

3/15/09

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY O God, whose glory it is always to have mercy, be gracious to all who have gone astray from Your ways, even when it is Your people. Bring those straying to repentant hearts and steadfast faith so they may embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Exodus 20:1-17 page

(God takes the initiative to establish His relationship with us in His Law.)

1 And God spoke all these words: 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me. 4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand *generations* of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. 13 "You shall not murder. 14 "You shall not commit adultery. 15 "You shall not steal. 16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. 17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

(Paul declares that he preaches Christ crucified which causes some to stumble but others to be saved.)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It

is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

THE GOSPEL LESSON John 2:13-25

(Jesus chases the money-changers from the temple and promises that He will rise again. But Jesus also knows the sin in the hearts of people.)

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" 17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

18 Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

THE SERMON "Suffering through Sin in God's Church

INTRO - When I was pastor in Florida we started a church in Georgia. One of our first families, who became good friends were the Taylors. Albert was older than I was, in his mid 30's to late 40's. He told me he hadn't been to church since he was 11. When I asked why, he explained that he had been active in a church as a child, but when he was 11 the pastor ran away with the choir director and the money. He hadn't been to church since. Our Lenten theme this March has been "Suffering with Jesus." Today we consider "**Suffering through Sin in God's Church**"

I. Trouble in the church is really nothing new.

A. Look at the Bible.

1. It was the church that persecuted and tried and crucified Jesus.
2. Acts 15 describes how the church dealt with an inner disagreement over how to reach out to the Gentiles, to non-Jews.
3. Of the letters or Epistles written to churches Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, Peter, John, and Jude all deal with problems in the churches.

B. It should not be a surprise that our Gospel lesson for today identifies trouble in the church of Jesus' time.

1. First, The people were using the temple more for making money than worshipping God. Jesus drove them out!

2. Then, In the last 3 verses of our reading we are told, **23 Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. 24 But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. 25 He did not need man's testimony about man, for HE KNEW WHAT WAS IN A MAN.**

3. In all honesty, those selling goods, in their own ways, were trying to serve the Lord, only they were serving themselves more. Those who were believing in Jesus were responding as God planned. Only, Jesus knew these people, even with their good intentions were still struggling with sin.

C. Today you may hear people say they don't want to be part of the church, organized or otherwise, because the people of churches say one thing and do another.

1. Unfortunately, God's people do know the call to righteousness, and often struggle and fail. We don't always worship God as we ought, and we don't always love others in a Godly way.

2. You see, the church is made up of sinners who need a Savior.

II. Albert was baptized. Albert and Renee' Taylor joined Holy Trinity and were some of the most regular attenders and some of the biggest supporters. The Taylors paid to rent a trailer where we started meeting. Their son, John, attended confirmation. In spite of past problems Albert had faced, and in spite of problems the church continued to face, they worked to serve the Lord.

A. It is easy for people who come to know God to say, "Look at the troubles, the fighting, the sin in church people. Why would I want anything to do with that? Isn't the church supposed to be a place of faith and love?" It is easy to turn away from the church, and to turn away from the work of the church.

B. You see, God still has work for the church to do.

1. Jesus said on Easter night, in John 20:21 and following, "*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.*" **22 And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."**

2. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 28, after he rose, **19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."**

3. Right before Jesus ascended into heaven he told His disciples, **8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

C. That is why God's people gather in churches.

1. Jesus has established the church to strengthen people in faith that they may have forgiveness and eternal life in Him.

2. Jesus has established the church to strengthen people in faith that they may do His work, and help other sinners to learn about the forgiveness of Jesus.

3. But, if the people of Jesus' time were so full of sin, and if church work has always been so messy, why would anyone want to do it?

4. This month we are considering God's call to suffer with Jesus. If Jesus knew the problems of the church, why would we want to join Him?

III. There's an old story about a wife who came to her husband and said, "Dear it's time to get up and go to church." His reply, "I'm not going." The wife replied, "But you have to go." The man replied, "I'm not going, they don't like me and I don't like them." The wife said, "I don't care you have to go to church." The husband said, "Give me one good reason." To which the wife replied, "Because you're the pastor." Why suffer with Jesus working in church?

A. Please look with me again at the reading. Verses 20-22 say, **20 The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" 21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.**

1. Jesus rose from the dead, after he was crucified.
2. Think of this, Jesus KNEW WHAT WAS IN THE HEART OF MEN, and he still came to this earth, he still suffered for them, He still died.
3. Jesus knows our sins, and He still loves us enough so that He died for us.
4. If Jesus loves me like this to die to forgive me, and still calls me to do His work through the church, I want to serve Him.

B. Jesus not only died, but He rose, and He has overcome all the sin of the world, even that in the church.

1. Jesus forgiveness give us the ability to go on after we have failed.
2. Jesus forgiveness and victory give me strength when things are going badly.

C. When Albert had focused on the church and it's sin, he stopped doing the work God calls His people to do. When his focus returned to what Jesus had done for him, he was willing to put up with the suffering, to serve His Lord.

1. When the people of God's Church focus on themselves, there always sin.
2. When the church focuses on Jesus and His love and forgiveness, the service of God's people for our Lord keeps coming, even in trouble.

CONCLUSION - Last October I got an invitation in the mail. It was sort of late, but it announced the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the founding of Holy Trinity Lutheran in Kingsland, Georgia. In fact, many of you know Mac and Carol Durgeloh, former St. John members who helped us start Lamb of God in Wasilla. Last year they helped build the addition to Holy Trinity. There have been problems over the years, but the forgiveness and love of God have kept God's people serving Him. To suffer with Jesus takes spiritual maturity. To continue in the church, in spite of sin, always takes maturity. It is worth the trouble to serve our Lord who died and rose for us.