

PROFERS & SERMON FOR THE 17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (B), PROPER 21, 1.X.2006
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROQUE, PENNSYLVANIA
10:00, HOLY COMMUNION LITURGY, LBW SETTING 2
Numbers 11:4-6,10-16,24-29, Psalm 19:7-14, James 5:13-20, Mark 9:38-50

J. J. !

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

Generous God, You Whose Son Jesus gave his life that we might come to peace with You, give us a share of Your Spirit, and in all that we do, empower us to bear the name of Christ, our Savior and Lord, whom with You and the Holy Spirit we worship and praise, one God, now and forever. AMEN.

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Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

11:4 The rabble among them had a strong craving, and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat!

11:5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic,

11:6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

11:10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased.

11:11 So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?

11:12 Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child,' to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors?

11:13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!'

11:14 I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me.

11:15 If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once--if I have found favor in your sight--and do not let me see my misery."

11:16 So the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you.

11:24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent.

11:25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again.

11:26 Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp.

11:27 And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

11:28 And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"

11:29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"

⁴ A mixed company of strangers had joined the Israelites out in the wilderness and began to be greedy for better food. Even the Israelites themselves began grumbling: **"Where's the beef? Give us meat!"** Then they complained: ⁵ **"Remember how in Egypt we had all the fish we wanted; and cucumbers and watermelons, and leeks and onions, and garlic and pizza."** ⁶ Then they said: **"Well, we're starving to death out here; wherever we look, there's nothin' but this manna stuff."**

¹⁰ Now, Moses listened to all this complaining from every family at the doors of their tents. And God became very angry, so that Moses was worried. ¹¹ Moses said to God: **"C'mon, God, what are You doing to me?"** Then Moses asked God questions like: **"What have I done to deserve this bunch of complainers?"** and: ¹² **"What, am I their mother? YOU are the one who birthed these people, God. It wasn't my idea."** and: **"Do You expect me to carry them in my arms like a nursemaid, all the way into the promised land?"** ¹³ and then: **"Where am I gonna find meat to feed all these people?"**

¹⁴ Moses continued his own complaining, saying: "Look, God, these people are bugging me with their whining: **'Where's the beef? Give us meat!'** This job is too much for me; I can't do it all alone. **'Where's the beef? Give us meat!'** ¹⁵ If this is how You want to treat me, God, I would rather You killed me outright. **'Where's the beef? Give us meat!'** If you care about me at all, then spare me this cruelty, God. Listen to them: **'Where's the beef? Give us meat!'** "

¹⁶ Finally, God responded to Moses about the task being too much for Moses. God told Moses: **"Find me seventy senior citizens, who are respected leaders among the people."** Then God said: **"Bring these seniors out of the campsite to a meeting at the Assembly Tent."**

²⁴ So, having told the people what God had said, Moses chose seventy leaders of the people and called them to the Assembly Tent. ²⁵ Then God came down in the form of a cloud and spoke to Moses: **"Hi Moses, I see that you found Me some good leaders."** Then God took some of the Spirit's power from Moses and implanted it in each of the leaders. And, when the Spirit entered the leaders, **they began to shout ecstatically like prophets.**

²⁶ Now there were two leaders, one named Eldad and the other Medad, who stayed at the campsite and did not make it to the meeting in the Assembly Tent. The Spirit of God also pre-empted them, and they too began to shout ecstatically like prophets. ²⁷ A young man who saw them acting like prophets ran to the Assembly Tent and told Moses: **"Hey Moses, Eldad and Medad are back at the campsite acting like prophets!"** ²⁸ When Joshua, son of Nun, who had been an aide to Moses

since boyhood, heard this report, he spoke out: “**Moses, you've gotta stop them!**”²⁹ But Moses replied to Joshua: “**Why? Are you jealous, Joshua?**” Then Moses said that he wished the Spirit would pre-empt *ALL* of God's people – “**and that they would *ALL* act like prophets!**”

Psalm 19:7-14

19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;

19:8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

19:9 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

19:10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

19:11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

19:12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

19:13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

⁷ The law of God is complete and gives new *life* to the soul;*
the testimony of God is faithful, making *wise* the simple.

⁸ The statutes of God are just and cause the *heart* to rejoice;*
the commandments of God are clear and provide *understanding*.

⁹ The way of God is good and *endures* forever;*
the judgments of God are true and *always* right.

¹⁰ The word of God is to be desired more than the *finest* gold,*
more tasty than the *sweetest* honey.

¹¹ By the commandments is Your servant *well* enlightened;*
and in keeping the commandments there is *great* reward.

¹² We never know how often we *offend* our God.*
O God, cleanse me from my unknown and *secret* sins.

¹³ Above all, keep me from sins of arrogance;
do not let them *control* my actions;*
then shall I be blameless
and not guilty of turning *away* from You.

¹⁶ Let the words of my mouth and the whispers of my heart
find favor *in* your sight,*
for You, O God, are my strength and *my* protection.

James 5:13-20

5:13 Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise.

5:14 Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

5:15 The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

5:16 Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

5:17 Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

5:18 Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

5:19 My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another,

5:20 you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Are there some persons among you who are suffering from any misfortune? **They should be praying to God.** Are there any who are experiencing good fortune? **They should be singing songs of praise to God.** ¹⁴ Are there any among you who are sick? **Then it's time to call in the leaders of the church.** In the name of the Lord Jesus the church leaders will pray over the sick, while anointing them with oil. ¹⁵ With these prayers of faith the sick persons will experience healing, and the Lord Jesus will cause them to be raised up. **At the same time these sick persons will experience the forgiveness of sin.**

¹⁶ So, it is good to confess your sinfulness to one another, and to pray for each other. That way you will experience healing and forgiveness, **because the praying of righteous people is powerful and effective.** ¹⁷ Remember Elijah, a human being just like us, and how he prayed passionately that it would not rain? Well, for three and a half years no rain fell on the earth and no crops were produced. ¹⁸ Then Elijah prayed that it *would* rain, and God did send rain – **and the earth produced its crops again.**

My sisters and brothers, if any person in your church should wander from the Christian way of living, **then that person should be led back again.** And if that wayward person be brought back by another member of the church, ²⁰ you can be sure of this: whoever brings back sinners from the error of their ways, those sinners will be saved from death – **and their sin will be forgiven.**

Mark 9:38-50

9:38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

9:39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

9:40 Whoever is not against us is for us.

9:41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

9:42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

9:43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

9:45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

9:47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,

9:48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

9:49 "For everyone will be salted with fire.

9:50 Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

³⁸ One day the disciple John said to Jesus: "**Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop it, because that person is not one of us.**" ³⁹ But Jesus told his disciples not to stop anyone who performs a good deed in his name: "**Because such a person will not say anything against me – and will not hurt our cause.**" ⁴⁰ Then Jesus said: "**Anyone who is not against us, is for us!**" ⁴¹ In fact, Jesus told them, all those who give a drink of water in the name of Jesus to a thirsty person – "**that makes them part of us, followers of me.**" Then Jesus added: "**And those who do such kindness will be rewarded!**"

⁴² Then Jesus said about so-called adults who cause little ones to commit sin – little ones who believe in him: "**It would be better for those 'adults' if a huge cement block were hung around their necks and they were thrown into the ocean.**"

⁴³⁻⁴⁴ To help his listeners (and us) to understand further how serious a thing it is to negatively influence "little ones", Jesus then spoke these harsh words: "**If your hand causes you to sin** (like hitting a child) – **then cut off your hand!** – because it would be better for you to be a part of the Realm of God with just one hand than to end up with two hands on the Gehenna rubbish-pile where the burning fire never goes out. ⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ **And if your foot sins** (like kicking someone) – **then chop off your foot!** – because it would be better for you to be a part of the Realm of God on crutches than to have both feet and find yourself on the Gehenna rubbish-pile where the burning fire never goes out. ⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸ **And if your eye sins** (like looking mean at someone) – **then pluck out your eye!** – because it would be better for you to be a part of the Realm of God with just one eye than to have both eyes and find yourself on the Gehenna rubbish-pile where worms never die and the fire never goes out."

⁴⁹ Jesus then told his disciples: "**Everyone will be salted with fire.**" ⁵⁰ Then he said: "**Salt is a good thing, but if it loses its saltiness – it is worthless!**" Finally Jesus said: "**So, to live in peace with one another, – keep yourselves 'salty'!**"

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and Who is to come. ☩ Amen.

"Whoever is not against us is for us."

--Mark 9:40

Sermon titles are repugnant to me, but perhaps my meaning and that of the Scripture from which I am bound to preach each Sunday would be clearer were I to use some subject headings. Perhaps I should designate some of my sermons, 'A Sermon in Time of War.'

I arrived among you, four years ago next Friday, when our nation thought it had concluded the war in Afghanistan and when our government and Armed Forces were preparing for a possible invasion of Iraq. I tried to prepare myself and you spiritually and morally for

that invasion and the war that followed. Fear, theological pride, bitterness, cynicism, hypocrisy and bloody-mindedness continue to be deadly temptations that threaten to lead us into still deadlier sins. The Gospel of Jesus Christ contradicts all this. The Gospel clears our heads. As one ordained to the Apostolic Ministry and as your Pastor it is my vocation, task and responsibility to proclaim the Gospel faithfully and honestly. This is one such 'sermon in time of war.'

Our President gave an address on Friday in which he repeated a slogan of the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the ongoing war in Iraq, a slogan which he has used since shortly after the enemy attacks of September the 11th, 2001. The President said, with utter conviction and firmness of purpose to the nations of the world that, when it comes to the struggle against terrorism,

"You are either for us or you are against us, and we will treat you accordingly." It is under that motto, 'You are either for us or you are against us,' that our Chief Executive and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces has taken this nation from having essentially *no* policy to deal with those who commit acts of aggression against us and our allies, from doing as the previous administration did, simply treating each new outrage as a felony or misdemeanor, to now having a firm policy, a clear policy, a policy requiring very little intelligence to understand. 'You are either for us, or you against us, *and you will be treated accordingly.*' Taliban Afghanistan, a country and a regime that enthusiastically welcomed and harbored anti-Western terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, found out what that meant to its grief. So, too, did Iraq under that

admirer of King Nebudkanezzar, Saddam Hussein, who now sits in a cage.

It is not a new policy. It was the policy of ancient Rome and of the British Empire. It was the policy of numerous powerful and successful states down through history, and it is our policy. It means, basically, 'If you interfere with or harm America, America will take your country apart and hand it back to you in a paper bag.' We *may* be magnanimous in victory, but you may not like the way we rebuild your country. This message has been heard by those intelligent enough to pay attention. At least one rogue state which murdered American citizens *en masse* and which used to be a player in the game of international terror and arms trafficking, Libya, has taken the prudent course away from such involvements rather than become another Afghanistan. Saddam Hussein was

not so prudent. 'You are either for us, or you are against us, and we will treat you accordingly.' This policy seems to work, and it may make us feel safer, regretting, as I think I do, that it was not in place *before* 9-11-01.

The result of terrorism committed by Muslim extremists around the world and the result of the implementation of the Bush doctrine aforesaid is that now we think we know just who our enemy is. This produces feelings of nostalgia in historians, especially in Church historians like myself. Those of us who have always wanted to travel in a time-machine back to the era of the Crusades have only to turn on CNN, though the landscape now before our eyes in reports from Baghdad, Kabul, Gaza and Beirut resembles carnage of a modern order. There is Al-Qaeda, battling like the Moors of old to regain Spanish Andalusia, only now chivalry has been tossed out the

window by all sides—and the Spaniards, strange to say, cannot seem to find their courage. The Muslims are supposed to be our enemies once again, because Al-Qaeda & Co. says so and because we say, ‘You are either for us, or you are against us.’ They are definitely not *for* us except as converts or obedient subjects, therefore

But, hang on a second! I learned in a university course on Islam that ‘Muslim’ means one who submits to the will of God, that ‘Islam’ means submission to God’s will and that, as a polite Christian traveler in a Muslim country in the 1960’s or ‘70’s one was supposed to say, when asked about one’s religion, that ‘I am a Muslim, according to the school of the Messiah.’ As I sat and took notes way back then, I thought that it might be nice to meet a Muslim someday. I thought that we would have a lot in common. Years later, while serving as a

pastor in Europe, I did meet Muslims, quite a few of them, and they *seemed* universally respectful of me as a believer and as a cleric. I was even asked to say prayer of blessing over a special funeral bread for a Muslim refugee family living in my parsonage, and invited to take part in the burial of one of their children. The parents grieved, the mother especially, and the brothers and little sister of the 10-year-old who had been run over. They seemed like real people, like genuinely pious and devout people. And that was all just before the First Gulf War.

'You are either for us, or you are against us.'

Where does this statement and this attitude come from? I would guess that, had you or I not just read or heard today's Gospel text from Mark, we might have attributed the Bush doctrine to Christ Our Lord. Try asking friends or family or co-workers, "Who said, 'You're either for me

or against me'?" and see what answers you get. It does not matter whether you ask a Republican or a Democrat, a Libertarian or a Sewer Socialist, the whole world thinks that Jesus said it before George Bush. But Our Lord did *not* say that. Jesus did not say *that!*

What Jesus *did* say is, "Anyone who is not against us, is for us!" Who is 'us'? That includes all who do or want to do the healing work of God on this earth. This includes not only the chosen and commissioned Disciples and Apostles, but also those who have heard about God's power in Jesus and who try to do works of power through that name. That was what the stranger was doing, the one on whom the Disciples reported, tattling to Jesus that that man was over there trying to cast out evil spirits from disturbed people in Jesus' Name. Instead of becoming indignant, as they expected He would,

Jesus seems glad, ready to welcome the unnamed exorcist as a brother and co-worker, sight unseen. Jesus' policy toward others is rather different than the foreign policy we practice. It is different also, perhaps, from the 'policy' we practice toward one another.

'Whoever is not against us is for us!' What?!

That 'whoever' includes just about all of humanity, humanity then and humanity now. Like the freelance exorcist, most people *want* others to be well rather than sick, at peace rather than disturbed, forgiven and reconciled rather than full of guilt and at perpetual war with one another. This is the picture of the world Jesus' teaching here seems to suggest. There is an assumption of good will. Anne Frank was closer to Jesus than President Bush when she wrote from her hiding place in nearly the last

entry of her diary, "In spite of everything, I still believe that people are basically good at heart."

Rather than seeing most of humanity opposed to God's merciful will, Jesus sees in almost everyone a friend and ally. Jesus *chooses* to see them, to see *us* that way. To be sure, there were, there are and there will be plenty to oppose God's love, enough to condemn that love to death on a Cross and enough to carry out that sentence. Even many in the same crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem in triumph will turn on Him, but they will have to be *turned*, turned away from God, turned away from their first joy, turned against God by an alien, lying word, not the original Word they heard as they were adopted into God's Covenant, not the Word of God the world originally heard at the dawn of Creation.

In the darkest days of his imprisonment, at the hands of a tyrant who was as close to the incarnation of evil as anyone has ever come, Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw a vision of a world in which many men and women, *most* of them in fact, would do God's will of mercy and compassion without knowing it was God's will, or caring very much about that. He saw a future which might no longer remember Christianity or make much of a place for the Church, but a future in which the world would be held together by those who felt a responsibility for others and who acted on that responsibility, regardless of the sacrifice, men and women like many non-religious persons of great courage he had known in the political resistance to Nazism, some of them in his own family. These, too, were included in advance among the brothers and sisters of

Jesus Christ, according to Our Lord's own words, "Whoever is not against us is for us."

But just one more moment, please! That is not *our* experience of others and their will toward *us* in this world, is it? Just because others do not speak out openly in contradiction does not mean that I enjoy their support of my ideas and plans. I have certainly learned that in life, and not only here. It is not as if there were no real enemies, no real allies. What of those who have taken sides, as indicated in the President's dictum, and who have decided that they are *our* implacable enemy, that *we* as a people and perhaps as a civilization no longer deserve to live?

If our motto is the safe wisdom of a strong state, we may keep them at bay. And that, I say with the greatest respect for any Commander in Chief of this nation

in time of war and for the men and women, our sons and daughters, who serve under his command. That is perhaps the President's and this nation's highest task and calling in this hour, for we have had but a taste of the poison those few but sufficiently numerous evil men would like to make us drink. We may even defeat them, break their power to wage war or do further serious harm . . . for now, perhaps for a generation. 'You are either for us, or you are against us' is the inscription on a heavy burden for humanity to bear. It is a burden too heavy for us to bear forever.

The Gospel challenges us to dare to think and to live another way: 'Whoever is not against us, is *for* us.' The Good News of Jesus Christ challenges us to live *and to let others live* as though their hearts were as open as ours to mercy, to compassion, to brotherhood and to love.

In this time of war, the enemy we think is ours forever, a people who refer to themselves according to their desire to submit to the will of an all-compassionate God, let us expect to find fellow workers in the Kingdom of God among them, and we will find such brothers and sisters, people who love their children and grandchildren, justice and a just and righteous God as much as we. ☩ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ☩ Amen.

