

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Advent 3C
December 12, 2021
Luke 7:18-28 (29-35)

The Blessed Are Not Offended by Jesus

[Jesus said,] “Blessed is the one who is not offended by me.” (Luke 7:23 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the Blessed One, the only Savior of the world,

While Jesus’ enemies were certainly scandalized and offended by Him, so were His followers, John the Baptist, John’s disciples, and all those crowds who gathered around Jesus to hear His Words of life. And what Jesus said about those folks then and there, He is also speaking about all Christians everywhere, about you and me. Jesus says in today’s Gospel, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” Blessed are YOU and blessed am I when we are not offended by Jesus, by His Words, and by His deeds.

Now, you may be thinking to yourself, “I am NEVER offended by Jesus! I am a Christian! I love Jesus and His Words! Far be it from me to be offended by Him!”

Yet, we, you and I, are often offended by Jesus and His Words. Not only by what He commands and forbids, but especially when God’s Word requires us to believe that “nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18). God’s Word tells me that, no matter how holy I might wish to be and no matter how sincerely I might desire to follow faithfully after my God, I do not have the ability to do so. My natural born heart and my human mind remain in a state of rebellion against Him. Without doubt, you and I both have been given God’s miraculous gifts of a “clean heart” and a “right spirit” (Ps. 51:10) through the indwelling power of His Word—but my unclean heart and the old, evil spirit of unbelief are always right there, tempting, sweet-talking, threatening, mocking. I believe “the Old Adam in [me] should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires” (Small Catechism, Baptism IV), but I also believe that the Old Adam in me is a very good swimmer. This Old Man in me does not want to hear from God; even hates to hear from God. This Old Man in me is offended by Jesus.

You have the same struggle with sin in your life. I am not telling you anything you do not already know deep within. Part of you wants to love your Lord Jesus “with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27). The other part of you—and the other part of me—cannot stand what Jesus says and does. It is a sheer miracle from God—a miracle continuously performed and sustained by His Words—that we do not turn away. That is why Jesus says to John the Baptist, to John’s disciples, to you and to me and to all who would love Him, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” Knowing the inborn inclinations of those who love Him; knowing that His Words and His deeds enter into an

alien and foreign land when they enter into us; knowing that He ALWAYS scandalizes and offends even His dear saints, Jesus says, “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.”

Now, what exactly is the offense or scandal that Jesus inevitably creates? Only this: Jesus does EVERYTHING for me and I have NOTHING for Him. Jesus must do EVERYTHING because I can do NOTHING. I was a beggar before God made me His Christian and I remain a beggar today. This is what Jesus warns John’s disciples about in today’s Gospel: “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.” Do not be offended by this one fact: By Jesus and Jesus alone—through Jesus’ Words and Jesus’ deeds alone— ... the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, [and] the poor have good news preached to them. Stated another way, Jesus’ Words and deeds perform actions for us that we could never do or even desire to do on our own.

- Jesus’ Words and deeds miraculously give us the new sight of faith, where once we were “people who walked in darkness” (Is. 9:2);

- Jesus’ Words and deeds have miraculously made it possible for us to walk in paths of righteousness (Prov. 8:20) where once we were totally lame and crippled and unable even to rise from our misery;

- Jesus’ Words and deeds have cleansed us from the leprosy of our sins. His same Words and deeds continually exert their power for you on a daily basis, cleansing and forgiving you, fresh and new, like a shower every morning.

Why are these things so offensive? Quite simply, because they require us to admit that, apart from Jesus’ Words and deeds, we have nothing and we are nothing. Apart from Jesus we are blind and lame, leprous and deaf, impoverished and even dead. Apart from Jesus’ Words and deeds, we are each an empty tin can or an un-inflated balloon. Only His Words and His deeds raise us up, forgiven, cleansed, and made alive. Stated another way, only Jesus’ Words and deeds provide you with what He calls blessedness or happiness: “Blessed is the one who is not offended by Me.”

Now there are certainly many other churches and preachers who will lead you to rely entirely too much upon yourself and to place too much confidence in your own abilities. They will teach a moralism devoid of faith in Christ. They will tell you to “look within.” “Believe in yourself.” “Trust yourself.” They will lead you to “think of yourself more highly than you ought to think” (Rom. 12:3).

However, when you or I put ourselves on a pedestal, we inevitably knock our Lord Jesus off the pedestal—or at least we insist on sharing His glory by sharing the pedestal with Him. When we look at ourselves, our eyes are not on Christ. When we focus on our deeds and our holiness and our commitment to Christ, we quickly make secondary Christ’s deeds and Christ’s holiness and Christ’s commitment to us. That is the way the flesh operates. When I spend my breath talking about my love for Jesus, I end up taking away from the time I can use speaking about Jesus’

love for you and for me. When we obsess about our faith—as if it might be something that we give to God—we will inevitably lose concern for the miraculous and precious gift of faith that Jesus gives to us through His Words and His deeds.

So, Jesus says to you today, dear Christians, “Blessed [Happy] is the one who is not offended by Me.” He’s not speaking to His enemies here. He is speaking to those who love Him, who want to follow Him and be with Him, and yet who also find it so hard to admit every day that apart from Him they have nothing (John 15:5).

Now, it must also be said that John, or at least John’s disciples, may have wondered about Jesus because John was in prison and Jesus hadn’t done anything to help him. Yes, it’s easy to be offended, or scandalized, by Jesus when He doesn’t do what we think He should do. We may be offended by Jesus when He doesn’t seem to hear our prayers or help us, when He doesn’t do what we want or expect. We are scandalized when our enemies, or at least others, seem to prosper while we suffer, and we don’t see Jesus do anything about it.

Thus, Jesus said, “Go and tell John what you have heard and seen: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, [and] the poor have good news preached to them.” And the same goes for you.

Jesus wants you to know that your true happiness and blessedness lives ONLY in the realization and the confession that you now see only because He has opened our eyes; that you are cleansed of all your sins solely because of His medicine and miracle; that you walk by His strength and power alone; that you hear because He has unplugged your ears; that you are poor except for what He alone gives; that you live, but only because He has raised you up from the dead. Indeed, “Blessed [Happy] is the one who is not offended by Me.” Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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