

The Witnesses

1John 5:4-10

The Second Sunday of Easter, April 8, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Whenever the doctrine of predestination comes up here at Immanuel there are no cries for joy. Some people say, "Sounds like the doctrine of predestination," in a tone that suggests may we please talk about something else now. Some people react to the doctrine of predestination by desperately quoting Scripture and all that they have learned to somehow get eternal salvation back under their control. They insist on things like, "Well, we have to repent, don't we?" or "Don't we have to ask for forgiveness?" and other similar things that move salvation out of the hands of our heavenly Father and into our own sinful hands. And some of you upon first learning about what the Bible actually has to say about predestination went home and spent the rest of the day talking about it. It is good to know that God can still command and entire day of our attention.

All of these reactions come from a misuse of the doctrine of predestination. It is not that we misunderstand the doctrine of predestination, but we misapply it. In other words while we are figuring out the doctrine of predestination we are losing sight of other things that are true about God and ourselves and when we lose sight of those other things that are true about God and ourselves, then the doctrine of predestination is just plain frightening.

The problem with the doctrine of predestination is that when we learn it Satan immediately tempts us to probe the hidden majesty of God with our new found knowledge of predestination and we fall for the temptation every time.

Here is what I mean. The doctrine of predestination simply stated is this, your faith in Jesus Christ was given to you by God. You did not decide to believe in Jesus because in your sinful condition you could not have decided to believe in Jesus. God in His mercy decided to give you faith in Jesus.

Once I say this Satan is tempting you to probe the divine majesty. He is tempting you to probe the depths of the will of God to figure out what God's will is. In other words when I say that God decided to give you faith, you immediately ask yourself, "Well, then what about all of the other people who do not believe? Did God decide not to give them faith?" That question is impertinent and beyond your ability to answer. You are trying to probe the divine majesty of God, dear sinner, and you cannot do it. You are misusing the doctrine of predestination.

In other words you are trying to figure out what God's will is toward humanity from eternity and thereby figure out what His will is toward you. You are trying to figure out who is in and who is out and upon what basis God makes such decisions. That is probing the divine majesty and all it will do is scare you to death. It will lead to questions like this one, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" Our Lord was asked this on two different occasions. On one occasion the Lord was gracious and said, "Make sure you get in." On the other occasion Jesus bluntly told the person asking the question, "Yes, those who are saved will be few." Of course He said it in that Jesus fashion that only Jesus says things in. He said, "Broad is the way and paved is the road that leads to destruction and many will find it, but narrow is the way and small the gate that leads to life and only a few will find it." And if you are a man who likes to gamble and play the odds, that answer is scary.

Frankly, the divine majesty is always scary. Whenever the divine majesty appears it is terrifying. When the divine majesty appears on the top of Mount Sinai and speaks to the people, the people beg that no further word be spoken to them. Even Moses himself trembled in the face of it. No one could bear the divine majesty. The reason is simple. God is Almighty. He can do what He likes with you. He can exalt

you on high. He can cast you into the depths of hell. You cannot stop Him. You cannot resist Him. You cannot do anything about it. The divine majesty is always scary.

For those who deal with God in His divine majesty and refuse to deal with Him in the way that He would prefer that you deal with Him, they are always trying to reduce the divine majesty. In other words there are people who deal with God in His divine majesty, but they do not think that sin is such a bad thing. And they wonder why those who truly believe in Jesus make such a big deal about sin. After all, they say, "What is the big deal with sin?" They rewrite the rules of God and make them easier to keep. They rewrite the expectations of God and make them easier to achieve. They have to do this because if they actually dealt with God in His divine majesty then they would be just as terrified as we are of what God will do with us. But when they rewrite God's expectations, they are no longer dealing with God. They are dealing with an idol that they have constructed, a god of their own imagination. They are inviting their own destruction by pretending that God is less holy, less just, and less mighty than He really is.

This is what happens when you misapply the doctrine of predestination.

Predestination is a real thing. God does predestine. The Bible says it in various places. Some of the most famous are Ephesians 1 and 2, Romans 8 and Romans 9. But in Ephesians 2 Saint Paul is rejoicing over the doctrine of predestination. If you do not rejoice over the doctrine of predestination, if it does not make you glad in heart and joyful in spirit, then you have misapplied the doctrine of predestination. You are using it to probe the divine majesty and all that does is bring us terror.

The Bible does not rejoice in the divine majesty. It records the terror of the divine majesty. The Bible rejoices in predestination, therefore predestination cannot be about the divine majesty at least it cannot be about the divine majesty the way Satan has tempted us to think about it.

How then shall we deal with a God who is majestic and sovereign? We shall deal with Him in the way that He would prefer that we deal with Him: through His Son, Jesus Christ.

If I had business dealings with a man and became dependent on the income that I received from him, and he suddenly turned reclusive and locked himself in his house and refused all communication with me, I would begin to wonder whether or not I would be able to continue to survive. If he refused all email and text messages, didn't answer the phone and would not even respond to snail mail, I would begin to wonder if I needed to go through the trouble of finding another vocation, lest my family and I lose everything. But what if this same reclusive man would talk to his son and his son was available to me? Could I get a message through to him through his son? But getting a message through to him is not what is important. I have been getting messages through to him through email. He receives them, he just doesn't answer them. He can hear my voicemail, he just doesn't call me back. This is how it is with the doctrine of predestination. You can shout at God and pray to God all you want, He doesn't give you an answer because you are not dealing with Him in the way that He wants you to deal with Him. What I need from this man with whom I do business is a message! I need him to tell me something, anything, so that I have something to go on when it comes to his will and attitude toward me. Since the son has access to him in his home, the son can bring me a message so that I know what this man is thinking. And when the son brings me the message that his father wants me to continue in the contract, I am greatly relieved and I thank the father through the son because that is the only way to get a message to him. I thank the son profusely for bringing the message, etc. You get the idea.

This is the way that it is with the divine majesty. As long as you deal with the divine majesty, you will always wonder what God's attitude is toward you? Am I among His elect? Has He chosen me? What are the odds that He has chosen me? Are the odds in my favor? Are they against me? Shall I be hopeful?

Shall I despair? I don't know, until the Son of God comes and gives me a word. And lo and behold the word that the Son comes and gives us is a word of mercy and forgiveness! It is a word of salvation! It is a word that God has in fact predestinated you from the foundation of the world to be saved! That is the Word that the Son has brought from the Father.

When the doctrine of predestination is applied correctly all it says is that God has saved you. It makes for sure that you know that this salvation is not by your works or accomplishment. And if God has saved you then that salvation is sure. You can count on it. But if salvation depends in some measure on you, then you can never be sure that you are saved because you can never be sure that you have done enough. Have I repented properly? Have I prayed sincerely? Did I mean it when I asked Him for forgiveness? You will never know and when you never know, you never rejoice and Ephesians, chapter one, remains a chapter of the Bible that never makes any sense. And the reason that it makes no sense is because you are still trying to deal with God in His majesty and you are not dealing with Him through His Son and when you are not dealing with God through His Son, you are not dealing with God the way that He wants you to deal with Him.

The Son brings forgiveness. The Son brings life. The Son brings salvation.

Now, we have another problem.

The Son lived some two thousand years ago.

It was all very well for the Son to become incarnate and live among us. It was all very well for the eternal God to come to us in the Son and speak to us. But we are bound by time. We can only live in the present. We remember the past and we don't remember all that much of the past. We can only remember what we were alive to remember and not even all of that. We can only anticipate the future. And we only anticipate the future based upon the past. But sometimes the future and the past do not resemble each other identically. Therefore our anticipation of the future is often inaccurate. And that is all that we can do. We are limited to the perpetual present in which we live and that present is constantly moving further and further away from the time when the Son was incarnate before He ascended into heaven. Jesus has returned to the Father and resumed His place in eternity, but we are still chugging away in time from one present moment to the next! How are we supposed to deal with God through His the way that He wants us to when we cannot even get to the Son? We have no memory of Him.

The way for us to have access to the Son is through the witnesses. There are witnesses to the Son who come to us across time. They give us access to the Son which gives us access to God. These witnesses are three: they are the water, the blood, and the Spirit. These three are united.

In 1John, chapter 5, God gives special emphasis to the water and the blood. What water and blood is He talking about? It is hard not to think of the water and the blood that came from the side of Jesus when the Romans pierced Him with a spear to make for sure that He was dead.

You recall John's Gospel and its testimony. Our Lord and the two criminals who were crucified with Him were crucified on a Friday. Saturday is the Sabbath of the Jews and the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses. The book of Deuteronomy states that a body left hanging like that would defile the land. The Jews did not want the land defiled especially on a Sabbath and especially on the Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In deference to the Jews Pilate ordered the legs broken of the crucifixion victims. Breaking the legs of the crucifixion victims would advance their death. Pilates aim was to have them dead by nightfall so that the bodies could be removed from the crosses before nightfall. When the soldiers began this procedure they came to Jesus and found that He was already dead. It would therefore be unnecessary to break His legs. But just to be sure, one of the soldiers took a spear and pierced the side of Jesus and immediately out of His side came a flow of blood and water.

Now when John records the flow of blood and water from the side of Jesus, He stops His record to tell us, "There is one who testifies to this and we know that his testimony is true." John could have said that about any of the events of our Lord's crucifixion. Instead, he chose to say this about the water and the blood. The one who saw the water and the blood bears witness that there was a sudden flow of water and blood from the side of Jesus after He died. And it is that water and that blood which testify of Jesus.

Well, how does this water and blood testify of Jesus to us? We still live two thousand years after He was incarnate before He ascended to God.

The blood of Jesus is the blood of the Sacrament of the Altar. When Jesus says that this cup is the new testament in My blood He is talking about the blood that will flow from His side. Since Jesus is the incarnate God and He has returned to sit at God's right hand, He has ascended to a place that is outside of time. That is a fancy way of saying that once He ascended into heaven, Jesus is no longer limited by the time constraints by which you and I are limited. He is not limited to a certain present time from which He cannot free Himself. He transcends time. He is therefore able to bring His blood to you in subsequent celebrations of the Sacrament of the Altar. And when the apostles pass down this divine tradition from the Lord to the congregations of the Lord, the Lord passes down His blood also to you. The only blood that Jesus has promised to give you is His blood and it is His blood that came from His side. This is the blood that testifies of Jesus who testifies of God. And what is the testimony of the blood of the Son of God? Your sins are forgiven.

Thus through the Sacrament of the Altar God reveals His eternal predestinated attitude toward you personally. And it is a gracious one!

Well, what else can the water be but Baptism? If we are talking about water and blood that flow from the side of Jesus and that testify to Him, what other water is there that testifies to Jesus except the water of one's baptism?

And so Jesus has carefully instituted His sacraments. When He attached the revelation of His gracious will to elements, He specifically chose elements that would come from His side when He was crucified. The reason that the sacraments bear witness to you of a gracious attitude by almighty God toward you is because such an attitude on God's part was obtained and revealed when Jesus was crucified.

What is the testimony of the water? That your old self has been put to death by the Son of God and that a new man has emerged to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. He has given you the Holy Spirit. He has forgiven you of your sins. You are saved by the eternal, predestinating will of God!

And the testimony of the water and the blood are united by the testimony of the Spirit. The Spirit is the One who came and reminded the apostles of everything that Jesus had said. That way the apostles could remember what Jesus had said and testify to us in their writings. Therefore the Scriptures are breathed out by God, they are inspired by the Spirit, they bear witness to Christ and what do they testify? They testify that God sent His Son to die for you and take away your sins. God is gracious to you for this reason and hears your prayers. He has saved you and will save you.

And this is how God wants to deal with us, not in a flame of fire of the divine judgment and majesty, but in humility through His Son and His Son's death upon the cross.

The water, the blood, and the Spirit, all three bear witness to this and the three are united!

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.