

Devotions – April 12-18, 2015
Rev. Chris Johnson
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Escanaba, MI

Sunday, April 12th

Text: Jude, verses 1-2

“Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James: To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ: May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied in you.”

What does it mean to be called? It means being chosen. We have a God who chooses people. The Lord chooses people with gifts, skills, and talents for ministry, for furthering the intruding kingdom of God into this dying age. God makes all things new, this is most certainly true. And God makes all things new not with the wave of a magic wand, but through ordinary people like you and I. But for the Lord Almighty to use us as He sees fit, we must hear His promise, His selection, His Word that chooses you – yes you. But here’s the thing about how God chooses people: He picks the ones you’d least expect. Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip, Phoebe, Prisca and Aquilla – men and women who accomplished amazing things all because they first heard the Lord’s claim on their lives and so served this same Lord with all they had. He even chose Jude and Jude wrote a little “book” that is in our Bibles. This servant of the Lord reminds us that we too have been called, have been chosen to serve the Lord in many ways – some as pastors, others at the paper mill, or Wal-Mart, or the grocery store, or at a funeral parlor, or as nurse, or as a police officer. All of these vocations have committed Christians that serve the Lord faithfully and they serve the Lord faithfully because they were called, they were chosen, because they heard the Lord’s voice in their lives through the proclamation of the Gospel.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, continue to speak to us that we may listen. Always remind us that you have called and chosen us as your beloved children. Forgive us when we neglect who You are in our lives and shirk our responsibilities as Christian disciples. Empower us to lead holy lives and so be faithful and faith-filled examples where you want us to be. Amen.



Monday, April 13th

Text: Jude, verse 3

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

What do you think about when you hear the world “contend”? Something that pops up into my mind is boxing. There are two contenders waiting to duke it out to win and to receive respect and all the praise (and money) that comes with victory. To contend is to do battle. What Jude is pointing out to us is that since you’ve been called, since you’ve been chosen, get ready to join a battle. There will be many opponents you will face, but your biggest adversaries will be sin, death, and the devil. These three opponents will come at you in many ways. Sometimes they’ll engage you in a long drawn out battle so that your faith – the “common salvation” you have received – may gradually wither away. Sometimes they’ll engage you in a high stakes battle that you don’t feel prepared for – Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 11:4 that “...even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” Sometimes they’ll just engage you for the sake of reminding you that they are still around and do not like the fact that you believe in the One who defeated them once and for all – Jesus Christ. This is why all disciples of Jesus must be ready to contend, to fight against those powers which seek to destroy the faith of the Lord’s people.

How do we engage this conflict? Well for starters, we don’t seek trouble, trouble will come to us. Scripture speaks of contending for the faith in a defensive manner, not an offensive one. In Ephesians 6:10-20, St. Paul talks about being equipped with the “armor” of God. In James 4:7, we are told to “Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” 1 Peter 5:8-9 teaches us to “Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith...” The old adage applies here: Offense may win games, but defense wins championships. And to have a good defense, to “contend for the faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints” we must know what we believe and why we believe it.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you have claimed us as your own and we know you will protect us. Equip us with the confidence and wisdom we need to contend for the faith we have received so that our faith would remain strong and resilient, holy and undefiled. Send faithful teachers of your Word to us so that we would be further strengthened for the battles that lay ahead. Amen.



Tuesday, April 14th

Text: Jude, verse 4

“For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

It didn’t take too long in the early church for scoundrels and would-be Christians to try and mess up what God was doing through the ministries of the church and proclamation of the Gospel. We read about such “ungodly people” in Paul’s letters, in 1st John, in Revelation, and we see that happen in Jude’s church, too. There’s an old saying: Whenever a church is built, the devil builds a chapel next door. I think there’s a lot of truth to that. Although, the devil doesn’t need to build a chapel; he’s capable of destroying a church from the inside-out through those who “pervert the grace of our God.” Some pervert God’s grace in subtle ways: Sowing seeds of

dissent about a pastor or a church leader, unceasing negative criticism, spiritual apathy and malaise. Some pervert God's grace in more public ways, "sensuality" being one that Jude hones in on. We all may know tragic stories of unbridled sensuality in the church. Sometimes it was a pastor. Sometimes it was a key church leader. Sometimes it was the person that sits in the pew in front of you. Whoever it was and whatever happened, it caused problems in the church and brought suffering into the lives of some of the Lord's faithful people.

Why does "sensuality" cause such problems in Christ's church? We see this problem in 1st Corinthians where freed and forgiven "Christians" thought they could use their bodies to gratify their sexual desires as they saw fit – "Only God can judge me!" Paul condemned those actions. Fornicators will not enter the kingdom of heaven. But shouldn't the church keep its nose out of what people do behind closed doors? Is it any of our business? Jude (and Paul and Moses and Jesus, too) would say here: Yes. It is our business. It is our business because the Scriptures – in contrast with the world around us – invite us to live a life that isn't obsessed with the pleasures of the flesh. The pleasures of the flesh are rightly satisfied when man and woman join together in marriage, but beyond that and outside of marriage it causes so much guilt, remorse, and shame – at least, it used to. Will we the church go against the current, or simply go with the flow? How do we lovingly confront someone we know who is "perverting the grace of God into sensuality"?

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, help us to see sexuality as your gift to us that is not to be abused, distorted, and perverted. Grant forgiveness to all those caught in sexual sin, that they would repent and truly live for you. Bring healing to mind, body, and spirit to those who used to have a lifestyle that is not in concert to your will for our lives. Grant purity of heart, mind, and body to all of your people. Amen.



Wednesday, April 15th

Text: Jude, verses 5-7

“Now I desire to remind you, though you are fully informed, that the Lord, who once for all saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterwards destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day. Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.”

The body of Jude's letter is a scathing rebuke against the hypocrisy of some false teachers. Jude quotes biblical and extra-biblical sources to prove his point: Those who thought they were saved and safe from God's righteous judgment, in actuality, are not. These self-righteous "saints" are false teachers who do more harm to the church than anything else. They cause divisions. They create a cultish following within the ranks of the faithful. They may preach an entertaining sermon, but that's about it. Their words have no substance, nothing of value. The church is "their" church, not God's. This is why the flock must know their faith – what they believe and

why they believe it. The flock must know the Scriptures, must know what the Bible teaches, so that if someone comes along and teaches anything in contradiction to the Word, they can call out those leaders.

I'm reminded of Bo Giertz's masterpiece of historical fiction: *The Hammer of God*. In one of the stories of the book, a newly ordained pastor is placed into his first church. There's a problem with this pastor though: He's not quite sure he believes what he is preaching. His faith was challenged in seminary due to a heavy rationalism influence. One day, this pastor is essentially "born-again," reawakened from his spiritual stupor. How did that happen? A young girl at the bedside of a dying man preached the gospel better than this pastor could. She knew her Bible and loved Jesus. The pastor knew theology (or what was called "theology" in the seminary he attended), but couldn't proclaim the Gospel. The "conversion" of this Pastor ushered the church into a spiritual revival. And it all happened because one of the flock knew what she believed and why. A false teacher repented and starting doing what he was supposed to all along: Preach the Word of God, preach the Law and the Gospel to the flock he was called to shepherd.

Let us pray: Gracious God, you know the struggles all people have with faith – pastors, parishioners, young, old, and everyone in-between. Lord, you also know that Your holy people can be easily led astray. Grant to our pastors and church leaders purity of doctrine, a zealous love for You, and a servant's heart that glorifies You alone. Grant also to all our parishioners an unquenchable desire to know You and know Your Word. With a re-ignited love for You and Your Word, grant that our churches and communities would be revived and set on fire by the Holy Spirit. Amen.



Thursday, April 16th

Text: Jude, verses 17-19

“But you, beloved, must remember the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; for they said to you, ‘In the last time there will be scoffers, indulging their own ungodly lusts.’ It is these worldly people, devoid of the Spirit, who are causing divisions.”

The apostles – Peter, James, John, Thomas, and the others – knew that their commission to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ would be met with hostility. Jesus himself told them as much in Mark 13:13: “...you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.” And with a little experience under their belts of establishing and building up churches, they too soon found out that hostility can also, sadly, come from within the ranks of the church. Those who cause divisions in the church, Jude points out, are “worldly” and “devoid of the Spirit.” What does that mean? Even though they may be a member of a local church and claim the title as Christian, by their works it is easily discerned they are not Christian at all. They may be in worship every week, they may be in Bible study, they might even be on council. Yet their persistent divisive attitude, behavior, and words do little else than fuel their own selfish agenda and the little cadre of open ears they are trying to sway. God have mercy on those who wantonly cause division!

There is another way, a better way; there always is. But sadly, until Christ comes again, far too many churches will be plagued with these “scoffers.” We might even go so far as to consider them “bullies” by their tactics. The best thing a church can do is to lovingly confront this person or people who are being divisive. This isn’t just the pastor’s job! All Christians ought to be held accountable and be willing to be held accountable by their brothers and sisters in Christ. It shows care, not only for the erring person, but also for the health of the body of Christ – the church. If such a “scoffer” won’t repent, won’t stop causing division, then they must go. Cancer must be removed before it kills the entire body.

Let us pray: God of mercy, your Word challenges us to think deeply about church discipline. We know that to be loving, we must be stern. We know that to be healthy, sometimes surgery must be done to remove unhealthy growth. Help us to do such difficult work with great care. May your Spirit lead divisive people to repentance through the caring community of Your holy church. Amen.



Friday, April 17th

Text: Jude, verses 20-23

“But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies.”

If you only read the first part of Jude’s little letter and neglect the sweet final verses, it might seem like Jude comes across quite heavy-handed. These final verses flow from the mouth and pen of a servant of the Servant, someone with a heart for the Lord’s people, even those who are in error and under judgment. “Have mercy” Jude says. This can be a very difficult thing to do, even for those who are strong in their faith. To have mercy is to be willing to forgive and forget, to make amends and move on. To have mercy is to exercise the Office of the Keys – forgiving the sins of the repentant and binding the sins of the unrepentant.

Why is having mercy, being merciful, so important? Eternal life is at stake. Some people are in the “fire” – I think Jude here is alluding to being lost and condemned. But the problem is that some of those people who are in the fire – the ones who need to be snatched out of the fire – don’t realize they are in eternal danger of losing their salvation. When approached with mercy, these erring brothers or sisters can repent and believe the Good News again and so be saved. If the mercy shown to them is rejected, then you’ve done what you can – only God can fix them now. And if they won’t listen to you coming to them with Christian love and a caring heart, chances are they wouldn’t listen to the Lord himself if He appeared before their eyes. As Jeremiah once put it, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is desperately sick: who can know it?”

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, You know who the wandering and erring people in our churches are; help us to help them. If it is me, Lord, who is wandering and in error, destroy my pride and presumption and give me a new heart. May your mercy stream to us through the Word and Sacraments; may your mercy stream to us through you holy people. And if I can make a difference Lord, let also your divine mercy flow through me to others. Amen



Saturday, April 18th

Text: Jude, verses 24-25

“Now to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to make you stand without blemish in the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

This concluding doxology of Jude’s is so beautiful. After talking about hard things – church discipline, false teachers, sexual immorality, the dangers and very real possibility of losing salvation – Jude places us back into the presence of God. He who has called and chosen us will not fail in supporting us; He will “keep you from falling.” He who has called and chosen you will be your strength and portion. What the Lord began in you will be brought to completion. You’ve been justified through faith in Christ and so are saved. When you appear before the judgment throne, the Lord will see no imperfection, no “blemish” in you because the blood, death, and resurrection of the Son of God cover your life (and death). You have been forgiven; divine judgment has passed over you because you are in Christ. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1)! This God-given reality and newness of life affects everything about us – both in this life and in the life to come.

Let us pray: Lord God, you want to be everything to us, to me. I often times forget and neglect your transforming love and power. You have chosen me for salvation, not for condemnation. You have forgiven all of my sins. I do not deserve what Your Son Jesus did for me, yet You couldn’t stop showering Your love in this world through Your Son. Lord, be my Everything. Take everything I have and make it Your own as You have me as Your own prized possession. Amen.

