



Lutheran Church of the Master

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“WE’RE SINNERS! ONE MORE POWERFUL IS COMING!”

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IF YOU WANT TO GET TO THE JOY & PEACE OF BETHLEHEM, & THE PRECIOUS LITTLE BABY JESUS, FIRST YOU HAVE TO GET PAST JOHN THE BAPTIST. THE CHURCH, IN IT’S WISDOM, HAS ALWAYS INSISTED ADVENT COMES BEFORE CHRISTMAS; THAT IF YOU REALLY WANT TO SEE WHAT THE BABY IN THE MANGER IS ALL ABOUT, YOU MUST FIRST CONFRONT THIS CRAZED PROPHET, THE VOICE, OUT IN THE WILDERNESS, WHO’S SERMONS WERE AS BITTER & WILD AS THE DESERT TERRAIN.

“YOU BROOD OF VIPERS!” THAT’S WHAT JOHN CALLED THE PEOPLE WHO CAME TO HEAR HIM PREACH, TO CONVINCING THEM THAT THEY WERE SINNERS, EVERY ONE! DO YOU NEED SOME CONVINCING TODAY? OR ARE YOU WILLING TO ADMIT IT AS READILY AS JOHN’S BROOD OF VIPERS? THEY DIDN’T SAY, “WAIT JUST MINUTE THERE, BUDDY! WE’RE NOT AS BAD AS ALL THAT. WE MAY NOT BE PERFECT, BUT AT LEAST WE’RE HERE TO LISTEN TO YOUR MESSAGE, CONFESS OUR SINS & GET BAPTIZED.”

THEY HAD NO ARGUMENT WITH JOHN EVEN IF HE DID CALL THEM SNAKES; OFFSPRING FROM THAT SERPENT IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, & MAYBE CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM BY BLOOD. BUT WITHOUT THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM, THE BLOODLINE WAS WORTHLESS. SOMEHOW THEY SEEMED TO REALIZE THAT JOHN WAS SPEAKING THE TRUTH; THEY REALLY WERE SINNERS, IN NEED OF BEING SAVED, & SO ARE WE.

SO WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO ABOUT IT? “WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” THEY ASKED JOHN. THE COMMON CROWDS, TAX COLLECTORS, EVEN BIG, TOUGH SOLDIERS ASKED JOHN, “WHAT SHOULD WE DO?” “BEAR FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE,” HE TOLD THEM. SHARE YOUR CLOTHING & FOOD WITH THOSE WHO DON’T HAVE ANY. BE FAIR & STOP CHEATING OTHERS. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THAT ACTUALLY MADE THOSE PEOPLE FEEL GOOD. “THEY WERE FILLED WITH EXPECTATION”, LUKE WRITES.

HELPING OTHERS, SHARING GOD’S LOVE, BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOR MAKES ALL OF US FEEL GOOD, DOESN’T IT? THERE MAY BE ALL KINDS OF MOTIVES & REASONS WE’RE INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRY OF THIS CONGREGATION, BUT THE FACT THAT IT MAKES US FEEL GOOD WHEN WE DO SOMETHING FOR SOMEBODY ELSE IS A NICE BENEFIT.

I WOULD EVEN GO SO FAR AS TO SAY IF WE GOT OURSELVES MORE INVOLVED IN THE MINISTRY & MISSION OF LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE MASTER, WE WOULDN’T HAVE THE TIME NOR THE ENERGY TO ARGUE ABOUT TROUBLESOME ISSUES, NOR WOULD WE HAVE THE DESIRE. IT’S KIND OF LIKE A FAMILY THAT’S NOT GETTING ALONG VERY WELL, WHEN A SERIOUS ACCIDENT OR ILLNESS,

SOME TRAGEDY BRINGS THEM TOGETHER & THEY FORGET ALL ABOUT BEING ANGRY AT EACH OTHER.

ALL OF A SUDDEN THEY HAVE A REASON, A CAUSE OR PERSON THAT DEMANDS THEIR ATTENTION. THEY HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO PUT ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES & TAKE CARE OF THIS IMMEDIATE, IMPENDING NEED. & WHEN THEY DO, IT MAKES THEM FEEL BETTER. THE NEGATIVE FEELINGS & DISTRESS FADE INTO THE BACKGROUND.

WE'RE STILL A BROOD OF VIPERS, NO LESS SINNERS; BUT THE ONE MORE POWERFUL, MORE POWERFUL THAN SIN, THAT JOHN SAYS IS COMING, HAS COME. BUT WE CANNOT GREET JESUS UNTIL WE FIRST MEET JOHN. WE CANNOT KNOW EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, UNTIL JOHN TELLS US WHY WE SO DESPERATELY NEED GOD TO BE WITH US.

IT'S STILL ADVENT & NOT YET CHRISTMAS. CHRISTMAS WILL COME, TO BE SURE, WITH ALL IT'S TINSEL & GLITTER, THE GLORY OF THE ANGEL CHORUS, THE SWEET BABY JESUS LYING IN THE MANGER & ALL THE REST, INCLUDING I SUSPECT JOLLY OLD ST NICK WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF PRESENTS UNDER A BRIGHTLY DECORATED TREE. BUT TODAY, JOHN STILL HAS CENTER STAGE, & WE WOULD DO WELL TO LISTEN TO HIM.

JOHN'S PURPOSE, LIKE THE OTHER PROPHETS BEFORE HIM, WAS TO TELL THE TRUTH, GET THINGS OUT IN THE OPEN, EXPOSE & UNMASK WHAT PEOPLE KEEP TRYING TO HIDE, EVEN FROM THEMSELVES. SUCH ACTIVITY IS USUALLY IRRITATING & UNWELCOME. WE DON'T REALLY WANT TO BE CALLED A BROOD OF VIPERS, SINNERS TO THE CORE.

PEOPLE DON'T WANT TO HEAR THE TRUTH WHEN IT REVEALS TOO MUCH ABOUT WHO THEY REALLY ARE. AT THE TIME OF THE REFORMATION, WHEN MARTIN LUTHER WAS UNVEILING CORRUPTION WITHIN THE CHURCH, POPE LEO EXCLAIMED, "A WILD BOAR HAS INVADDED MY VINEYARD!" & THEN HE PROCEEDED TO PUT A PRICE ON LUTHER'S HEAD TO GET RID OF THIS TROUBLE MAKER!

KING HEROD DID GET RID OF JOHN THE BAPTIST, & EVEN HAD A HAND IN GETTING RID OF THE ONE MORE POWERFUL, OR SO HE THOUGHT; ONLY THAT ONE DID NOT STAY DEAD! THE ONE WHO BAPTIZES WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT & FIRE IS STILL ALIVE & DOING HIS WORK TODAY; WITH HIS WINNOWING-FORK IN HIS HAND TO CLEAR HIS THRESHING-FLOOR & GATHER THE WHEAT & BURN THE CHAFF. BUT AS ONE COMMENTARY SUGGESTS, WHEN REPENTANCE & FORGIVENESS ARE AVAILABLE, JUDGMENT IS GOOD NEWS. THE PRIMARY AIM IS TO SAVE THE WHEAT, NOT BURN THE CHAFF.

LAST WEEK I CALLED THE DIRECTOR OF KOOTNAI BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TO CLARIFY SOME CONCERNS & ANSWER QUESTIONS WE HAD ABOUT OUR SON, ED'S TREATMENT. SHE WAS RATHER SURPRISED SHE TOLD ME, BECAUSE PARENTS DON'T USUALLY CARE ENOUGH THAT THEY WANT TO GET INVOLVED WITH THEIR CHILD'S TREATMENT; LIKE TAKING THEIR CAR IN TO GET IT FIXED, & WE'LL PICK IT UP WHEN IT'S DONE. HOW TRAGIC IS THAT? DIANN & I CARE SO MUCH WE CANNOT IMAGINE NOT DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN FOR THIS CHILD TO CONVINCHE HIM OF OUR LOVE FOR HIM.

I WOULD HOPE THAT ALL OF US CARE ENOUGH & CARE FAR MORE ABOUT EACH OTHER & THE MINISTRY OF THIS CONGREGATION, THAN WE DO ABOUT ANY SYNOD, NO MATTER WHAT IT'S INITIALS ARE. I DON'T MEAN TO MINIMIZE OUR DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS, BUT THE ONE MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY POSITION ON THESE ISSUES IS COMING. WE'LL CELEBRATE JESUS' BIRTH IN A WEEK & 1/2. CAN WE DO THAT TOGETHER, & SET ASIDE OUR DIFFERENCES AT LEAST FOR THIS MAJOR CHURCH FESTIVAL? THERE'S ALREADY BEEN ONE MAJOR CASUALTY WITH PASTOR DAVE, & TOO MANY OTHERS AS WELL.

THERE'S NO QUESTION WE DO NEED TO FIND A RESOLUTION. MAYBE IF WE LET CHRIST COME INTO OUR WORLD & INTO OUR HEARTS THIS CHRISTMAS, IT WILL DAWN ON US WHAT GOD'S PLAN IS FOR US. I'M NOT SUGGESTING THAT WE STOP TALKING WITH ONE ANOTHER. IT'S IMPORTANT TO SHARE WITH EACH OTHER, & REALLY LISTEN TO THOSE WHO MAY NOT AGREE WITH US. BUT CAN'T WE DO IT IN A KIND & UNDERSTANDING MANNER, ONE ON ONE, OVER A CUP OF COFFEE? THAT ALWAYS SEEMS TO HELP LUTHERANS!

WE'RE SINNERS, & WE ALWAYS WILL BE IN THIS SINFUL WORLD. BUT ONE MORE POWERFUL IS COMING; THE ONE WHO FORGIVES SINS, SO WE CAN DO SOME OF THE GOOD THINGS GOD WANTS, & FEEL GOOD ABOUT IT OURSELVES. IT'S THE SEASON FOR GIVING, DOING GOOD, AS JOHN SAYS IN THE TEXT, "BEARING THE FRUITS OF REPENTANCE."

THAT HAVING BEEN SAID, OUR FAITH HAS ALWAYS PROCLAIMED THAT OUR SALVATION IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON ANYTHING WE DO, BUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR US THROUGH JESUS CHRIST. THAT SHOULD FILL US WITH AS MUCH EXPECTATION AS JOHN'S LISTENERS HAD. THAT SHOULD BE THE GOOD NEWS WE LONG TO HEAR, & THE SOLUTION TO ANY TROUBLES WE FACE IN THIS WORLD. BEING FORGIVEN & SAVED, WE RESPOND WITH THE LOVE WE HAVE BEEN SHOWN, THE LOVE GOD SENDS INTO THE WORLD AT CHRISTMAS, THE LOVE GOD GIVES TO THE WORLD ON THE CROSS, THE LOVE THAT LIVES IN YOU & ME THROUGH OUR SAVIOR & LORD, JESUS CHRIST. AMEN.