

“It’s Not about Happy, but Saved” by Pastor Steve Sommerer
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost June 28, 2020

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The sermon text is from Matthew 10:34-42.

As the congregation filed out of church one steamy summer Sunday morning, the pastor greeted the members at the church door. When little Johnny filed through, he reached into his badly sagging pant pockets and began to snatch out handful after handful of pennies into the pastor’s cupped hands. “Hold it, Johnny, why didn’t your gift go in the offering plate?” Johnny answered, “I know you need it, pastor, and I wanted to help. After last week’s service, my pa said you were the poorest pastor we’ve ever had.”

For three weeks, we’ve read Matthew 10 and Jesus’ warning to the disciples that they would be hated and rejected for preaching God’s Word.

On some level, these words apply to every Christian in that the places you live and work and play are places God calls you to stand up for Christ. But they are especially relevant to pastors and missionaries, those called by God to preach as were the Apostles in Matthew 10.

A pastor is a shepherd – that’s what pastor means. The call is to shepherd. True pastors genuinely believe God’s Word and care about dying souls, and want to bring the only saving truth of Christ to people – at the same time not compromising God’s truth. True sheep or believers love God’s Law, because sheep know the Shepherd gives good gifts. But God’s unvarnished truth often hurts our pride and makes us squirm. Sometimes prideful people get mad at those who deliver God’s Word, looking for a more ear-pleasing shepherd. So pastors and congregations are tempted to invert Jesus’ Parable of the Lost Sheep. We worry how to keep happy the 99 righteous persons who feel no need for repentance; rather than risking speaking the truth and ending up with one repentant sinner... but you know Jesus said, *“There’s more rejoicing in heaven over one who repents than 99 who feel no need.”* How many church leaders really believe that? I dare say it’s tempting to aim for the 99 – a big happy church – all smiles – a nice church – where no one leaves offended – and hopefully dropping a lot of money in the plate. But God searches for the one – and that through preaching a Law word, a convicting word, a word of repentance.

Our church and every church today carries out her ministry in a climate of either honoring God’s Word and risking offense to the flock, or ignoring and downplaying God’s Word to keep people in church that aren’t converted Christians. Does a church dare speak convicting truths or is it content to just entertain her members, hopping music, nice self-help kind of inspirational message? This isn’t a new issue for God’s Church – it’s older than Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading. Now think of it from a family perspective.

What Christian parent wants to have kids mad? But, dad, Billy’s parents let him do it? Why can’t I? It’s tiresome getting static for doing what’s right. For telling a coach – sorry, but you’re wrong to schedule games on Sunday morning... but that’s

tough, life is tiresome sometimes. Jesus seems bent on the disciples and you and I understanding that being nice and keeping people happy aren't the goal.

You have to come to grips with two things: Firstly, you are called to love God with all your heart, first, last and forever. No matter how the world changes and society disintegrates in perversity, and churches crumble and cow-tow to political correctness, God doesn't give you the option of bargaining away the parts of His Word you'll compromise in order to keep people in the church who don't believe in God's Word. Jesus said, "*Teach them to observe **all things** whatsoever I have commanded you.*" If you are afraid to be called a hater by the woke mafia, Jesus said, "*Do not fear the one who can destroy the body, but the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell.*"

Secondly, realize preaching is useless without Law and Gospel, perhaps amusing, entertaining or even educational, but finally useless. God's Law is not a topic to be avoided because it may offend you. It's actually God's loving good will for the world. If you want the best life for yourself and for your kids, dare and care enough to talk about God's 10 Commandments. If you want a good marriage, God's Word talks about what that family looks like, and it doesn't start with the obligatory shack up or in the bar... it doesn't need a big bank account built up. It starts with a mutual dedication to Jesus.

Don't ever believe you're doing someone – your child or anyone else – any favors by shielding them from the clear Word of God that calls to repentance. Yes, there's the risk that family are offended and peace is lost, but without that repentance salvation is lost. In a nutshell, what I'm saying is: true love will draw lines of right and wrong... true love will share God's wisdom, even if every idiotic TV sitcom portrays the glory of a hedonistic life. God's way is better! God knows the best shape of your life better than your classmates and Hollywood liars. And yes, God's Law, kills, but it must kill so the Gospel can give us life and forgiveness. Nobody cares about our great Savior until they know how great their sins.

In that sense, Paul tells us God's Law is good. It's good, as in, your life will be better for following it... and it's good in that it makes me see my failures and paves the way for the Gospel of forgiveness in Jesus. Repentance is a gift of God... the Holy Spirit works it by driving me to my knees... I can't be saved so long as I'm the proud, self-sufficient Pharisee standing, "*Thank God I'm not like other men.*" Remember, it was the broken tax collector who could only beat his chest and cry out to God who went home justified from the temple. The Epistle says God's Law "*produced death in me in order that sin might be shown to be sin.*" See, God's Law shows me I'm an utter failure, but that's good when the Gospel points me to Jesus my Savior who never failed for me.

And when you realize how far you've wandered from God's flock. You still haven't wandered so far that God's Good Shepherd doesn't kneel down and lovingly lift you to His shoulders and carry you home. That's repentance; Jesus found you and His Spirit shows you God's love for the lost – and in that repentance there is rejoicing in heaven. You don't keep God's Law, but Jesus allowed Himself to be despised and rejected and forsaken. He walked into the hatred and hostility of your world and finally gave up His life at the cross so all your sins and mine could be wiped away in His cleansing blood.

You have been restored. You are God's child – a sheep carried home by Christ your Savior. If you can hear my voice, you can know that Jesus loves you and left heaven to make your home. When you wander, the Shepherd reaches out His staff of the

Law to yank you back... sometimes that hurts, but it's a good thing. Sometimes God disciplines you through hardship and life begins to crush the wind from your lungs and you cry out through clenched teeth and bitter tears. If suffering in this life is how God draws you nearer to Him, what He ordains is always good. Still your shepherd prepares a table of grace for you when He feeds you with Himself – with His own life-giving, death-defeating flesh and blood in the Lord's Supper, Jesus is bringing His cross-won forgiveness to your tongue – you are the one He died for; you are the one He lives to carry home. Your Shepherd always sends His Spirit – a Law Word to show your sins – and a Gospel Word to show Jesus your Savior.

Both words from God – Law and Gospel – are gifts to you. Children can't be raised to responsible adulthood by only being patted on the head; sometimes a loving parent will discipline. Hebrews says, "*God disciplines those whom He loves as a loving Father disciplines His children.*" Whether a church or a family, true love is tough love.

It's unpleasant to think of it, but your pastor's job isn't to bring peace and joy and acceptance – it's to be faithful. It's not to be creative or clever and figure out ways to do evangelical Christianity with Lutheran style. It's to say what's true. When I'm faithful to God as a pastor, or we as parents, as citizens people, as friends, God can produce the fruit. But when you're afraid that God's Word is old-fashioned – no seed will get planted. "*My Word that goes out from My mouth will not return void, but will accomplish the purpose for which I sent it,*" God promises.

That part is a struggle... we all want a better strategy for witnessing to kids or church or neighbors, but "*faith comes through hearing the Word of God.*" You can only plant the seed of God's Word and some will make a harvest – and you can't make it happen... and some will reject – and you can't stop that from happening.

But God is faithful... His good and perfect will for your life is evident to all in Jesus' bloody death. You are loved. Your family is loved. Your God knows how best to save sinful wanderers. May God grant us faithfulness and courage in these Last Days and lead us to pray from the heart our Collect: "*By the working of Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word proclaimed among us and follow its directing*" and "*Dear Father, let Your Kingdom come.*" Amen.

And now may the peace of God which surpasses human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.