

EITHER HEAR THE DEVIL OR GOD

Hear again the Word of God for this eighth Sunday after Trinity:

Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own centers of being, not from (the) Mouth of YHWH."¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

The theme for this week's readings is: any given human can either hear the devil or God. There are only two alternatives. The devil speaks with all manner of beguiling, beautiful, articulate, and humanly-loving languages. God speaks His truths beautifully, clearly, as a loving Father to His dear children in the One divine language of sin and salvation.

Hear this clearly – even as those truths have been and will be declared today, there is no dualism. Good and evil in this fallen creation are not equally balanced. God has won the war, the devil can only fight battles, and even win some during the time set by God, but the Satan cannot win the war.

That war's victory was achieved on the Cross at Calvary as God as sin-bearer in the Person of Jesus, destroyed sin and eternal death's hold over those who believe in the Christ. In that moment, the devil, was bound, and cast down to earth. He never again will have the power to accuse God's chosen people before His Almighty throne.

In the manner of fallen, despotic, evil human dictators, the Bound One is intent on making the Victory of the One Who Frees as costly as possible. That is, the

¹ Jeremiah 23:16.

devil, from the time of his ultimate defeat, wills to take as many to perdition with him as is spiritually possible. His favorite skirmish ground is in congregations and Church Bodies where the Word of God is taught in its purity, and His Sacraments are administered rightly.

To counter God, Satan has enabled and encouraged the creation of many humanly beautiful religions. This has been the case since the Fall of Adam in the First Church of the Garden of Eden, where he was encouraged to create the Church of Man. And, it will be the reality until God ends His fallen angel's reign of deceptive terror on earth. To cause their continued fall into sin, death, and ultimately Hell, the devil exercises all of his beautiful creaturely wiles.

What this means is that the devil's ways and appearance, to one's sinful nature, can seem more pleasing, more beautiful than God's. . This is especially true when God determines in His own counsel, to exercise His alien nature. That is, when He punishes sin, sinners, and anything in Creation on account of sin. We have an example of this in the circumstances that led up to today's Old Testament Word of Law:

*Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own centers of being, not from (the) Mouth of YHWH."*²

God uses human agents, those who proclaim His Word, to declare His Law to show sinners their fall, and His Gospel to forgive repentant sinners. The devil uses human agents, those who corrupt God's Word, to affirm sinners in their sin, that they

² *Ibid.*

find no need for repentance. The Church notes that both use the Word of God. Take care, dear Christian, for you are the prize the devil seeks. He knows God's Word better than you.

Yet, God knows His Word best. This He displayed when he came as the Word Incarnate. God's Word leads one to his or her need for the Savior, and then gives the Savior. On the other hand, the devil's perversion of God's Word leads one to self and others, leads one to various means of personal acceptance and good self-image. What this means is: false preachers of the Word declare what unrepentant sinners desire to hear; true preachers of the Word declare God's truth to sinners that some might repent and be forgiven. Four texts, five if one counts the Gradual, declare God's warnings against false prophets – pastor/teachers – and His consolations of forgiveness and life to those who heed His true prophets – pastor/teachers. Each text approaches the Law and Gospel for the week a little differently. Yet each, in its own way, declares that the people of God are called and freed by Him to follow only the pure Word of God. Hear again that pure Word:

Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own centers of being, not from (the) Mouth of YHWH."³

The texts you have participated in this morning were first proclaimed thousands of years ago. The latest of them first went out to the people God named as His own over 1900 years ago. The oldest was heard first in the Church about 3,000 years ago.

³ *Ibid.*

But, they all could have been written last night for first proclamation in the Church today. That is because the Word of God is living and active, and their relevance today is due to the reality that there truly is nothing new under the sun! God, through Jeremiah, begins His Word we have in the Church for this week in this manner:

*Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own centers of being, not from (the) Mouth of YHWH."*⁴

The first thing Jeremiah declares to his hearers is the Name and Title of the One Who is about to speak. The Name is "I Who Cause to be," or "I AM." His Title is "Lord of hosts." There is to be no doubt in any hearer of the following proclamation that it is God who speaks, the One Who is the effective and efficient cause of all, who rules in glory, majesty, power and might over every living being, including those in the heavenly realms – angels, cherubim and seraphim. The verbal image is of the Conquering King coming into Creation with His victorious Armies before and behind.

The very first Word this Victorious Creator King speaks is translated "not." When He says "do not," there is to be no doubt, this is His command that cannot be changed. What are the people of God to not do?

They are not to hear the words of the prophets who speak to fill people continuing unrepentant in sin with vain hope. That is clear from the original setting of today's declaration. God is not patting His bad acting children on the head, and gently saying, "There, there, now, calm down, and do what is right." He is verbally spanking

⁴ *Ibid.*

the errant souls among His people, with Words that are meant to hold power, to incite fear of His divine retribution. His intent, from His revealed Will in His holy, inspired and inerrant Scripture, is that the sinners will hear of His wrath, confess their sins, and be forgiven, and saved to everlasting life.

In our day's texts, God is using His Word of Law to declare His alien nature. That is, He will punish, as a fiery whirling storm, all those who do not turn from their sins – daily – and daily walk in His gift of New Life. Both people and pastors are being struck with the edge of the Word that cuts to the quick. Hear again as the Sword of God strikes into ears, hearts, lips and lives:

Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own centers of being, not from (the) Mouth of YHWH."⁵

The Word of God declares that the message of false prophets/false pastors, is any message that comes from their own imaginings, thoughts, wishes, desires. Such men and women have shown up here in the past. They will in the future. That is because the devil - he who is not all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present – has to roam about the earth in order to pick his battlegrounds for their potential effectiveness in bringing down as many souls to perdition with him as possible. When these attacks come, you dear Christian may take heart: they are proof that you have the Word in its purity and the Lord's Sacraments administered rightly.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Attacks from the Deceiver often come in the form of reasonable-sounding, people-pleasing teachings in the Church. You see, the true prophetic task is to not let the people “have it your way,” but to let the people have things “God’s way.” With the opening words of today’s Old Testament reading, God describes just what the sinning people are doing when they listen to false prophets. They are despising the pure Word of God. They want to follow the desires of their own Old Adams, and to have their pastor/teachers lead them in that direction. They, the people who remain unrepentant in their sins, want, and raise up for themselves, only men and women who will tell them things that will not convict them of their sins.

Two specific sins are attributed to the false prophets and their unrepentant hearers. The first is that they preach worldly and spiritual peace to those who continue to despise the full counsel of the Word of God. The second is that they preach that no evil will come upon those whose god is anything other than the One True God.

As our text clearly demonstrates, congregations in the Church have chosen for themselves pastors who do not fill the biblical prescriptions and descriptions of the Lord’s chosen undershepherds. When one gets to the heart of why this is done, he or she finds the devil’s beautiful, angelic heart. One discovers that the devil’s preachers are elected because they will not condemn clearly articulated, and **forgivable**, sins. The Lord condemns such false preachers and those who hear them. Their work of perverting the Word is usually done in their either remaining silent, or by changing the meaning of the inspired Word. I could give you a list of the things the devil leads them to beautifully

corrupt, but you can find them summed up on the wall under the cross! And that leads us to the tie to the true Good News in our text for those who are willing to hear the unadulterated Word of God, and to practice it rightly in Church, and in life.

For who from them has stood in (the) council of YHWH, and seen and heard His Word? Who caused to give heed to His Word and heard?⁶

The answer to those questions the faithful, continually repentant sinners whom God declares to be saints know. Who has stood in the Council of the I AM? Jesus! Who has seen and heard His Word? All who cling to Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of their sins! Who caused to give heed to His Word and heard? Only One – Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God! With the harshness of the Law still ringing out, the Word of the Lord calls to those stung by it to find His answers to His questions, in His Son.

It is only by clinging to Christ Jesus crucified, risen and ascended that you, dear sinner/saint are able to hear the pure Word of God, that is, to stand in His council and receive His counsel. By Faith, Christ's faith, you see and hear God's Word where He has revealed it – proclaimed, administered (not merely distributed), in Word, Water, Bread and Wine. Only in the true Word, rightly declared, even put forth into your mouth by the stewards of the mysteries of God, only in that pure Word has any human the divine ability to see and hear God's Word.

If you are troubled by the beautiful deceptions of the devil, if you are hurt on account of his work in the Church, take heart: he cannot win the war! The deed is done.

⁶ Jeremiah 23:18.

Christ's victory has spared you the eternal weight of this day's closing Word from Jeremiah's inspired hand:

Behold, (the) storm of YHWH's wrath goes forth, (as a) tempest whirling; upon (the) head of wicked men it will burst.⁷

That time has come. History, even the history of the ancient Israelites, is replete with incidents, years, decades and centuries of people suffering under God's wrath on account of their unrepented sins. And that time, the time of God's eternal cleansing fiery wrath at sin, is coming. Yet it is not yours to fear as you continue to hear and believe God's Law which convicts, condemns, and kills your Old sinful Man, and God's Gospel which acquits, frees, and enlivens your New sinless Man. Instead of the fiery whirlwind of God's wrath encircling your head, you have Christ's crown of righteousness. Instead of terror raining down on you in a deluge, you have been washed with the blood of the Lord, rinsed in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. You have died with Christ, and now are free to live in Him. The glory of the Word is here, and, dear Christian, it is in you. In Christ, you remain free to hear your Father's Word in the one divine language of sin and salvation.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Trinity VIII (*LSB* One-year series)

Jeremiah 23:16-19; Romans 8:12-17; Matthew 7:15-23

August 2, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

SECOND DRAFT TRANSLATION:

Thus says YHWH Sabaoth, "Do not hear the prophets' words, they who prophesy to you to cause to fill all of you with vain hopes. They cause to speak to you every vision of their own hearts, not from (the) Face of YHWH."⁸

They are continually saying to those continuing to despise Word of YHWH, "Shalom will be for you all;" and to everyone who is stubbornly following his own heart they say, "No evil will come upon all of you."⁹

For who from them has stood in (the) council of YHWH, and seen and heard His Word? Who caused to give heed to His Word and heard?¹⁰

Behold, (the) storm of YHWH's wrath goes forth, (as a) tempest whirling; upon (the) head of wicked men it will burst.¹¹

⁷ Jeremiah 23:19.

⁸ Jeremiah 23:16.

⁹ Jeremiah 23:17.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 23:18.

¹¹ Jeremiah 23:19.