

July 11, 2021

Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

“Silencing Gospel”

Amos 7:7-15, Mark 6:14-29

The truth is that God is our Creator and that He has a design for His creation. The truth is that any variance from this design is nothing less than sin. The truth is that we all sin and that sin condemns us to a hellish eternity cast away from God and His blessings. The truth is that God sent His own Son into our flesh in order to die under the penalty for all the world’s sin and then rise in victory that we might be forgiven and be saved with a blessed eternity in the presence of God Himself.

Lots of people have a strange reaction when confronted with the truth, not just salvation truth, but any basic truth that they don’t like. Very seldom when you confront someone with such plain truth on any matter do they respond with “That’s not true!” Sometimes they do, but most often the response is an explanation, an argument, a mindset, a reasoning on why what they believe differs from the actual truth.

Easy example from modern culture: A man is a man and a woman is a woman. A lot of folks disagree with that statement today but they don’t simply say, “That’s not true.” They don’t say it because there’s a lot of objective evidence that says it is true. No, they’ll go into a spiel about self-identification, feelings, desires, perception and who knows what else. But the long and short of it is that in the pursuit of some earthly desire they turn a blind eye to objective truth.

You see it in our readings today. Amos is speaking truth, that God is going to destroy the northern ten tribes of Israel—the land of Jeroboam—because of their idolatry. The idolatrous priest Amaziah doesn’t say Amos is wrong. He tells Amos to be quiet, to leave and stop upsetting the statue quo. The truth is that they are worshiping false gods and bringing the true God’s wrath upon themselves. They don’t deny it. They just want the truth to go away and leave them alone.

Likewise, Herod in our Gospel lesson. He doesn’t say John the Baptist is wrong about his adulterous marriage to Herodias. He just wants John to shut up so he throws him in prison. Herodias is the same. She knows she’s a sinner but she likes her sin, so when she gets the chance, she has John put to death.

St. Paul’s words in Ephesians today are Gospel truth. We stand blessed *“in Christ with every spiritual blessing”* and in Christ *“we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will.”* In your Holy Baptism and *“when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”* as a guarantee of your inheritance.

This truth is awesome and it sounds awesome, especially when you’re sitting in church formally receiving these wonderful blessings in Word and Sacrament. We’ve got this wonderful liturgy guiding us, making sure that we’re responding to God’s gifts in the manner we should. In union with the faithful gathered here we believe and receive this truth rather easily and really, that’s as it should be.

But what about when this truth gets up and in our face out in the rest of life? Remember, Jesus’ directive is “Repent, and believe the Gospel.” How do you react when the Holy Spirit convicts you of a sin, but you don’t want to take responsibility for it—maybe even want to defend it? Do you ever inwardly or even publicly try to twist God’s Word and will to make

accommodation for bad behavior? What about if some unjust gain is headed your way; do you kind of look the other way and let it happen? Is there anybody in your life that you could forgive and be reconciled with just as Christ has forgiven you and reconciled you with God, but you just won't? Have you been called on to sacrifice for the benefit of another as Christ sacrificed for you, but you just don't want to part with your time, talent, treasure or whatever.

In these type of situations and so many others, the truth of the Gospel is quite clear—in Christ we have been chosen to be holy and blameless before God. And we can't respond with "That's not true!" That would be denying Christ, denying God and ultimately denying our own salvation. So I think our response often times is the same as that of Amariah or Herod—we try to find a way to make God's truth shut up. We tell the truth of God to absent itself from the situation. We imprison it to some deep recess of our mind so it won't bug us.

Doing so often works for us according to the world. It may save us money, protect our reputation and self-esteem, allow us to practice those sins that bring us pleasure and make us happy. You may even convince yourself that you're in the right because life is still so good, but all you've really done is manufactured your own "truth" that isn't true at all.

Ultimately you're trading the truth in for a falsehood. And what is that truth you're denying? It's the Gospel. "Repent and believe the Gospel." There is no believing the Gospel without repentance. We Lutherans use the term "Law and Gospel" a lot for a very good reason—it is all God's Word, God's truth. If the Law comes a calling to confront your sin and your response is "shut up", the Gospel of forgiveness of sins isn't going to follow. What you're really denying isn't the law, it's Christ Himself, the Word made flesh come to remove those sins—and you deny His truth when you try to accommodate sins and find some silly rationalization for why they aren't so bad; that they're really something good to hold onto.

Folks, you are not saving your earthly life, your reputation and standing, your wealth, your family, your happiness by saying "shut up" to Christ and His Gospel when it becomes inconvenient. The only thing you're gathering by that is a heavier weight hanging around your neck to drag you down to the abyss when the truth is manifested in all glory on the Last Day. When you are willing to sacrifice all these things for the sake of Christ and His Gospel, then your true life—the one Christ died and rose to gift you—is saved for eternity.

In light of this, make it a practice—maybe as your preparing to say your prayers at night—to ask yourself, "Is there anywhere that I've been trying to keep Jesus and His Gospel quiet today? Is there anyplace His truth showed up and I said 'Shut up'?" Find those places and pray your repentance.

Then wake up forgiven and washed in your baptism, and walk in that blessed truth holy and blameless before your Lord Jesus Christ that day and forever.

Amen.