

Pastor Kenneth Mars

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

Judica (Fifth Sunday in Lent)

March 17, 2024

Text: John 8:42–59

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

I find it remarkable that our culture remembers and celebrates two Christian saints. Those being St. Valentine – Valentine’s Day on February 14<sup>th</sup> and St. Patrick, today, St. Parick’s Day. Both saints were real, historic people. Legends surround both, especially St. Patrick of Ireland. Sadly, our cultural celebrations of these great men are barely represent who they really were. There is so much more to Valentine than heart-shaped pieces of paper. More to Patrick than shamrocks and green beer.

What is true for both men is that they were Christians committed to the truth that God the Father sent His beloved Son to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. In and through Christ Jesus, the Father was reconciling the world unto Himself. Both men believed the teaching of God’s Word that Jesus came to destroy the devil’s work and the power of death. It is this great hope of reconciliation with the Father and divine life in and beyond this world that gives Christians like Valentine, Patrick, and the saints of this congregation such courage and strength. Without the eternal redemption won for us by Christ Jesus through the eternal Spirit, we sinners would remain under the dominion and tyranny of the devil. But the Father gave us His greatest gift, His beloved Son. In the grace and power of the Spirit, we love Jesus with every fiber of our body and soul.

(CTK: only) I can’t thank Christ the King’s choir with enough praise and gratitude for leading us in that great hymn attributed to St. Patrick, *I Bind unto Myself this Day* (LSB 604). This hymn gives us the words and language by which we express our conviction that God is bound to us and we are bound to Him. But this binding gives liberty and freedom, not slavery. The

strong name of the Trinity is literally affixed to us by the Holy Spirit in our baptism. Christ's incarnation, baptism in the Jordan, His cross and resurrection, His 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in glory on the Last Day are all bound to us, marking us as Christians. Prayer and God's holy Word form our shield while the heavenly host of angels stand guard over us. With these holy powers we stand in every place and at all times against the demonic snares of sin, vice, and natural lusts that give temptation power. Thank you, dear choir and musicians, for enriching and strengthening our prayer and devotion to God the blessed Holy Trinity. May God's holy name always be bound to us with joy and gratitude so that together, as one redeemed people, we may live under His love and power.

We ought not to take such a gift for granted. The Jews in the gospel text from John 8 could not believe Jesus was sent by the Father. The reason? Vs. 43-44, "It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." Hearing the word of Jesus and believing it is what makes Christians Christian. We might take that to be an obvious truth. And it is. But it's not an easy truth.

The truth is the issue here. The truth of who Jesus is and what He came to do. When I teach catechism students about Jesus using the 2<sup>nd</sup> Article of the Apostles' Creed, I always tell them they will not be confirmed unless they can tell me who Jesus is, what He came to do, and why that's important for them. Jesus is true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary. He is the Lord who came to redeem me as a lost and condemned person from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. He accomplished our redemption through His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death so that you, me, and all His beloved people might live under Him in His kingdom and service Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessed. To this great confession of faith, all catechism students conclude by confessing, "This is most certainly true." It's not an opinion. It's the truth.

Christians, young and old alike, must be able to speak the truth about Jesus and the truth about His world not in some abstract, metaphysical way. But as a confession of faith and trust established upon the absolute truth of God's Word. Anything less, is, as Jesus Himself says in John 8, a demonic lie.

"[The devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (vs. 44b-45).

There is no way of getting around the fact that Jesus claims to be eternal Son of the Father come in human flesh. Such an audacious claim is why the Jews pick up stones to stone Jesus. Standing right before their eyes is an ordinary man. But He claims to be honored and gloried by God the Father. He's not yet 50 years old, as the Jews point out in vs. 57, but Jesus says He's greater than Abraham, the father of God's faithful people. He says that whoever believes in Him will never see death. Who can overcome death but God?

The Jews rightly understand what Jesus is saying. He is God in the fullest sense and also completely man. "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am" (vs. 58). I am God the Lord who spoke to Abraham. I appeared to Moses in the burning bush. I am *the* I am, Yahweh, come in human flesh to redeem a people unto myself. There are only two legitimate responses to such a claim: Faith in Jesus as God's divine Son or a blasphemer who deserves to be stoned. The Jews in John 8 chose the second option; they wanted to stone Jesus to death.

Why should we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God? The best and surest answer is Good Friday and Easter. We believe Jesus to be who He says He is because He died and rose from the dead. That awesome death and glorious resurrection is the confirmation of God's truth and of God's love for the world. But let's make this more personal...our Lord's death and resurrection are the confirmation and proof that what God says to you in Holy Scripture is true and that His love for you will never, never change.

This is why we pray, day after day, that the truth of Jesus be preserved among us in our congregation. That His truth would be deeply implanted in our hearts and minds by the Spirit. In lives of our youth, through Sunday School and catechism classes. In our families so that husbands and wives, parents and children may hear the truth of God's Word, pray, praise and give thanks together. In our older members, so that they can continue to grow in the wisdom and virtue of Christian faith and piety. And finally, for us all, that when our last hour comes, depart this world in Christian peace awaiting the resurrection of the righteous on the last day.

St. Valentine was a pastor; he cared for God's people by teaching them the truth about the Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, and Savior of the world. He died a martyr's death in Rome around 270 AD for confessing Jesus is Lord. St. Patrick spent many, many years preaching the Gospel in a wild, pagan land. Martyrdom seemed to be always close at hand. Churches were established. Sinners were baptized in God's Trinitarian name so that they, like us today, can confess Jesus is Lord through the grace of the Spirit. Patrick died in peace in the late 400's AD in northern Ireland.

Let us rejoice and be glad this good day. For Christ Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords has come among us with all His blessed gifts. May His truth and goodness fill our lives with joy and peace.

✠ 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.