



“Family Values”

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
Saturday & Sunday, August 17-18, 2019

All Services

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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Jeremiah 23:23-29; Hebrews 11:29-12:2;

Luke 12:49-56

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

I always like gospel readings like that, you know the Gospel of the Lord, oh, thank you, thank you, O Christ – wait, what did he say?

In the 2006 classic “Talladega Nights” the ballad of Ricky Bobby, Will Ferrell plays a race car driver Ricky Bobby and there is a dinner scene with his family and it’s time to offer grace. He starts the prayer by referring to Jesus in his baby state using phrases such as: “Dear Eight Pound, Six Ounce, Newborn Infant Jesus, don’t even know a word yet, just a little infant, so cuddly, and still so omnipotent, and use your baby Jesus powers.”

When Ricky’s wife complains about his praying to the infant Jesus, he replies, “Well look, I like the Christmas Jesus best when I’m saying grace. When you say grace, you can say it to Grown-up Jesus, or Teenager Jesus, or Bearded Jesus, whoever you want.”

Which Jesus do you like to pray to? One of my seminary professors said, “The great religious question of our day is not ‘is there a god?’ but instead ‘Which god?’” The great religious question is not is there a God, but which one is God?

Theologian Paul Tillich talks about religion as being grasped by one’s ultimate concern. Your ultimate concern is what you put your trust in, your hope, your dreams, your very life, your ultimate concern is your God.

And history is full of gods. When I was a teenager, we studied the Greek and Roman gods. There was a whole family of gods. We studied about Zeus, or for the Romans, Jupiter. Of course, we discovered they were basically the same gods. The Romans just stole it from the Greeks. And then there was the god the Babylonian god Marduk or the Canaanite fertility god that we heard about in our first reading, Baal, and we hear a lot in the Old Testament.

Yes, history is full of gods. Even when we say that we are not following any god, even “secular religions” have their own god. The environmentalists have Mother Nature, the Capitalists have the Invisible Hand, Nazi Germany had Volk and Blut (people and blood), and the communism had the Party. Not everybody, just really the party leaders.

All of them via for our ultimate concern. And with so many to choose from it's easy for us to relativize this. You know, your god is good for you and my god is good for me. As long as we all believe in something.

But what if your god happens to be Molock, a name of a Canaanite deity associated with child sacrifice. Or perhaps some of the Mayan gods that I learned about when I was down in Guatemala. The Mayans when they captured warriors from other tribes would have them play a game called Pok-a-Tok. Players were not allowed to use their hands or their feet, only their head, shoulders, elbows and wrists as they try to loft a ball through a stone hoop. The losing team was often sacrificed to the sun god.

You might say that one religion's heaven is another religion's hell.

In the Hebrew Bible, God has a name *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, *Adonai*, the basic jest of all of those is that he is the Lord and the God of all.

In the New Testament, God's purpose for all humanity is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. And there he brings forgiveness, and grace, and love, and mercy and healing. But, before we get all lovey dovey and want to give each other a big group hug, the gospel writer Luke also adds, and **division**. “Do you think that I have come to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²For five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” (Last's the only one that seems to make sense to me)

Luke paints an interesting picture for us. A challenging picture. We want peace and love in our homes and our world. Christ after all is the Prince of Peace. What he is saying is that coming into the world may bring tension and ultimately division, and not peace.

Perhaps Jesus is recognizing that divisions are often at work in our world. For example, you can't root for the Steelers and the Ravens. It's just not done. Or the Yankees and the Red Sox, or Microsoft and Apple, or Miley and Liam. I read the news!

Today we are divided over so many things, politics, values, lifestyles, culture, ethnicity. We want our churches to be places of love and humanity and we

want places of love and unity. We wish that we could all just get along. Jesus teaches us love and forgiveness that is to be sure, and it's important for us to strive for that in society that is divided by so many things. But Jesus is also lifting up values that may bring, just may bring division.

Commitment to Jesus and to his Way of life may create tension and anxiety in God's family. The very act of commitment may bring division. Taking a stand for God and for his purposes.

Some people want to be uncommitted. They don't like the idea of giving their heart, their time, their energy, their money to a cause or to relationships or to a belief. Commitment after all can be scary. When we are committed to something, we're somewhat vulnerable. We are offering our time and our effort, commitment takes discipline. It requires sacrifice. Its focus is on that clear vision that God has in store for each one of us.

And Jesus is warning about the cost, but also inviting his disciples into that deeper level of commitment. Valuing the life that he offers to the world.

Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer author of the *Cost of Discipleship* in 1937 during the Nazi rise to absolute power in Germany wrote that the proper understanding of God's grace required a proper understanding of the commitment necessary. A commitment to that response of grace by Christian followers of Jesus.

He writes, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

Both Bonhoeffer and Jesus in Luke are saying that it's time for us to get serious, become serious as a family of God and give Christ the commitment that is necessary!

Yes, Jesus is our friend, but he's also our Lord, our leader and even our provocateur. We owe him our life and for him we gladly give our life in worship, prayer, and praise. We connect with God and others, and offer our time, talents and treasures to serve God and neighbor.

He brings us into his family and challenges us to be the very best versions of ourselves that we can be no matter what the cost may be until his kingdom comes and his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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