

"Simple Salvation"
Matthew 11:25-26

July 9, 2017

5th Sunday After Pentecost

It had happened again last Thursday . Two of my fancy electronic devices were not working. My iPod, a Bluetooth device, was supposed to connect to my speakers, also Bluetooth devices, and play music from my iPod all without any cords or wires being necessary. But, of course, my iPod wasn't talking to my speakers. And I, being as simpleminded as I am when it comes to such devices, had no idea how to make them communicate and produce music.

Such occurrences make me long for the good old days when telephones were attached to the wall, stereo speakers were huge and connected with wires, and music came from small compact discs or (if you are old enough) from big black discs. If you mention any of these longings, your children will look at you like you are a dinosaur. They may ridicule you for your simplistic view of entertainment or, if you carry on long enough, they will become annoyed and won't fix your devices for you. Fortunately, I was smart enough not to say anything on Thursday. And, between Matthew and my nephew who was visiting, they were able to get my iPod talking to my speakers and music was soon being played. I didn't even have to endure a speech about the superiority of modern complex technology and how much better it is than the old inferior technology of the dark ages when I grew up.

The debate over that which is simplistic and that which is complex is not limited to the topic of technology. However, the form of the debate often is the same. Those who support the new and complex are often assumed to be superior. Those who favor the old and simplistic are often thought to be inferior and even wrong.

This is true, for example, in the area of religious beliefs and ethical behavior. Simpleminded people believe that the God of the Bible is the one true God. They believe there is a standard of right and wrong (holiness and sin as the Bible calls it) and that it has not changed. They oppose same-sex marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and other public policies, no matter how popular, because they are condemned by the word of God.

Wise and learned people, on the other hand, may either not believe in God or believe in a God that is much different than the God described in the Bible. Their God often reflects them, rather than the other way around. They do not accept a never changing standard of right and wrong, but insist on an ever changing standard of right and wrong. They support policies which reinforce people in their sin because they view such practices as good public policy.

Wise and learned people are often more condescending than a teenager who is helping you install your new computer. At their best, they smile shake their heads and say, "Oh, those poor ignorant people." At their worst, they are cruel and accuse those who disagree with them with being on the wrong side of history.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the area of salvation. Simpleminded people believe what the Bible says. There is one, and only one, holy God who loves all

people. This God requires all people to live according to His unchangeable Law, not according to ever-changing societal standards and to do this perfectly, neither doing any of the evil God forbids nor failing to do any of the good God commands. All people, from least to greatest, have sinned and stand under God's condemnation. We have earned the wage for our sin, namely death, and shall go to hell after we die.

However, God loved all of us, from most horrible sinner to most pious saint, and decided, out of love alone, to save us. Since He is holy, God must punish sin. Since He is loving, God desires not to punish us. So He sent Jesus, His only Son, to be our substitute. Jesus was our substitute under the Law of God and perfectly did what was required of us. He did all which the Law commanded and did nothing which the law condemned. His holiness was credited to our account. Jesus was also our substitute on the cross and endured completely all the punishment which was due us. His punishment atones for our sin. Thus we have forgiveness for all of our sin. God raised Jesus from the grave to life again three days later, not only to make Jesus alive, but also to ratify his sacrifice for our sin and to guarantee our own resurrection from our graves to eternal life.

The wise and learned people scoff at such things. They look at the history of religion in the world and conclude that the God of Israel cannot be the only God there is. Therefore, they do not believe that we are exclusively bound to the God of the Bible and that the teachings of other deities can be plugged in, especially if they are more appealing to us.

Wise and learned people believe that, since morality is ever-changing, God's requirements are ever-changing, too. God does not require us to be holy, but simply try our best to do what is right depending on the situation. Since God is a "God of love", He would never judge or punish anyone. Therefore, Jesus did not die to do anything for us, but simply to give us an example of how how to love to the fullest. For many wise and learned people, the resurrection did not literally happen, but it serves as a symbol of hope and renewal for us to follow here in this life.

Those who follow the simpleminded method of believing what the Bible says (like you and me) and not what we would like the Bible to say will receive cruel and condescending critiques from those who are wise and understanding. We will be made to appear anti-reason and anti-science because of our beliefs. We will be warned about ending up on the wrong side of history because of our faithfulness to the Word of God. To keep it simple and succinct, we will be made to feel stupid because we take God at His Word.

That is how the world views us and how the world wants us to feel. However, our Lord Jesus has a different point of view about who got it right and how we should feel about it. Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children, yes, Father, for such was your gracious will."

First, what are "these things" of which Jesus speaks? Reading the context of Matthew 11 helps us understand. Jesus had been proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of heaven – the reign of God in human history to make things right again – but since there had been no political revolution, no military defeat of the present

regime, and no social upheaval “(which many wise and understanding people assumed the Messiah would bring about), many, even John the Baptist, wondered if Jesus was the One. Jesus, however, preached repentance – the turning away from sin to God – and believe in the Good News, that Jesus would offer Himself upon the cross to earn forgiveness for all sin and that His resurrection from the dead would bring about new life for the people of God. Jesus’ miracles were signs of the beginning of this restoration. In addition, Jesus harshly condemned those who would not believe and those who would not repent.

These are “the things” of which Jesus spoke. It is quite simple. Those who believe what the Word of God says about sin, repentance, and faith in Jesus Christ have what the Word of God promises: forgiveness, new life, and salvation. Those who refuse to believe can expect nothing but condemnation, death, and eternal damnation.

Jesus’ prayer is interesting. He thanks and praises God, but for what? First, He says that the Father has hidden these things from the wise and understanding people. Does this mean that the Father does not want all people to be saved? By no means! God has simply placed his salvation and blessings in a place where wise and understanding people are unwilling or unable to find them: in the humble, self-serving life and agonizing and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. These things are hidden in plain sight, yet wise and understanding people, in their pride and arrogance, search for wisdom and power and miss out.

Second, Jesus says the Father has revealed these things to little children (really, the word here refers to “infants”). We might be tempted to think that Jesus here is referring to people who are humble and childlike and, thus, more deserving of God’s salvation and blessings than wise and understanding people. That’s not it at all. These “little children” refer to those who are not full of themselves and want to approach God on their own terms, but come to Jesus with nothing and approach Him having nothing. They receive life and salvation, not because they are more worthy or have done something to deserve these things, but because the Father has revealed these things to them. By the working of the Holy Spirit, these spiritual children receive all of God’s blessing and salvation through faith, despite opposition by the wise and understanding people who surround them.

We join together in thanking and praising God, our Father, not because we are so smart to have figured out God and, thus, are worthy of his blessing, but because we were as simpleminded as infants and deserved nothing from Him. Yet God, in His infinite mercy, revealed His love to us. His Spirit, working in Holy Baptism, has made us His child and has given us faith to receive everything everything: every blessing, every mercy, every gift. His Spirit, working through the Word, instructs us in that faith so that we are wise and understanding, not in the ways of the world, but in the ways of God. His Spirit, working through the Lords Supper, strengthens us in that faith and in the reception of His gifts.

We also join together in not paying attention to or being bothered by the wise and understanding people of the world. Their criticism, condescension, and condemnation shall not bother us or affect us. It has been revealed to us what they are unwilling or unable to see: who God is, what God has done, and what God will do

in the future. We have received by faith what they have rejected by reason: the one true God, His mercy and forgiveness, His present and lasting care, and His life now and forever in heaven. It is they – not we – who will end up on the wrong side of history.

As Christians, we are not opposed to wisdom or understanding. The right kind of wisdom and understanding is what is important. Our closing hymn for today reminds me of a famous theologian who was asked this question, “What is the deepest wisdom or most profound theological understanding that you have ever seen?” The theologian thought for a moment and responded, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” This is the wisdom revealed to the simpleminded, like you and me. This is the understanding of faith which we have received. As Jesus said, “yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” Amen.