**September 29th 2024 Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity**

**Text: John 7:40-49** 0739

**Theme: Departure from the Word of God.**

Grace, mercy, and peace be granted unto you all from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christians: As we look about in our country and the world today, what we see begs the question: what happened to the church of the New Testament? What we view with our eyes today is a far cry from what we hear in the book of Acts concerning the Christian church, which says: *“Peter and James, and John, and Andrew, Phillip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alpheus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” (Acts 1:13-14)* And again: *“And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people.” (Acts 2:44-47)* These passages of Scripture describe a Christian church united in one accord under the Word of God and Sacraments. There is no talk of denominations, divisions, or schisms within the church. They did not have differing doctrines or opinions, they were united. As said, we read these passages and compare them with the current condition of the world and we see that the two are completely foreign to each other. There are so many different Christian denominations and religions today that many come to the conclusion that there is no one visible communion which has the whole truth, no certain set of doctrine which is actually God-given. Rather, that every person is free to choose his own doctrine devised of himself. Because of this condition we often wonder what has happened to cause this great divide between all the different Christian denominations? What events took place which ruptured the once united Christian church?

In our own federation of churches, called the Lutheran Churches of the Reformation, we are separated from every other Lutheran church body. Even within the circle of those who were born out of the Reformation through Martin Luther, there is division. We have a monthly publication called One Accord. The title refers to those passages in the book of Acts already quoted. But are we right in stating that we are united and in one accord when we see that we are, in fact, divided from every other Lutheran body, and every other Christian body in the nation? Should we be divided from all these other church bodies, and if so, are we sure that our doctrine is the correct one? There is a new movement today which says that every Christian denomination and church body has a portion of the truth, but none of them have the whole truth. Therefore the solution to this would be to take from each what is truth and combine them to create the true Christian faith. Those who teach this believe that then all the different denominations could unite under what they call the truth and we could truly be in one accord. That then we would be united as the Christian church in the same form as the in the days of the apostles in the book of Acts. Now, this does sound nice, it sounds good and right, for should we not want to be united together with other Christians? However as we will see from our text this teaching must be denied. We will see why it must be denied and at the same time learn the reason why the Christian denominations are divided from one another. Our text for today is found in the seventh chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse forty.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most gracious and loving Lord God, we confess unto Thee that we are often overwhelmed and bewildered at the growing number of Christian denominations and churches. Forgive us for our doubt that we have the truth preserved in our midst by Thy gracious hand. Teach us that clinging to Thy Holy Word insures that we have Thy truth at all times. We need not doubt the truth of our doctrine for it is taken directly from Thy mouth, which cannot lie nor err. Help us to see that Thou art greatly displeased at the many divisions within the Christian church, but Thou art pleased with the faithful who depart from those who teach falsely. Give us zealous hearts which know Thy Word and teaching, that we may be swift to defend the truth, courageous to stand against those who oppose it, and wisdom to teach those that oppose themselves. Hear us, O Lord almighty, in these petitions for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whose Word we abide evermore. Amen.

According to our text let us learn first that all the denominations and Christian churches which are seen today are a result of departure from the Word of God which:

1. **Brings forth false doctrine.** We read verses forty through forty two of our text: **Read verses here.** Our text begins by showing the disagreement amongst those who heard Jesus concerning His person. Some claimed that He was Elijah reincarnated, others believed that He was the long awaited Messiah, and still others argued that Jesus was from Nazareth, not Bethlehem, and therefore could not be the Savior, for it was foretold that the Savior would come from the city of David. What we see taking place in our text is the very thing that we witness today. It is not always disagreement about the person of Christ, but it is always disagreement about a certain doctrine of Scripture which causes divisions amongst the many denominations. In our text they argue about who Jesus is, this argument is born out of ignorance concerning what is taught in Scripture. Some of them had hit the nail directly on the head when they said that Jesus was the Christ. He truly is the Savior of the world. They based this belief in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for Jesus was fulfilling each of the prophecies foretold of Him. However there are others who say that Jesus is Elijah, that is, the forerunner of the Savior. They believe this because of their lack of knowledge of Scripture and their departure from it. Malachi prophesied, saying: *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Mal. 4:5)* Though their doctrine agreed with Scripture partially, they missed that John the Baptist was the very prophet foretold by Malachi. When the disciples asked Jesus about that very prophecy, Jesus told them: *“Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.” (Matt. 17:11-13)* You see just because a doctrine is drawn out of Scripture, and taught with a so-called proof passage does not mean that it is truth. They were correct that Elijah would come just before the coming of the Savior, but they failed to recognize that John the Baptist was that prophet foretold. They departed from the Word of God and therefore fell into false doctrine concerning the person of Jesus Christ.

The last group of people believed that Jesus could not be the Messiah because He lived, not in Bethlehem, but, in Nazareth. They said that the Savior had been foretold to come from Bethlehem, the city of David, and thus Jesus, being from Nazareth, could not be the Messiah. We have here a very interesting thought. These men obviously did not know that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem, therefore we can hardly fault them for their words in our text concerning Jesus’ place of birth. However they miss something very important in the Old Testament Scriptures which would have helped them in avoiding false doctrine concerning the person of Christ. We hear reported in Matthew: *“And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene.” (Matt. 2:23)* Now there is no prophecy in the Old Testament which has the exact wording given by Matthew in saying Christ shall live in Nazareth, but it is a collection of prophecies known, even in those days, to be referring to the fact that the Savior would be called a Nazarene. Thus like unto those who believed Jesus to be Elijah, these men fell into false doctrine concerning the person of Jesus due to their departure from the Word of God. So it is that every false doctrine is born out of that very departure, for when men depart from God’s Word, they must, of necessity replace it with the word of men, and therefore err greatly. And once error and falsehood creep in due to man’s departure from Scripture, this:

1. **Brings forth division.** We read verses forty three and forty four of our text: **Read verses here.** Because one group of men held to the truth of Scripture and the other, departing from Scripture, held to human doctrines there was a division among them. They could no longer agree on doctrine, they could not agree on the doctrine concerning the person of Jesus, and thus they were divided. This is always the case when error has crept in. Those who hold to the truth of God’s Word cannot abide with those that depart from it. Paul says: *“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.” (Rom. 16:17-18)* You see, the divisions which result from the departure of God’s Word, are caused not by those who cling to the truth, but by those who cling to their own thoughts and teachings. The division which takes place in our text would never have happened if all the men had clung to Scripture as the source of all teaching, for then they would have seen that Jesus was the Christ, the Savior of the world. The LCR has long been accused of being divisive for clinging stubbornly to our doctrine, for not uniting with other Lutheran bodies who teach similarly to us. However, we are not the ones who divide, rather it is those who have departed from God’s Word and teaching. They have put a rift between themselves and us which can only be fixed by their repentance and turning from their false doctrine. Until that happens they are the divisive ones, not us. Thus we can clearly see from our text that what we see in our day concerning the many divisions and denominations within Christendom is due solely to some departure from God’s Word. If there was no such departure, there would be no division.

The apostle John writes concerning men like this: *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they no doubt would have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.” (1 John 2:19)* Truly ever since the establishment of the New Testament church there have been divisions without number, resulting from many men departing from Scripture on various doctrines. Jesus once said: *“Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but rather division: for from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.” (Luke 12:51-53)* I had always had difficulty with this passage, for how could Christ be divisive? But when applied to our text and the teaching of our text it becomes quite clear. Christ is not the source of the division. Rather He is the subject of it. Because there is departure from God’s Word by some, there will be divisions. It is that simple. The reason we carefully insure that all false doctrine is eradicated from our midst is the danger that it poses. By their departure from God’s Word and falling into false doctrine they divide themselves from the truth, and from those who hold the truth, and once they have departed they have opened the door which:

1. **Brings forth outright rejection.** We read verses forty five through forty nine of our text: **read verses here.** The last portion of our text focuses on the Pharisees, and has ceased speaking of the divided Jews. However, the words of the Pharisees echo those who taught error concerning Christ’s person. What the Jews had said about Jesus was likely a result of false doctrine taught by the Pharisees, who admitted to not believing in Him. Thus ultimately the departure from Scripture took place by the teachers and preachers of the day and was being parroted by their hearers, at least in part. Thus we have a departure from God’s Word by the teachers, followed by a departure from God’s Word by those who did not spend time in Scripture themselves, but took their teacher’s word for it. This should never be the case. More often than not a false doctrine will begin not by the people of a congregation, but by the pastor. This error will in turn deceive those who are ignorant of Scripture. The duty of every Christian is to know what he believes and why he believes it, so that he can defend scripture against any wolves in sheep’s clothing who may enter their midst. Otherwise they are in danger of being deceived and led into outright rejection of the truth.

Once men have departed from God’s Word, taught false doctrine, and caused a division, they will likely not cease at that point, but will continue down the path of falsehood. This is because once the door is open to call into question what the Scriptures say, nothing is off limits. Every doctrine can be contorted, every passage twisted, every word made to say whatever one wants. This is the very thing that had taken place amongst many of the Jews at Jesus’ time. They had so distorted the Word of God, that it was no longer recognizable. One could no longer find a Savior coming to deliver them from sin and death, but only a savior who would deliver them from the rule of Rome and restore them to power. This was not the Word of God, but the word of men dressed up in Scripture passages. This is what is happening in our day. False doctrines on Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the means of grace, justification, and sanctification, among many others, are being taught by many so-called Christian denominations wrapped up in twisted and contorted Scripture passages, but with nothing left of God’s Word.

This should never be, dear Christians. We must be on our guard for these false opinions that they do not creep in among us, but beyond even that we must take our stand on Scripture, on the Word of God, for there, and only there, do we have surety that all our teaching is true and right. Let us pray to God that He keep us in the one true faith unto our end, forever standing on the Word of Scripture, which is able to make us wise unto salvation. Praise the Lord that He has graciously preserved this pure doctrine in our midst. Amen.