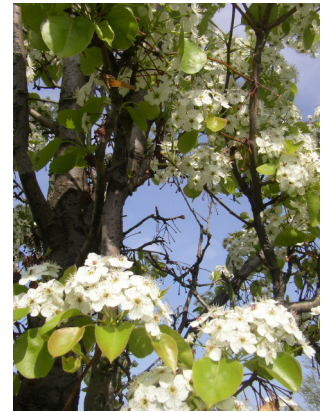


St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Pentecost 2 May 25, 2008 **Matthew 7:15-20**



“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruits you will recognize them.

People of God rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

They say baseball used to be the American pastime! Where did baseball come from? They say there have been games like baseball down through the ages. Did you know that? There was a German game called Schlagball! In Schlagball you have a “bowler” – who threw the ball to a “striker” who tried to hit it with a club – then ran around the bases – without getting hit with the ball by a defender! There have been different versions – different variations of this theme. In some – you ran around the bases in the opposite direction – 3rd – then 2nd – then 1st. In some the pitcher was a guy from your own team. That way he could really tee it up for you – put it right where you wanted it – so you could really pound that ‘tater! There is a similar game – called “oina” the national game of Romania – a game played by Romanian shepherds – out in the pasture – while they were supposed to be watching their sheep. I like that! The thing about baseball is – they keep changing the rules. They are all very complicated – very technical. They keep making new rules – to try to keep up with changes in the way people try to win. Some people think God’s rules change. That what’s right and wrong changes with the times. That what used to be right or wrong *back in the day* – is today “*old fashioned*”. That right and wrong pretty much depends on the circumstances or depends on whether anybody gets hurt or not. Today as we consider part of the sermon Jesus delivered on a grassy hillside God’s Word says:

Don’t Be Misled!

1. Good trees bear good fruit

2. Bad trees bear bad fruit and end up burned.

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on – is part of a sermon Jesus delivered on a grassy hillside by the Sea of Galilee. As always – it’s important to remember the context. What’s going on around this part of Scripture? Jesus is preaching to people who are believers. Jesus is talking to people who know him, love him and believe in him. Jesus is talking to believers about putting their faith into practice – about fruits of faith that give glory to God. Jesus is not just talking about being nice or doing the right thing. Jesus is talking about the kingdom of God. It is to believers that Jesus said, **“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”** It was to believers that Jesus said, **“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? Is is no**

longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” It was to people with saving faith in their hearts that Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** It was to believers that Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.”** To believers Jesus said, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”** It was to believers that Jesus said, **“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”** The Sermon on the grassy hillside is about putting your saving faith into practice – by showing extra-ordinary love to all the people around you for Jesus’ sake!

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” It is easy to be misled. It is easy to be misled – not so much by horrible lies and terrible obvious falsehoods. It is easy to be misled by half-truths – by a thought or idea that is only partly true – that has some salt and pepper and seasoning of truth – sprinkled on the salmonella and e-coli of falsehood. Sometimes the false prophets – the false teachers are very kind and gentle people – as sincere as can be. But if what they teach contradicts the simple message of law and gospel they are a danger to our faith and a danger to our immortal soul.

The best way to protect our faith from false doctrine is to be very *very* faithful reading the Scriptures – coming to Bible Class – coming to Church to hear God’s Word. The more familiar we are with God’s Word and God’s truth – the more sensitive we will be to the truth. Confident of the truth by the power of the Holy Spirit we will not be worried when you hear that someone like Albert Einstein wrote, **“the Word of God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish.”** While Einstein might have dismissed all other religions as **“an incarnation of the most childish superstitions”** by the grace of God we know the Scriptures to be the very Word of God – profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. We know the Scriptures to be breathed by the Holy Spirit – inspired and inerrant! We know the Scriptures to be the only way to eternal life. Albert Einstein no doubt understood mathematics and physics – was brilliant enough to develop the theory of relativity. But the letter he wrote that was sold at auction for \$40,000 is wrong. By the grace of God we know the **one thing needful** – that Jesus is the only way to Heaven!

Good trees – good fruit – bad trees – bad fruit! Good trees – good teaching of law and gospel for Jesus’ sake – will result in good fruit – fruits of faith that give all glory to Jesus. There needs to be a sense of urgency in the hearts and in the lives of God’s people. I was on the road the other day – when I heard that James Taylor song – **“Fire and Rain”**. You know that song?

"I've seen fire and I've seen rain. I've seen sunny days that I thought would never end. I've seen lonely times lonely times when I could not find a friend. But I've always thought that I'd see you again." That's the key phrase—"but I always thought that I'd see you again!" Apparently Mr. Taylor had his struggles with painful emotions. Do you know how that feels—to have strong emotions—even painful emotions that can be so difficult to cope with—sometimes you think you can't? Apparently Mr. Taylor had a friend who was sad—very *very* sad. So sad that they despaired. *But I always thought that I'd see you again*—and they didn't! Do you think about that? That there are people we love—and sometimes we have this false sense of security—that—oh, I'll see them again—some time. And then something happens—and you don't! The older I get—the more and more certain I become—that we squander way too much time doing things that have no real or lasting value. That what we need to do—is spend time with the people we love. We need to take time—we need to make time to be with the people we love—to help them and encourage them—to love them and forgive them for Jesus' sake. We can't afford to squander time being angry or upset or frustrated about stupid little things—like small sharp rocks in our shoes. Things that don't matter. We need to stop chasing after the things and stuff of this world—as if-just one more big credit card purchase—and then we will be truly happy. To learn the secret of contentment—with the things and stuff we have. To instead grow in acts of kindness and compassion toward the people all around us.

Good trees—good fruit—bad trees—bad fruit! Good trees—God-pleasing teachers teach the truth of God's Word—which results in good fruit. False teachers teach something—anything else—and the result is bad fruit—not giving glory to God. In Japan—last autumn—dozens of men stood side by side in a cabbage patch. They were participating in "Shout Your Love From the Middle of A Cabbage Patch Day". They took turns yelling "I love you!" or "Thank you!"—trying earnestly to say these words to their wives—some of them for the first time. Their wives stood in the field watching, listening—some even crying. Apparently in Japan—expressing love and appreciation is uncommon—especially among men. The number of divorces rose 73% in the last years. There are many in home separations. People remain legally married—but there is no love—no closeness at all. Shouting past vegetables is not the answer. Buying cards and flowers and chocolates isn't the answer. Sharing scrubbing floors, unloading the dishwasher or taking turns changing diapers isn't the answer either. **Husbands love your wives like Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her**—is the answer. Forgive your neighbor—your closest neighbor—your spouse **70 times 7** for the very same painful hurtful mistake is the answer. Love and forgive one another for Jesus' sake. That will result in good trees being full of good fruit!

Good trees—good fruit—bad trees—bad fruit! They say that sports are supposed to be an opportunity to show sportsmanship. That there are values that are far far more important than winning at any price! That happened the other day. A girl named Sara Tucholsky—was up to bat. Sara is pretty small—4 inches shorter than I am. The second pitch she hit—there was that indescribable sound when the bat and ball collide. There was a moment of quiet—followed by people literally screaming and shouting—when the ball sailed over the center field fence. A home run—with two people on base. Sara went tearing down the base line—rounded the corner when she realized she had missed first. She slammed on the brakes to go back to touch first—when something went horribly wrong inside her knee—and down she went. Now what? She had torn something deep inside her knee. She could crawl back to first—but then what? If she stayed at first—the home run wouldn't count. If anyone from her own team *touched her* to help

her – to help her around the bases she would be out. There was only one thing to do. Players from the other team would not be breaking a rule – if they picked Sara up – and carried her around the bases – pausing as very carefully she lowered her left foot to touch first – *first base*, then second and then third and then home plate! A home run! Such sportsmanship – one seldom sees. And yet – with Jesus’ love in your heart – with the truth of the Gospel in your heart – isn’t that how we will live? **Everyone will know we are Jesus’ disciples – his students, and followers and imitators if we love one another** – like Jesus loves and forgives us. Amen!

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