



St John Lutheran Church

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"Christ's Hallowed Touch Brings Sanctity"

Revelation 22:12-17, 20

A dear and now departed Seminary professor, I admired named Dr. Waldemar Degner defined sanctification as simply "the Life of God in the soul of the believer."

As we close out yet another Easter Season... we are reminded, through John's vision that the Resurrected Christ will come again in glory to claim the Church for whom He gave up His very life. "I have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches (Jesus says). I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."

I am coming (Jesus says), "to give to everyone according to his work."

Those words... least on the surface... seem to contradict everything that we have come to know and believe about Jesus Christ... and the Gospel of salvation. We are saved by Grace, through faith (the Bible says)... and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph 2:8-9).

As Lutheran Christians... we stake our eternal life on the central Doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls...the Doctrine of Justification ... that is to say... we are "justified"... we are counted righteous before God "by Grace through faith." Our salvation is dependent... not on our works... but on Jesus Christ... this God / Man, who gave Himself that we might have complete forgiveness of all of our sins. All these many years... we have been taught to view our own works as very nearly destructive to saving faith...this in the sense that to rely upon them for our personal salvation is to deny Grace and even faith itself.

Our reliance on God's Grace, is, of course, well founded... for St. Paul stood against the corrupters of the Gospel... those who would add something to God's Grace...or detract from God's Grace... and he fought with all of his might that the Gospel might remain pure... and that God's Grace then would be the very anchor of our souls. "Who has bewitched you (Paul asked) that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" (Gal. 3:1)

Paul made it clear that our salvation is wrapped up in the goodness and in the mercy of Christ. He would even go on to call for the annihilation of those who preach any other gospel than that which had already been preached. The Gospel of God's Grace in Christ is not to be toyed with... for when any particular Church Body loses that Gospel ...or tries in some way to change that Gospel... it ceases to be Church. By default, it becomes, perhaps a social organization... or even a place to dispense human care... but not a church.

God's Church depends solely on God's Grace to us in Jesus Christ... and this message is the ONLY TRUTH we are to follow. Any other "truth" ...any message that conflicts with God's revealed Word is a lie...it is deadly...and any man, teacher or Church Body that changes God's Word into something it is not... is of the

devil. As our Lutheran Fathers taught us...we simply have no authority to change that which God has given us in His Word! The created have no authority to change the teaching of the Creator!!

The Gospel of God's Grace in Christ Jesus must and will stand. Good works, however, are very much a part of the Christian faith... and they will be very much a part of Christ's Judgment when He returns on that Last Great Day. Hear the Words of Jesus in Matthew 25. To the sheep on His right... that is to the faithful... He will say, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in." And yet, to the goats on His left, He will say, "I was hungry and you did not feed me. I was thirsty and you did not give me drink. I was naked and you did not clothe me."

Your good works... done in ...and because of your God given faith, my friends... will follow you into eternity. And so, listen to the Words of Jesus and confess your sin before God's Throne of Grace. For each and every one of us...there was, a time when we saw, that person in need... perhaps he was hungry or thirsty... and we walked or drove by without ever even giving him so much as a thought. The tendency is to justified such callous action by insisting that the man would only use your gift to find solace in the bottom of a bottle. Perhaps! But Jesus spoke in Matthew 25, not about giving someone money...He talks about feeding them and giving them something to drink. He spoke about compassion and mercy, love and empathy...and on our own...left to our own devices and strength...we will fail!

So... confess your sin before God... lean upon the perfect holiness and righteousness of Christ ... so that by His Grace and through His Power and Promise ... His very Life will sanctify... that is...His Life will make holy the works of faith that follow you into eternity. On that Last Great Day all of the goats (that is unbelievers) will be found wanting... looking for something good to offer before God's Throne of Grace. And yet, goats are goats by virtue of their rejection of the Gospel of God's Grace in Christ... they will have nothing offer the Lamb as He sits high upon His Throne.

Sheep, on the other hand... are sheep by virtue of the faith planted in their hearts by Christ in baptism. Their lives are filled up with those things blessed and sanctified by Christ. As a believer... you confess your sin before God with confidence... because the faith God gave you causes you to trust the Promise... the Promise that your sins are forgiven and they most certainly will not follow you into eternity.

A careful look again at Matthew 25 is very revealing. The goats stand before God...struck quite dumbfounded... for they thought that their lives were filled up with good... yet... without a God given faith... they were only filled up with evil. Where was the evidence of the good things they had done? There weren't any good things, because God counts good only that which is done through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

On the other hand... the sheep (those in the faith) wonder when it was that they did good things in their life. "When (they asked) did we see you hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?" In short, when did we do all of these things that you so praise and honor?

You have no doubt wondered similar things. What kind of good will God find in your life? What works will be there testifying to your faith? And perhaps most importantly... what will have come of those times when you passed that person by on the street... having failed to extend human compassion and empathy? Well, those things ...those failures and sins will have been washed away in the blood of this "infant Priest" who became for you "unholy and forlorn."

And the "good" will be everything that you did in your life through faith in Christ. **These cannot and** will not save you...**but they** are a natural fruit of your God-given faith...**they flow** from this faith and as such they reflect who you are as a child of God. **If you are** a student who labors to learn... **to grow** in knowledge... **this is** good in the eyes of God, for your efforts are sanctified... **they are** made holy by the Blood of Jesus. **If you are** already in the work force laboring at a job that perhaps seems mundane at times... **this is** good in the eyes of God... **because your** work is sanctified... **that is...** **it is** made holy by the Blood of Jesus. **If you are** retired... **living in** those golden years of your life... **this too** is good in the eyes of God... **for your** life is a testimony to the love of God that has sustained and blessed you all these many years.

You see, your works...**that is** those works done in faith...**works that** you may not even know that you do...**these will** follow you into eternity. **What will amaze** you... **on that** last great day... **is what** God counted as good in your life **because of the merits of His Son Jesus Christ.**

I'd like to close this morning with a little quotation from *Luther's Large Catechism*. **I do so** because Luther's words get at the very heart of this issue of good works in the life of the Christian. **He points out** the difference between what the world sees a good vs. what God sees as good. **Luther writes:**

"It seems to me that we shall have our hands full to keep these commandments, practicing gentleness, patience, love toward enemies, chastity, kindness, etc., and all that these virtues involve. But such works are not important or impressive in the eyes of the world. They are not unusual and pompous, restricted to special times, places, rites, and ceremonies, but are common, everyday domestic duties of the neighbor toward another, with no show about them. On the other hand, those other works captivate all eyes and ears. Aided by great pomp, splendor, and magnificent buildings, they are so adorned that everything gleams and glitters. There is burning of incense, singing and ringing of bells, lighting of tapers and candles until nothing else can be seen or heard. For when a priest stands in a gold-embroidered chasuble or a layman remains on his knees a whole day in church, this is considered a precious work that cannot be sufficiently extolled. But when a poor girl tends a little child, or faithfully does what she is told, that is regarded as nothing." (LC - Close of Commandments)

Your life, my friends, is Holy before God. For "this Great High Priest in human flesh is the fulfillment of God's righteousness and Love for all those He created. His hallowed touch brings sanctity... His Holy hand removed impurity....your sins are forgiven and you are now called the Holy ones of God...His family...His people. In the Name of the Father and of Son + and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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