

A Good Tree

Matthew 7:15-23

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity, August 11, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Only the person who does the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Calling Jesus Christ, "Lord, Lord," is not good enough. There are plenty of people who call Him, "Lord, Lord." Only the person who does the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Prophecy in the name of Jesus is not good enough. There are plenty of people who prophecy in the name of Jesus. Not all of their prophesying is fraud. Some of it is genuine. Even if it is genuine prophecy and what gets predicted comes to pass, it is still not enough. Only the one who does the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Casting out demons in the name of Jesus is not enough. There are people who cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Not all of them are frauds. Some of the exorcisms are genuine. Even if they are genuine, they are not enough. Only the person who does the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Performing mighty deeds even if such mighty deeds are miracles is not enough. There are plenty of people who do mighty works in the name of Jesus. There are even people who perform miracles in the name of Jesus. Not all of these miracles are frauds. Some of them are genuine supernatural events. I have even had other Christians testify to me that resurrections occurred in their congregation. I have no reason to doubt it. I believe in the God who raises the dead. If He raised the dead back then, why not now? But now how matter the mighty deed, even if it is raising the dead, it is not enough. Only the person who does the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now what is all of this about doing the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and thereby entering into the Kingdom of Heaven? Don't the holy and blessed apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ preach to us that we are saved by grace through faith without the works of the Law? Don't the holy and blessed apostles preach in the name of Jesus? Don't they preach that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law? Don't the apostles preach with the authority that Jesus Himself had? Don't the holy and blessed apostles talk about a righteousness that is by faith and not by works of the Law? So how can the apostles whom the Lord has sent on the one hand say that we enter the

Kingdom of Heaven by faith and not by works and yet on the other hand the Lord who sent them out says that unless you do the will of His heavenly Father you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven? How do we explain this? How do we riddle this out?

Well, in order to riddle this out, you have to talk about trees. You know trees, big leafy green things that grow in your lawn. More precisely we should talk about fruit trees, apples, pears, and my favorite, peaches.

Our Lord makes a horticultural observation. "A healthy tree bears good fruit. A diseased tree bears bad fruit." Now, I am not a horticultural expert and I realize that I am preaching in front of at least a couple of them one of whom rose to prominence among horticulturalists in the country, but that seems obvious to me. "A healthy tree bears good fruit. A diseased tree bears bad fruit."

Remember what I said last Sunday about people who point out the obvious? You have to wonder why they are pointing out the obvious. You especially have to wonder when the person who is pointing out the obvious is your Lord.

And our Lord presses the point, "A healthy tree bears good fruit. A diseased tree bears bad fruit. A diseased tree cannot bear good fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit." Our Lord presses the point.

Our Lord is obviously not talking about fruit trees. He is talking about people. A good person will do good things. An evil person will do evil things. An evil person cannot do good things even if he should prophesy, cast out demons, or do a miracle in the name of Jesus. He cannot do good things. A good person cannot do bad things. Even if he does not prophecy, cast out demons, or perform miracles in the name of Jesus. He cannot do bad things.

So the trick when it comes to whether or not you do the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is whether or not you are a good tree. So are you a good tree? It seems that a lot is riding on the answer to that question.

In order to determine whether or not you are a good tree, one has to check out how God created trees and people to begin with.

In the beginning on the third day of creation God said, "Let the waters under the firmament be gathered together in one place and let the dry ground appear." And it was so. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth vegetation with seed in it according to its kinds and let the earth bring forth trees with fruit in which is their seed according to their kinds." And it was so. God saw that the earth, the vegetation, and the fruit trees were good. And if they were good they produced good fruit.

On the sixth day God said, "Let us make man in our image." When God made man He saw that they, both male and female, were very good.

Because the trees and the man and the woman were all good they all did good things. They could not do bad things because a good tree cannot bear bad fruit. And how did all of this goodness come into existence? It came into existence when God spoke it into existence.

God's word does what God's word says.

God's word does what God's word says even if a sinner is saying it.

John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." When the translations translate John the Baptist's preaching as "Repent" it makes it sound like John is telling the people to go and do something. The translation is a bit off. What John the Baptist actually preached was more like this, "Be penitent because the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." John the Baptist was not commanding them to do something. He was commanding them to be something. He knew that if there were something good doing something, something good would come naturally. To put it in tree language John the Baptist understood that if the people coming to him were bad trees, then no amount of preaching of the Law of God was going to make them into good trees. In other words no amount of explaining to them what they should do was going to be sufficient such that they would enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. They would simply become a bunch of people who cast out demons, prophesy, and do miracles. They would not be good trees and when the Kingdom of Heaven did finally come the Lord of the Kingdom would tell them, "Away from Me, you evildoers. I never knew you."

John the Baptist is delivering the word of the Lord that makes them into good trees. He is not telling them to repent. He is telling them to be penitent. And by commanding them with the word of the Lord to be penitent, the word of the Lord is making them into good trees. Then they will do the will of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Only good trees can.

And it does not matter that John the Baptist is a sinner. He is not worthy to carry the sandals of the Lord or even untie them. When the Lord comes to John for baptism John insists that John needs to be baptized by Jesus not the other way around. John the Baptist for all of his fulfillment of prophecy in his own person is a sinner. He is a sinner like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses and all of the other prophets. And yet John the Baptist just like the other prophets spoke the word of the Lord that brought about the thing that the Lord told them to speak. Even the fact that it is a sinner speaking the Word of the Lord does not alter the Word of the Lord's creating power.

If John the Baptist or any other preacher called by the Lord to deliver His Word announces to you that you are a good tree then you are a good tree. The Word of the Lord does what it says.

I am sinner. The Lord has called me to deliver His word to you. I have told you already in this Divine Service that your sins are forgiven. That means that you are righteous. You are righteous just as surely as the Word of the Lord made the deaf to hear and the blind to see. You are righteous just as surely as the Word of the Lord called Lazarus forth from his tomb. You are righteous and if you are righteous by the Word of the Lord then you are righteous by grace through faith and not by works of the Law. And if you are righteous, then you are new creations in Christ Jesus. And if you are righteous, you are good trees! And good trees cannot do evil things! And good trees will do the will of the Father in heaven and will thereby enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

So what you need is a preacher who will preach to the Word of the Lord. The Word of the Lord will make you righteous. Once you are righteous you will do righteous things and be saved.

Beware of the false prophets. Outwardly they are wearing sheep's clothing. Inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

In the beginning God spoke the creation into existence and it was good. The serpent spoke in the Garden and his word though not the word of God and precisely because it was not the word of God brought evil and death.

There are preachers who preach the serpent's word. There are preachers who teach you that if you cast out demons, prophesy in the name of Jesus, and do mighty works even miracles in the name of Jesus that you will be saved. There are such preachers who preach such things even now. This is not just an ancient thing. This is a contemporary thing and probably more prevalent now than when our Lord first uttered these words two thousand years ago. The Lord can prophesy too.

The preachers who preach to you the serpent's words will sound righteous. They will look righteous. That is the sheep's clothing that they wear. But inwardly they are ravenous wolves. That is to say that they will bring death to you. They will preach you a message that makes you into a diseased tree and a diseased tree will not be able to bear good fruit no matter how hard it may try.

So how do you tell the difference between a good preacher and a bad one? You tell the difference between a good preacher and bad one by observing their fruit. Our Lord makes more obvious horticultural observations. He makes these obvious horticultural observations because while from the perspective of horticulture they are obvious, they are not obvious when we apply them to preachers. "Do people pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?" Well, no. Therefore a bad preacher will bring forth bad fruit and a good preacher will bring forth good fruit.

Now this fruit will manifest itself in two ways.

First, it will manifest itself in the preacher's own life. If the preacher is a preacher of the Word of the Lord that makes people into good trees, then he will be one himself. That righteousness that his Lord gives him will be manifest in his life.

That is why it is dangerous to listen to preachers on TV or the radio or the internet. You don't know them. You don't know their fruits. You know mine. You moved me here into your parsonage. I live with you. My fruits are with you all of the time even when I don't want them to be.

Second, the preachers' fruits will show itself in the congregation that he serves. Sooner or later the good trees will come out and bear fruit. And if he is a bad preacher, sooner or later the bad trees will come out and bear fruit. The congregation will either be one that does the will of its Father in heaven or one that does not.

That is how you can tell the difference between the good preacher and the bad one, between the good tree and the bad one, between the preacher who preaches the Word of the Lord which makes you new creation or the word of the serpent which puts you to death.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.