

July 12, 2015

St. Mark 6:14-29: ***“Faithful Unto Death”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Preaching the Word of God is a dangerous business. The prophet Amos preached to King Jeroboam and all the kingdom of Israel. He said that their sin had led them away from God and would lead them into exile and even into death. For his preaching he earned the rebuke of the king's prophet; a false prophet by the name of Amaziah: "And Amaziah said to Amos, 'O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom (Amos 7:12-13).'"

In our Gospel lesson for this morning, John the Baptist preached the Word of God to king Herod and his new wife: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife (Mark 6:18)." For his preaching of the Word of God, the Baptist earned for himself chains and a place in king Herod's prison; his own execution; and his head upon a platter.

My thoughts drift to the words of Christ in the seventh chapter of the gospel of John. We are told that Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him there. His brothers try to persuade him to go to the feast of tabernacles. And Jesus said to them, "My time has not yet come . . . The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil (John 7:7)."

This morning there will be those who will preach the pure Word of God. They will echo Amos and sound the alarm that sin leads to exile from the presence of God, and even unto everlasting death. They will speak things like John the Baptist. They will point out sins of lust and sexual immorality and how it is against God's law of love. And they will be hated like Jesus because they have the nerve to testify that this unbelieving world is doing wicked works, is in need of repentance, and that the time will come when God will judge the living and the dead. Indeed, there are those who will preach the pure Word of God and this unbelieving world will tell them to "go away!" They are hated. Some may be put into prison. And others may lose their lives. The words of Jesus in the gospel of Matthew are tough to swallow:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worth of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 10:34-39).

We know how this unrepentant, hardened, unbelieving world reacts to the pure Word of God. The ongoing question for those of us who claim to be the children of God is this: when Amos sounds the alarm that sin leads to exile from the presence of God, when the Baptist points out sins of lust and sexual immorality, when Jesus testifies about wicked works, how will *we* respond? When God tells *us* that our sin is dangerous and even deadly to *our* souls - what will *we* do with what he has to say? We all carry

around with us a sinful flesh, and that sinful flesh needs to be kept dead. Otherwise, if it is left alone, it will rise up against the pure Word of God and have dominion over our hearts and every action and finally drag us into hell.

The day that you hear the pure Word of God and remain defensive and angry, the day when you want the pastor to go away because he's bothering you, the day that you start shopping for another church because you want a positive message that will give you steps to a better life down here, the day that you no longer want to hear that sin is a deadly thing that can lead you away from God to eternal death, is the day that your soul is in peril! The pure Word of God is designed to bring us to our knees in repentance that we may humbly and always receive God's gift of salvation. And having received that great gift of salvation, the Christian struggles and overcomes sin, and when the Christian fails to do so, he doesn't run from God's truth and house, but is humbled and raised up to fight again. As I have said on other occasions and in many ways, Jesus did not die on the cross in order that we might have the pleasure of sinning all the more with God's approval. Jesus did not die so that we might take sin lightly nor suppose the evil great. Paul writes:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life (Romans 6:1-4).

Indeed! We have been baptized. Our sins have died. They have been washed away by the sufferings and death of Jesus. Consequently, in the forgiveness of sins, we have been raised up to walk in newness of life as he rose from the dead - a life that is lived in Jesus, a life like Jesus, a life that confronts sin and strives to walk in his footsteps, a life that longs for the moment when we no longer have a sinful flesh and are living in perfection.

Words like these are dangerous business when spoken to a people who call good evil and evil good. Words like these are dangerous business when spoken to those who love sin and want to do what they want regardless of God's Word. Words like these are dangerous business when people desire an earthly kingdom rather than the righteous kingdom that is presently unseen.

Perhaps the hardest thing for us is that God is calling us to be his representatives in an unbelieving and hostile world. He is calling us to bear witness by our words and actions that we have experienced his forgiveness and mercy in Christ. He is calling us to give evidence of the fact that in our Baptism we died to sin and have been raised to a new life and a new relationship to God by the working of Holy Spirit.

While many people may live their lives and never witness and experience a day where the Lord destroys a city or a nation, all must gather together for judgement on the Great Day of the Lord. All of us will stand before the seat of God. And those whom the Holy Spirit has led to hear God's Law and believe God's mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ will be invited to share the full joys of eternal life. Those who

have rejected and spurned God's warning and gracious invitation will be led away to everlasting punishment, having broken everlasting laws of love. Let us then examine ourselves to see if we have faith.

The Lord is calling us to speak as Amos spoke. Regardless of our king Herod, he would have us speak like John the Baptist. It isn't easy to realize, as Jesus states, that we are hated because we speak the truth. Still, God is calling us to be his representatives in this unbelieving and hostile world. We are still living in a time of grace. The Lord is giving us daily opportunity for hearing and heeding his Word in daily repentance, which includes a daily renewal of our faith in God's forgiveness in Jesus Christ. All we can do is speak God's Word wherever we are. We can speak the law and gospel wherever we are and with those we come into contact on a day to day basis. God calls and empowers us through the Word and Sacraments so that we might represent him, that we might be witnesses to his new life. And, he would have us be **Faithful Unto Death**.

You might recall that in the Rite of Confirmation that those who are about to be confirmed are asked a series of thought provoking questions. One is this: "Do you intend to continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it?" The confirmand is to answer: "I do so intend with the help of God." Another question is this: "Do you intend faithfully to conform all your life to the divine Word, to be faithful in the use of God's Word and Sacraments, which are His means of grace, and in faith, word, and action to remain true to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, even to death?" The confirmand is to answer, "I do so intend by the grace of God."

Faithful Unto Death. Am I? Are you? Do you still so intend with the help of God, by the grace of God? Do you hear the message of Amos, John the Baptist, and our Lord Jesus Christ? May God by His Spirit, through His Word, for Christ's sake, lead you to hear and heed his law, to repent of your sins daily, to believe the words of his gospel, to live as a child of promise, and to testify to the life he has worked in you.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott