they can have their churches, their pastors, their Bibles and their faithful Christian literature. Thank you for your support as well, as God's stewards that you are. Amen.