**Lent Vespers 3,**

27 March 2022,

*Concordia Lutheran Mission,*

Terrebonne, Oregon.

**“God’s Word and Truth, the Gospel,**

**Sanctifies and Saves Sinners.”**

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

**St. John 17:17.**

**Introduction**.

How do sinners become holy? Sinners become holy through God’s Word and Truth, i.e., the Gospel.

Sinners don’t think truth sanctifies because truth would merely bring to light their misdeeds and unholiness. Sinners flee the truth.[[1]](#footnote-1)1 The holiness of the law, indeed, does condemn sinners. But there is another holiness of God that doesn’t condemn but saves. This holiness of God is the Holiness of the Gospel. The Holiness of the Gospel absolves of the unholiness of sin, fulfills all holiness, and saves, for Christ’s Sake. Sinners don’t flee this Holiness and Truth but are drawn to it.[[2]](#footnote-2)2

On the Cross Christ bore all the penalties for the unholiness of all men by His Suffering and Death. That Holiness of the Cross Christ applies to men through God’s Word and Truth, the Gospel. The Truth of God’s Word of the Gospel doesn’t condemn men made unholy by sin but Absolves of that unholiness and saves.

God’s Word and Truth, the Gospel, saves sinners by Sanctifying them with the Holiness of the Cross of Christ.

**I. The Truth of the Cross of Christ Sanctifies Sinners.**

**A. Untruth un-sanctifies men and men perish.**

In our day and age, truth is mocked. The modern mind tells us there is no truth -- just one’s own construction of truth.[[3]](#footnote-3)3

Untruth, however, has consequences. Adam, for example, bought into an untruth and it cost him Paradise and his life forever, landing him in everlasting suffering. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ... .[[4]](#footnote-4)4

Not only was Adam’s following the devil’s untruth sinful, it was also irrational, i.e., contradicts reason. The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther, one of the founding fathers of the Missouri Synod, writes that it is irrational to follow untruth:

From what has been said you can gather how foolish it is, yea, what an awful delusion has taken hold upon so many men’s minds who ridicule the pure doctrine and say to us: “Ah, do cease clamoring, Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine! That can only land you in dead orthodoxism. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will raise a growth of genuine Christianity.”[[5]](#footnote-5)5 That is exactly like saying to a farmer: “Do not worry forever about good seed; worry about good fruits.” Is not a farmer properly concerned about good fruit when he is solicitous about getting good seed? Just so a concern about pure doctrine is the proper concern about genuine Christianity and a sincere Christian life. False doctrine is a noxious seed, sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness. The pure doctrine is wheat-seed; from it spring the children of the Kingdom, who even in the present life to come will be received into the Kingdom of Glory. May God even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine! May He graciously give you a holy desire for the pure, saving truth, revealed by God Himself.[[6]](#footnote-6)6

Notice Dr. Walther says it’s not only sinful to embrace untruth (false doctrine) but irrational. “Foolish” means irrational, unreasonable. Sin destroys men spiritually and rationally. We see this in our own day. As men have moved away from the Gospel in droves, we are being confronted more and more each day with irrational behavior. For example, we are told that if somebody identifies as something, they are whatever they identify as.[[7]](#footnote-7)7 That teaching and practice, of course, is complete detachment from reason and reality; it is irrational. But such is the case when men embrace the untruth of the devil over the truth of God’s Word.

Untruth and the denial of truth doesn’t liberate men but forever enslaves them under the thumb of the devil.

**B. The Truth of the Cross of Christ sanctifies sinners.**

Truth becomes man’s mortal enemy under the law. Men know that truth does not bode blessings for them because with the fall of Adam men are creatures of untruth and the word of the devil. Rather, everlasting wrath and suffering awaits them. Hence, men flee the truth. Jesus says:

And this is the condemnation , that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.[[8]](#footnote-8)8

God, however, did not abandon truth because man did, but sent truth in the Gracious Form of the Cross to save man from the darkness of untruth and sin. The Apostle St. John writes:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.[[9]](#footnote-9)9

Grace is Truth. That is magnificent! The Grace of the Cross is not wishful thinking but God’s Blessed Truth. God’s Truth is that God Himself bore the burden of men’s sins on the Cross and fully Atoned for them. *The Truth is that not one scintilla of sin remains for God to condemn any man because Christ fully Atoned for them*. On the Cross Christ suffered the unholiness of men in order to replace it with His Holiness. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

... Christ ... loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.1[[10]](#footnote-10)0

As the Apostle St. Paul has just noted, Jesus lived a perfectly holy life waking and sleeping for all men. Jesus lived a perfectly holy life even when He suffered for men’s sins on the Cross. Jesus gave His Entire Self and lived His Entire Life, from the womb to the tomb, in holy fashion for the sake of all men bereft of God’s holiness because of their sin.1[[11]](#footnote-11)1

The Truth of the Cross does not condemn sinners. That’s the truth and holiness of the law that condemns. Rather, the Truth and Holiness of the Cross makes sinners holy and forever pleasing to God. This Truth and Holiness of God does not cause sinners to flee but draws them back to God. The Apostle St. John writes:

Jesus answered and said, ... Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.1[[12]](#footnote-12)2

**II. The Truth of God’s Word, the Gospel, Sanctifies and Saves.**

**A. The Gospel is God’s Gracious Truth and Word**.

Jesus takes this Precious Truth and Word of the Cross and places it in the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism to be enjoyed by all men. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.1[[13]](#footnote-13)3

Luther writes:

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism*.1[[14]](#footnote-14)4

Holy Baptism, then, is God’s Gracious Truth and Word, i.e., the Gospel. The Lutheran Church confesses:

But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a *visible* *word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same.1[[15]](#footnote-15)5

**B. God’s Truth and Word of the Gospel sanctifies sinners and saves**.

God’s Word or Truth, namely, the Gospel is what sanctifies sinners. Jesus prayed in His High Priestly Prayer on the Eve of His Passion:

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.1[[16]](#footnote-16)6

Whenever we are Baptized, hear God’s Truth, His Word of the Gospel, or receive the Holy Communion, there God’s Word sanctifies us through the Absolution of our unholiness of sin. The Lutheran Church confesses:

For neither you nor I could ever know anything of Christ, or believe on Him, and obtain Him for our Lord, unless it were offered to us and granted to our hearts by the Holy Ghost through the preaching of the gospel. The work is done and accomplished; for Christ has acquired and gained the treasure for us by His suffering, death, and resurrection, etc. But if the work remained concealed so that no one knew of it, then it would be in vain and lost. That this treasure, therefore, might not lie buried, but be appropriated and enjoyed, God has caused the Word to go forth and be proclaimed, in which He gives the Holy Ghost to bring this treasure home and appropriate it to us. Therefore sanctifying is nothing else than bringing us to Christ to receive this good, to which we could not attain of ourselves.1[[17]](#footnote-17)7

Sanctifying, i.e., making sinners holy, is as easy as hearing of God’s Truth, the Gospel. Some say that mere words cannot sanctify and, thereby, save.1[[18]](#footnote-18)8 But Christ’s Word is clear, “Sanctify them in Thy Truth ... .” Where man are Sanctified, there also they gain life everlasting. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.1[[19]](#footnote-19)9

**Conclusion.**

Remarkably, sinners become holy by what they normally flee: the truth. But the Truth of God’s Word, the Gospel, gives them no cause to flee because this Truth is not the holiness of the law, which does condemn sinners, but the Holiness of the Cross of Christ. The Holiness of the Cross of Christ Absolves sinners of their unholiness through the Gospel and saves.

The Holiness and Truth of the Cross of Christ draws men back to God and men gain life everlasting and the resurrection of the body when Christ returns again in Glory.

**Amen.**

1. 1“And this is the condemnation , that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” **St. John 3:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.” **St. John12:32**. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 3This talk is nothing but the flesh speaking. Pilate said the same thing 2000 years ago. “Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” **St. John 18:38**. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. 4**Romans 5:12**. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 5c. 1884. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. 6The Rev. Dr. C. F. W. Walther,  *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, pp. 20, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. 7“Modernity, the child of the Enlightenment, failed when it became apparent that the good society cannot be achieved by unaided reason. The response of liberalism was not to turn to religion, which modernity had seemingly made irrelevant, but to abandon reason. Hence, there have appeared philosophies claiming that words can carry no definite meaning or that there is not reality other than one that is ‘socially constructed.’ A reality so constructed, it is thought, can be decisively altered by social or cultural edict, which is a prescription for coercion.” Robert Bork, *Slouching toward Gomorrah*, New York: Regan Books (a division of Harper Collins), p. 4, 1996.

   Dr. Bork continues: “In feminist jargon [©. 1996], ‘sex’ is merely biological while ‘gender’ refers to roles and is claimed to be ‘socially constructed,’ which means that everything about men and women, other than their reproductive organs, can be altered by changes in the social and cultural environment. One of the major implications of this view is that human sexuality has no natural form but is culturally conditioned. Radical feminists concede that there are two sexes, but they usually claim there are five genders. Though the list varies somewhat, a common classification is men, women, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals. Thus heterosexuality, being socially constructed, is no more ‘natural’ or desirable than homosexuality.” ibid, p. 197, amplification in brackets added.

   Gender is a grammatical classification and not a substitute for sex. “*Gender* is a grammatical term, denoting (in English) whether words pertaining to a noun or pronoun are classed as masculine, feminine or neuter. It is not a substitute for ‘sex’ ... . Indeed, in some foreign languages ‘gender’ often disregards sex. In German, for example, ‘Weib,’ The word for woman, is neuter; in French ‘plume,’ the word for pen, a sexless article, is feminine. To use ‘gender’ as if it were synonymous with ‘sex’ is an error … .” Theodore M. Bernstein, *The Careful Writer: A Modern Guide to English Usage,*  New York: Atheneum, 1977, p. 199. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 8**St. John 3:19**. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 9**St. John 1:14**. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. 10**Ephesians 5:25**, **26-27**. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. 11“This inexpressible grace and blessing was long ago promised to Abraham in Gen. 12[:3]: ‘And in thy seed (that is, in Christ) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.’... Isaiah 9[:6] says: ‘For to us a child is born, to us a son is given.’ ‘To us,’ it says, because he is entirely ours with all his benefits if we believe in him, as we read in Rom. 8[:32]: ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?’ Therefore everything which Christ has is ours, graciously bestowed on us unworthy men out of God’s sheer mercy, although we have rather deserved wrath and condemnation, and hell also. Even Christ himself, therefore, who says he came to do the most sacred will of his Father [John 6:38], became obedient to him; and whatever he did, he did it for us and desired it to be ours, saying, ‘I am among you as one who serves’ [Luke 22:27]. He also states, ‘This is my body, which is given for you’ [Luke 22:19]. Isaiah 43[:24] says, ‘You have burdened me with your sins, you have wearied me with your iniquities.’ Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes ours. Therefore the Apostle calls it ‘the righteousness of God’ in Rom. 1[:17]: For in the gospel ‘the righteousness of God is revealed …; as it is written, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’ Finally, in the same epistle, chapter 3[:28], such a faith is called ‘the righteousness of God’: ‘We hold that a man is justified by faith.’ This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he. It is therefore impossible that sin should remain in him. This righteousness is primary; it is the basis, the cause, the source of all our own actual righteousness. For this is the righteousness given in place of the original righteousness lost in Adam. It accomplishes the same as that original righteousness would have accomplished; rather, it accomplishes more.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 31, pp.298, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. 12**St. John 12:30**, **31-33**. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. 13**Galatians 3:26-27**. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. 14*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. 15*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, **Article XIII (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments**.5, *Triglotta*, p. 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. 16**St. John 17:17.** [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. 17*The Large Catechism*, **Part Second, Of The Creed, Article III**.38-39, *Triglotta*, 689. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. 18“And although it is true that we obtain this by faith, yet since we see that all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy [working] of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings*.*” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book Third, chapter one, paragraph one, tr. Henry Beveridge, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishig Co., reprinted 1995, p. 463, underscore and amplification added.

    Menno Simons’, one of the radical reformers, entire argument against Baptism was that not all Baptized believed. Hence, Baptism had no power to create faith and save. “[The church fathers] taught him that children needed baptism to be cleansed from original sin. But when Menno compared this teaching with the Scriptures he found a clear conflict, for did not the Scriptures teach that the blood of Christ the Redeemed, and not the water of baptism, was the only means for cleansing from sin? The church fathers were wrong. ... Having arrived at the end of his diligent search with no proof that infant baptism was based on the Word of God, Menno concluded that ‘all were deceived about infant baptism’ – the Catholic Church, priests at Pingjum, the church fathers, the reformers – and that baptism on confession of faith alone was Scriptural. This momentous decision was the most significant one in Menno’s entire career, for it sealed the breach with the Catholic Church and ultimately led him into the circle of the Anabaptists. ... Anabaptists alone among the religious groups of the day denied the need for infant baptism and based membership in the church upon a personal experience of salvation of which water baptism was merely the outward symbol. (Brief Biography, p, 8) ... ‘And brethren, both of them, the scoundrel as well as the harlot, of whom such illegitimate children are born, have been baptized in their infancy, and they claim therefore to be Christians. They boast of Jesus Christ and of His crimson blood, but we may see by their fruits what kind of Christians they are and what kind of faith they have.’ (Christian Baptism, p. 251)” *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, tr. Leonard Verduin, ed. J. C. Wenger, with a biography by Harold S. Bender, Scottsdale, PA, Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1956.

    “**Mennonite Bodies** (*Anabaptists* [re-baptizers] ... ). The origin of the Mennonite bodies is traced back to the Anabaptist fanatics, who at the time of Luther, under the leadership of Muenzer, Storch, etc., boasted of celestial revelations, rejected Baptism, subverted the existing forms of government, and caused general confusion for a number of years in Germany and other states of Europe. ... In the course of time the members of these scattered communities, who laid particular stress on the doctrine of believers’ baptism as opposed to infant baptism, found a leader in the person of Menno Simons, a former Roman Catholic priest, who was born in Witmarsun, Holland, about 1496. He is regarded by the Mennonites, however, not so much as the founder of their sect as a prominent factor in its organization. The name ‘Mennonite’ dates from 1550.” *Concordia Cyclopedia*, eds. Fuerbringer, Engelder, Kretzmann, St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1927, p. 452, s. v., “**Mennonite Bodies**”, amplification in brackets added. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. 19**Titus 3:4-7**. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)