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St. Mark 3:20-31; 2nd Corinthians 4:16-18:

The Issue We Can't Afford to Miss

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Former Russian exile Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote, "If humanism were right in declaring that man is born to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to die, his task on earth evidently must be of a more spiritual nature." Well, that is the main focus of life for a multitude, isn't it? To be happy. There's nothing like a funeral to clarify the perspective. You know the saying: "You'll never see a U-haul behind a hearse."

I'll tell you this: There's nothing more disheartening than sitting by a dying member of a church and hear their confession of faith in the words, "Well, I believe in God." That doesn't say much. Believe what?

Over the past 48 years Pastor Brock and I have been privileged to conduct funerals for approximately 450 beloved brothers and sisters in Christ; loved ones from ages minutes to 104 years old. Time does fly, doesn't it? We must take with us each day . . .

THE ISSUE WE CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS

I. Not of This World

A Gallup pole stated that "A record low of 20% of Americans now say the Bible is the literal word of God, down from 24% the last time the question was asked in 2017...Meanwhile, a new high of 29% say the Bible is a collection of 'fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man.'" I say, it's far more than 29%. The poll also stated that "a number of indicators show a decline in overall religiosity in the U.S. population." That's without saying.

Our Gospel lesson begins with, "Then (Jesus) went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, 'He is out of his mind (vv.20,21).'" His earthly family had concerns about His teaching, didn't they? And if you drop down to the 31st verse of our text there's this surprise: "And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him." Mother Mary was there.

Concerning Mary's presence with the family, we should remember the words the angel Gabriel spoke to her at the announcement that she would give birth to the Lord Jesus: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord will give to him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob (Israel - the church) forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Lk.1:32,33).'" More than likely, Mary's presence was not because she thought Jesus was out of His mind, but because of the motherly concern for the Son to whom she had given birth.

As far as the other members are concerned, isn't it amazing how the earth driven mind and heart lose touch with the obvious, such as Jesus' words, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world (Jn.19:36).'" Well, listen to this from St. John's Gospel:

So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him (Jn.7:3-5).

His family wasn't with Him at this point. His earthly family was walking with this world, as most people do. So, hear this from our text . . .

II. Hard Truth

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebub," and "by the prince of demons he casts out demons." And he called to them and said to them in parables, "How can

Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself that kingdom cannot stand...

"Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin" - for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit (vv.22-30)."

"Blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness." David Hollaz, Lutheran Theologian of the mid 17th to early 18th century wrote this clear explanation of the sin against the Holy Spirit:

The sin against the Holy Ghost is the malicious denial of the divine truth which a person has clearly understood and approved in his conscience, a hostile assault on it, horrible blaspheming, and an obstinate rejection of all the means of grace, which lasts to the end." (Francis Pieper, D.D., Christian Dogmatics, Volume I, CPH, Saint Louis, 1950, p.573.)

And noted 16th to 17th century Lutheran Theologian John Gerhard wrote:

For we must observe that this kind of sin was proved against the Pharisees by Christ; for, although they were constrained by the force of truth uttered by Him, and were convicted in their consciences by its illumination, yet they raged against him by their wicked impiety, to such a degree...to ascribe His doctrine and miracles to Satan. (Heinrich Schmid, D.D., The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Augsburg Publishing house, Third Edition, 1962, p. 256.)

And above all else, to underscore the words of our text, the Lord gives this powerful and chilling warning through the writer of the Book of Hebrews:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away (you can only fall away from something you believed), to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt (Heb.6:4-6).

It's clear: "impossible...to restore them." Crying out that God changes with the times, or that Scriptures reflect an ancient, uninformed mind-set, or insisting that the writers God used stretched the truth is no different than the Pharisees we see in our text. And all the human thinking and sentimentalism of every age fails, and fails miserably to hear God say, "For I the Lord do not change (Mal.3:6a)." You've heard it here plenty of times: Sentimentalism and human wisdom dictate nothing when it comes to God's judgement against the rage of what people know is true.

III. The Issue

What we need are words of encouragement and comfort, and that's what we're given from the Epistle lesson, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor.4:16-18).

The main issue we cannot miss while we are running through this world is "...we look not to the things that are seen...the things that are seen are transient" - here and gone. We sacrifice so much for this world in order to avoid the struggles and disappointments, yet they still come, and will bring all our dreams and hopes of a little heaven on earth to an end.

And then comes the truth that can't be avoided: "...our outer self is wasting away." We cannot stop the process. Often it takes place early in life. But the question is, are you and I understanding of God's design for us? "For this light momentary affliction (What sin has done to us and this world - decay and death - what can't be avoided!) - this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." Jesus paid for sin and gives us the gift of eternal life.

The Word of God is clear: "...seek the things that are above...set your minds on things above...For you have died, and your life (The incomprehensible, eternal life and joy we have in Christ)...your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you will appear with him in glory (Col.3:1-4). This is the main issue we cannot afford to miss, or let anything or anyone distort it. Jesus promised:

"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also (Jn.14:2,30)."

I love those words, don't You? They form the promise that moves us through this world! "Where I am you may be also." It's the issue we can't afford to miss. Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott