

Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity
09/29/2013
Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Matthew 22:34-46
David McMinn

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word of God for our consideration this morning is from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the 22nd chapter.

You've heard that politics makes strange bedfellow. Sometimes religion or theology does too. Such is the case in this morning's Gospel lesson. The Sadducees who were liberal theologically tried to trip up Jesus by asking Him which of a woman's multiple husbands she would be married to in the Resurrection. Jesus' answer was that none of them because in the Resurrection, in eternal life, people will not be given in marriage, they'll not be married. Then Jesus told them, "*You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.*"

The power of God is wrapped up completely in His Word. The Word is the way in which God created all things. It's the way in which He sustains all things. The Word is the way in which God saves His people. Jesus Christ, the man before them is the embodiment of that Word. The Sadducees did not believe the letter of the Word nor the Spirit of it as Christ stood before them and therefore despite all their learning they did not know God. They were lost.

This morning's Gospel follows immediately after Jesus speaks to the Sadducees. The Pharisees hear that Jesus shut the Sadducees up and so the Pharisees decide to join the battle and try to trip up Jesus. Now the Pharisees are anything but liberal. They're the conservative side of Judaism at the time.

And the Sadducees and the Pharisees hated each other. But there was somebody on the scene now that they hated even more. Jesus was the object of their disaffection. The Pharisees see that their arch enemies failed to take Him down so they take their own crack at this man Jesus. Some say He is the Messiah, the Christ, and they'd just see about that. They'd make this Troublemaker go away.

So they ask their own question: *"When the Pharisees heard that [Jesus] had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

Now the Pharisees knew the letter of the Word. They didn't throw out a good portion of the Scriptures like the Sadducees did. They still believed in the Resurrection which their liberal counterparts didn't. They still believed in miracles. But they didn't believe in salvation by grace alone and they didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

They ask Jesus a Law question and Jesus gives them a Law answer. It's as though He says, "You want to live by the Law, you think your salvation is wrapped up in fulfilling the Law and so here is how you must do that." Love God more than anything. And love your neighbor like you love yourself. As we've

said before “love” is kind of a nebulous word. What does it mean? Well here Jesus uses the Greek word agape or unconditional love. This is the epitome of love. He’s telling the Pharisees (and us) that we must love God more than anything else on the face of the planet and we must love Him without condition.

When things are going better than we could expect or hope for we’re to love God most and without condition. When things are absolutely at rock bottom and life couldn’t get any more difficult we’re commanded to love God most and without condition. When things are just on that level where most of life seems to be, neither high nor low, we’re to love God more than anything else and without condition. What a Law and stumbling block Jesus puts before the Pharisees. But what an opportunity Jesus gives them to believe.

The Law should have pricked their hearts. Instead of puffing up their chest at their thought of fulfilling the Law ‘You shall have no other gods’ they should have hung their heads in shame as they admitted that they did not love God more than themselves and therefore they hadn’t even kept the first commandment let alone the other nine. Having no other gods means I must love God above everything else? That’s exactly what Jesus says.

And just to make sure they understand the enormity of their task Jesus says, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Who does that? Who loves their neighbor more than they love themselves? Our response should be: “First I have to love God whom I cannot see more than anything else in the rest of the cosmos and then I must love my neighbor, who I can see and don’t always like, as much as I love me?” I don’t know about you folks but I want my way and I

want my life the way I want it way more than I want the same for my neighbor. I want to be comfortable and fat and happy more than I want you to be the same. So is that 'loving you more than me'?

So there's enough here to shut the Pharisees mouth and mine with them. And yet just to make sure that the Pharisees (we) get the full brunt of their not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God Jesus asks them, "*What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is He?*" They said to Him, "*The son of David.*" He said to them, "*How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls Him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'? If then David calls Him Lord, how is He His son?*" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask Him any more questions."

Jesus is rumored to be the coming Christ, the long foretold Messiah. God is standing before them and they don't know it. And He asks them, "Who is the Christ?" That's what the question gets down to and they by the Old Testament Scriptures should have known the answer. They should have known that God was coming to be the Messiah. But they don't. They see 'the waited for Messiah' as merely a man. "Whose son is He?" They answer David's.

Well for sure Jesus was prophesied to come from the lineage of David. Mary, Jesus' mother, was from the lineage of David. But the Messiah was prophesied to be born of a virgin. He had no earthly Dad. The Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary. This was no mere man, this Messiah. He was a man, no doubt. But He was not merely a man or as we say 'just a man'.

King David knows the promise of the Messiah coming from his own bloodlines and yet he prophesies and calls this one to come his Lord. Now how many grandfathers do you know who would call their great grandchildren 'Lord'? Into day's age of spoiling children and giving them every indulgence we may treat them as gods but know one seriously calls them Lord. And yet King David did. He understood hundreds of years before Jesus was born that Jesus was more than a mere man. This Savior was the Son of God. This Savior was God who would appear in the flesh. Jesus is God.

I was in a local business this past week and I got into a conversation with the owner and he told me he had been a Mormon for the last five years. That conversation went the way it has to go if it goes very long at all. See the Mormons are like the Pharisees in many ways. They're think they're saved by their works and they don't recognize Jesus as God. They cannot say the 'Lord said to my Lord' and mean 'God said to my God' because they believe that Jesus is a mere man, a mere created man just like you and me. If that's the case then we're above all men to be pitied.

But it's not the case. Standing before the Pharisees as He had before the Sadducees is Jesus Christ the very Son of God and yet of the very same essence of God. The Pharisees wanted to know what was the greatest commandment and standing before them was the fulfillment of the commandments. They want to know what they must do to be saved and the One who has come to save them is standing right before them. Jesus is the embodiment of the Word of God. He is the Law and He is the Gospel. He

perfectly does everything the Father commanded us to do plus He does everything required to save us; we who cannot do what is required.

This humble, sandal wearing man before them is 'God in the flesh' and they won't see Him. They refuse to recognize Him just like today's Pharisees and Sadducees, just like us. Yes it's true. We can't see Jesus as God unless we hear the Word and receive the faith created by Him in us. Only by faith can we confess that *Jesus is Lord*. Only by faith can we confess with Jesus that He is '*my God and my Lord*'. Only by faith created by Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit can we see Jesus as Savior. In Him is the embodiment of the Word of God and in Him is the power of God. That's what David means when He says that Jesus would sit at God's right hand. The right hand is power. The right hand is how God accomplishes His will in this world. The right hand is how He has saved you, how He has forgiven your sins.

The Sadducees and Pharisees didn't know who Jesus was. He certainly wasn't the Savior and He surely wasn't God to them. But you know Him. You've been given grace that allows you in spite of your sins to know Jesus as the Christ. This is not your own work but a gift from God in His Word. In His Name you are forgiven and in Him you have eternal life. Amen.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen.