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Christ the King & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Cody & Powell, WY

Oculi (Third Sunday in Lent)

March 3, 2024

Text: Luke 11:14–28

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The early weeks in Lent remind us that we live in a universe filled with spiritual life and activity. The Bible teaches the heavens and the earth are filled with God's glory (Is. 6:3; Ps. 19). The universe is "charged with the grandeur of God" (G. Manly Hopkins).

It's one thing to say the Lord God created the heavens the earth by the power of His Word. The deists of the 18th century believed God made a material universe that works perfectly like a well-made clock. But they thought God Himself and His spiritual life had nothing to do with the universe's workings. The materialists of today say the universe operates under the direction of physical laws; God's existence is no longer needed. It's one thing to confess God is the creator. It's quite another to say the universe He created is spiritually alive and active. There is more to the world than matter, energy, and laws of nature. These early weeks in Lent reminds us the spiritual world is real including the existence and activity of angels and demons.

The first Sunday in Lent taught us that while Jesus was fasting in the Judean desert, He endured temptations from Satan himself. Jesus didn't overcome Satan through philosophy, rational argumentation, or superior physical abilities. Jesus quoted the Scriptures and trusted in His heavenly Father. Man, including the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus, does not live by bread alone – material food, but also by the spiritual food that is every word from God's mouth (Matt. 4:4). God's Word and prayer are what sustained Jesus during His fasting and by which He overcame the devil.

Last week, the second Sunday in Lent, a Canaanite woman prayed to Jesus that He would deliver her daughter from demonic oppression. He did so but not through medicine or any other physical means. Jesus told the mother, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (Matt. 15:28). Faith in God reflects a spiritual reality we human beings possess by the grace of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel.

Today, the third Sunday in Lent, the Lord Jesus heals a man who couldn't speak. But Jesus didn't use medicine, speech therapy, or any other physical means. Using His divine power, Jesus cured a spiritual malady manifested physically through the man's inability to speak.

Every human being possesses a physical body and an immaterial soul. In all of God's creation, we alone are both material and spiritual creatures. We need food, drink, medicine, house, home, family, and many other physical necessities that support our life. But we also need spiritual fellowship with God through His Spirit, God's Word, faith, hope, love, worship, prayer, joy, and peace. Day by day, we need renewal in body and soul. To receive these necessary gifts of body and spirit, we turn to the Lord God who created us in His image, who redeemed us by the ministry of His beloved Son, and who sanctifies us in body and soul by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus did a good thing in casting out a demon that prevented a man from being able to speak. Not only was the man's soul delivered from demonic tyranny but his mouth was set free to fulfill its primary purpose: speaking God's praises in love and thanksgiving. Many marveled at what they saw.

But some doubted and scoffed at Jesus' healing ministry. “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons” (vs. 15). He can only do good by using evil power. Others in the crowd kept testing Jesus by demanding signs from heaven (vs. 16). Accusing Jesus of using demonic power and requiring signs from heaven revealed our Lord's opponents were of the devil.

This very intense moment in our Lord's life teaches us that we dare not overlook the spiritual reality behind life in this world. God's kingdom is present in this world even though we cannot see it with our physical senses. And there is also a dark, evil realm that seeks to destroy Christian faith and corrupt the physical, bodily life we live in this world. Satan has a kingdom which Jesus acknowledges in vs. 18. But then, Jesus claims God's kingdom and power are superior to that of Satan's in vs. 20, "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

This is simply extraordinary; the spiritual and the physical interact with each other almost seamlessly. There are no strict divisions between them. The prevalent notion of our time, or if you prefer more direct statements, the big lie of the modern age is that the universe is only material. There is no spiritual reality. Or if there is, it is of no importance and can be safely locked away with nothing lost. We 21st century Christians must reject this lie so that we can think and live differently.

To illustrate how our world thinks and acts primarily in materialistic terms, consider who we responded to the recent Covid crisis. Churches were closed or worship services were severely restricted. The spiritual food that sustains our souls was deemed unnecessary or a luxury item too costly in troubled times. But grocery stores remained open. Pastors were not allowed to bring God's Word, prayer, the Sacrament, or Christ's name to the sick and dying in hospitals, nursing homes, and other places of care. But nurses, administrators, janitors, and so forth were allowed in to do their good and noble work. In other words, the world behaved as if the only thing that truly mattered was our bodies. Our world acted as if God's kingdom was an illusion and God didn't exist. I could further illustrate with our economic system, entertainment industry, educational approaches, even by how we define what it means to be human, male and female, family, children, work, and so forth. All of these good things are primarily defined, set-up, and managed as if there was not spiritual reality behind them. As if we are only material creatures with no soul.

But we Christians know the truth. The kingdom of God has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Going back to vs. 20, “But if it is by the finger of God I (i.e., Jesus) cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come among you.” We Christians know that wherever Jesus is present, there His kingdom is also present. There Satan is defeated and his tyranny overthrown. We know God’s kingdom is among those who confess Jesus is Lord. That’s why we bring God’s Word, prayer, worship, and every Christian virtue into everything. When we’re sick, when we eat, get married, go to work and school, when we vote, pay taxes, go the movies, when we’re born and when we die. We bring all things, spiritual and physical working in together, into everything. We bring the salt and light of God’s truth into the world because we have God’s Holy Spirit living in us. Every nook and cranny of our lives is under the care and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We Christians know we need Jesus and His spiritual gifts of love, forgiveness, hope, and peace as much as we need food, drink, house, home, clothing, medicine, friends, family, and so forth. We also know by the precious Gospel revealed in the Bible that God’s Son came to this wondrous earth as true God and true man in one person, the Lord Jesus Christ, to give all that we need in body and soul. Jesus is God’s Son who brings His Father’s kingdom to us by giving us the Holy Spirit. Through Him, all sins are forgiven. The power of the devil is broken. That evil spirit has no claim on our lives. We live in Christ’s kingdom by His love and grace.

I want to close with the apostle Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3. It reflects the fullness of our life in Christ. It’s my prayer for you as well.

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father ... ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you ... ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

May the fullness and grandeur of Christ and His kingdom be with you all ...

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.