

## The Seventh Sunday after Trinity

Mark 8:1-9

Martin Luther says in his large catechism: “A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God.” (Large Catechism I.2-3)

If Coronavirus has done nothing else, it has, at least, exposed false gods. People put their faith and trust in government, science, and education. Behind the riots is an ideology that if you just get the government right, you'll create the perfect utopia where there will be no more inequality or poverty. The utopias of communist Russia and China show us something different. Behind the rush for a vaccine is the ideology that science can fix all our problems maybe even including death. Blind faith in science, or scientism, has made us hedonists of a purely material world. Behind the fear of closed schools is the ideology that the parents are the worst educators of their children. Behind the ideology of progressive education is the formation of unthinking cogs in the social machine. The younger generation's attachment to Marxist socialism shows the success of progressive education. The political tool of all these false gods is fear.

If you have felt fear during this time, you have shown that your fear, love, and trust is not solely in your creator, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Repent!

But, why do we feel this fear?

In part, I believe it is because we don't understand how fragile we are, to quote a Sting song.

We get caught up in the pride of life. We put our trust in money and medicine and believe they can solve all our problems. When things are going well, it's easy to fall into the trap of resting securely in the false gods of money and medicine. This is why St. John warns us that "all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life, is not from the Father but is from the world." (1 Jn 2:16) If there's one thing that describes our societal problems today is that we all chase after our bellies which is what John calls the desires of the flesh and desires of the eyes.

Old age, impending death, pandemics like Coronavirus, and uncontrollable riots have a way of reminding us that we are indeed fragile. We aren't in control of our lives. Our life can be taken from us at any moment. This is why the Psalmist prays for God to "teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." (Ps 90:12)

The crowd in our Gospel reading today shows us the source of a heart of wisdom. They listen to Jesus to the exclusion of everything else. Jesus leads them far into the wilderness where there's no food. They are so intent on His teaching that they ignore everything else, even the sustenance they need to live. Then Jesus shows us the heart of the Father, "I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. And some have come from far away." (vv. 2-3) This brings to mind another Psalm: "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust." (Ps 103:13-14) Just as your children learn to love you because you care for them, we learn to love our Father in heaven because He cares for us.

The life of all people is created *and sustained* by God. Christians call this daily bread. We know our dear Father in heaven loves us and takes care of us. But God doesn't just take care of His Christians. Others take the creation and sustaining of life for granted. Paul warns them: "Or do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?" (Rom 2:4)

Paul shows us the answer to fear in the face of pandemic or riot.  
Repentance.

You have real enemies: the world, Satan, and your flesh. They can cause real mayhem in your life even to the point of taking your life. It's no surprise that suicides have dramatically increased during this time of coronavirus panic. The gods of mammon and socialism make great promises but deliver only bleakness, meaningless life, and an empty death.

The living God, your dear Father in heaven, promises and delivers a living hope and an abundant life:

"Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."  
(Mt 11:28)

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rm 8:1)

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." (Rm 8:29)

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation [including coronavirus and rioters], will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rm 8:38-39)

Do not let fear have its way with you. Take courage, dear Christian, in your Lord Jesus Christ. "In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will... In Him you... were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory." (Eph 1:11, 13-14)

You have the source of true joy in times of plenty and in times of pestilence. You have the Holy Spirit who was given to you in your Baptism and who continues to come to you with the Word of God heard, read, and meditated upon. You have the promises of God which you inherited in your Baptism. You have the very Body and Blood of your Lord, Jesus Christ, in His Supper to sustain you on the way. In short, you have peace with God.

Avail yourselves of these precious gifts so that you continue to grow in faith and confidence in your Lord Jesus Christ. He says you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. (Mt 5:13, 14) You have the one thing that the darkened world and those who live in fear need: Jesus.

Jesus sends you out into the world as His ambassadors of salt and light. Go in His peace!

Amen.