**February 11th 2024 Quinquagesima Sunday**

**Text: John 12:1-8** 0702

**Theme: Contrasting Spirits.**

May the mercy of the Lord God ever be given abundantly unto each one of us, for each of us is in desperate need of His mercy, for we are sinful creatures deserving only of His wrath and punishment. Amen. Dear friends in Christ: Each and every one of us, because we are Christians and children of our Father in heaven, struggle with the weakness of our flesh, our old Adam, that still resides with us. This continuing struggle against sin and shame proceeding forth from our sinful flesh often causes Christians to question whether or not they actually believe and are children of God. One of the most telling stories in all of Scripture, regarding the people of God, is Jesus’ interaction with the father of a child possessed with a devil who asked Jesus to heal the child, and Jesus answers: *“If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” (Mark 9:23)* Then the father of the child cries out with tears: *“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)* This interaction and outburst of this father is really the cry of each one of us, for each of us knows the greatness and righteousness of our God, and we know all that He has done for our salvation, and further we know that each instance of sin by His people disparages the grace of God in Christ. We then loathe the sinful flesh within us, we loathe those sins of weakness that still proceed from us. Knowing these things means that we are not using our flesh as a continued excuse for sin, but truly and sincerely desire to be rid of the sin that still clings to us, and yet we cannot. Our hearts then cry out to God pleading to be rescued from this body of death as the father had done and as Paul does in Romans chapter 7.

Now it is easy for each of us to look at certain stories within Scripture and condemn the actions of certain people. In so doing, however, are we not also condemning ourselves and our own actions? Are we to sit in judgment of another without first looking at ourselves and seeing the sin and shame within our own heart? Now we can clearly state what is evil and what is good according to Scripture, but when we read these stories in Scripture it should be first and foremost to apply them to ourselves and look within ourselves to see the same sinful spirit within ourselves. Our text for today is one such story, and it depicts to us in two different people the two different spirits that dwell within the Christian at the same time. One is that which worships and serves the Lord with the heart and spirit of faith, and one is that which is a thief and a murderer and is the spirit of the flesh. Now none of the foregoing is to say that we cannot speak against evil even when it is the very same evil that we have committed at some point. However, it is important for Christians to be humble in so doing, for they have also committed the same offenses, and the primary reason for pointing out sin is not to make ourselves feel better about our own evil deeds but to call a person to sincere repentance and to save their souls. Therefore, as we progress through our study today, let us first apply it to ourselves, and secondly to see what the spirit of unbelief is and what its fruits are, and thirdly and most importantly to see the spirit of faith and its fruits. In so doing we can offer and receive comfort for the heart of faith who still has his sinful flesh remaining with him and is weak, but is a believer and child of God nonetheless. With these as our focus we will proceed to our text for today which is found in the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse one.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as the father with the demon possessed child cried unto Thee, so do we: Lord, we believe; help thou our unbelief! Lord, we confess unto Thee that all too often we have hidden our sinful motives behind a show of piety like Judas, forgive us for these sins and put away from us the spirit of thievery and greed, that we may ever be and remain Thy children. Uplift in our hearts the spirit of faith that works by love, as did Mary. Help us to honor Thy death and resurrection by the fruit of our faith, anointing Thee with our worship and praise our whole lives through. Lord we plead with Thee not to turn away from us in wrath over our weakness and sins of weakness, but rather gently admonish us, and restore us to repentance and faith once again. Grant us Thy grace always, for we are ever in danger of falling back into unbelief, sin, shame, and vice. Send unto us Thy Holy Spirit that we our flesh may be put down in us, and our faith may be ever strengthened to the glory of Thy name and Thy redeeming work, in which we pray. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn of the contrasting spirits, seeing first:

1. **The spirit of the flesh.** We read verses one through eight of our text: **read verses here.** Last Sunday we saw an exchange taking place between Martha and Jesus following her brother’s death, and how her sister Mary did not immediately come out from the house to commune with her Lord in her grief. Today’s text follows that event whereupon Jesus resurrected Mary and Martha’s brother, Lazarus, from the dead. Mary had come out at a further gracious invitation from her Lord and Savior and received great comfort concerning the spiritual and bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus had uplifted Martha and Mary’s faith, and the result is here seen in the person of Mary. She anoints the feet of Jesus in preparation for His death. Yet here we are not focused yet upon Mary, but upon the reaction of Judas to her good actions. Judas show to us the spirit of the flesh. From an earthly point of view and from the viewpoint of our flesh, the objection of Judas is not out of reason. Why should this expensive ointment dumped out on the feet of Jesus and wasted when so much good could have been done with it. How many poor could have been fed with the amount of money that could be received by selling it? Here is where the struggle is within the heart of a Christian. Now here Judas is no Christian, but the same spirit of the flesh resides within us also, and it chafes at the good work of our faith or the faith of another and seeks to undermine that work by making some pious declaration about the poor. Paul says: *Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:19-21)* The works of the flesh are anything that violates the Law of God and the good and gracious will of God. As our text states the motivation of Judas is not at all the poor, but rather because he was greedy of money and wanted to add these funds to the bag, or treasury, which the disciples had entrusted him with, likely in the hopes that he could extort some of it. However, whether or not our motivations are pure or not, we cannot require that a person do a certain kind of good work. For example we cannot demand that a person give their money to church for a certain fund or for a certain purpose, they are not governed by the thoughts and whims of another Christian, but by the Holy Spirit who dwells within them. Thus even if Judas actually did care for the poor and actually wanted to use the money to buy provisions for the poor, he sinned in that he impugned the good work of Mary, even though he thought there was a better work to be performed. Good works cannot be coerced, and we certainly cannot decide for the Spirit of God, which good works are better than others, nor that each Christian must follow the dictates of another. The Spirit of God moves each Christian to service in the way and manner in the Spirit sees fit. It will not always be the same, nor will we always agree as to what the best work is. Yet we do agree, as Christians, that all fruits of faith are good, and that all fruits of the flesh are evil.

Jesus addresses the fruit of the flesh and even taking it at face value, shows that the work she has done honors and glorifies the Son of God, which is the only true definition of a good work. *“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31)* Judas, and our own sinful flesh, did not have the glory of God as its motivation for arguing against Mary’s good work. It is the spirit of pride, that seeks to tell others what work of the Spirit is most pleasing to God, that seeks to glorify oneself by declaring that it knows best what is the right and proper work. Now as said this spirit of the flesh dwells within the Christian the same time as:

1. **The spirit of faith.** We read verses one through three of our text: **read verses here.** Turning our attention from the fruit of the flesh to the fruit of faith we find such a contrast that it is incredible. The selflessness of Mary here is astounding, for she takes this perfume, very costly, which presumably she had purchased, and uses it not for her own pleasure, not for her own personal gain, but to glorify and worship her Savior. Her faith had been uplifted by the teaching of Jesus upon her brother’s death, and strengthened further by his resurrection at the word of Jesus, and here that faith comes pouring forth from her in such a selfless act. This is what the fruit of faith means, it means that it necessarily comes forth out the heart faith, and can do nothing else. To put into context how expensive this ointment or extract was in that day, we hear Judas declare that it could have been sold for three hundred pence. Now it is noteworthy that the wages of an average person in that day was about a penny, meaning that the average person would need to spend a little less than a year’s salary to purchase it. And without a second thought, Mary does just that, she breaks it open and uses it to anoint the feet of her Savior, in glorification of Him, in worship to Him and His work.

Now if this was not astounding enough we must notice the reason why Mary performed this act beyond the act of worship. Jesus Himself states that she did it against the day of His burying. This is astounding for the simple fact that Jesus was still alive, Jesus was not on trial for His ;life, He was not in any immediate peril, but she had taken hold, by faith, of the Word that Jesus had spoken, that He was to be crucified and buried and rise again. She could see, with the eye of faith, the coming death of her Savior, and she was anointing Him now in preparation for that coming event. This is one of the greatest works of faith witnessed in Scripture, for it is a testament to the faith residing within her that she did this act. Paul said: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal. 5:22-24)*

Now this portion of our text gives us a great deal of comfort, knowing that the same Mary who failed to commune with her Savior in her grief is the one who here anoints Jesus with this ointment and has done a good work according to Jesus Himself. This teaches us that all Christians endure the same struggles that we endure, for they too were weak and sinful, and though they indeed sin out of weakness, they nonetheless are Christians, living in a state of repentance. Now being a Christian does not entitle us to willfully ignore the will of God, and to sin with impunity simply because Jesus died for us, but rather loathes the sins of weakness which he commits, and will pray and work and earnestly desire that he cease from sin. Therefore, here the Holy Spirit comforts our hearts and gives us the understanding that we are truly Christians and are truly the children of God as Mary is, and that we are forgiven of our sin, through contrition and faith. The act of Mary is akin to any work of worship or glorification of Jesus Christ, whether that is to sing a hymn to His name, or to play a guitar for His glory. May each of us take comfort in this knowledge, and earnestly pray that God would help our unbelief, and would strengthen our faith, and would produce all manner of good fruits in order to hallow His name among us. May God be praised for all His sanctifying work among His children. *“Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto Him with psalms.” (Ps. 95:2)* Amen.