

Jude 1:1-13

January 31, 2010 – 4th SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Contend for the Faith

† **Warned by the example of godless men (vv.3-13)**

† **Called, loved and kept by God (vv.1-3)**

In the name of Jesus, our brother, dear family of God:

The *Metro Lutheran* newspaper comes complimentary to Lutheran pastors, but rarely makes it into our house. This week I paused to read in the garage because a stranger had asked what happened at Central Lutheran last summer. They're finally replacing the 900 pound cross left hanging from the steeple in that freak tornado that came out of nowhere. Weather service kept saying, "We don't usually get tornados from this kind of storm." The woman said her mother and sister called from other parts of the country because the ELCA was voting to permit practicing homosexuals as pastors. Did the *Metro Lutheran* mention this? Of course not! Previous reports made it clear Central Lutheran did not consider the targeted tornado to be an act of God. But donations to replace their trees? Those are "acts of God."

Such things I would rather not discuss. As Jude says, "*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share,*" happy thoughts, "*it was necessary to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*" (literal) The Lord wants us to recognize sin for what it is, but not like blind Pharisees. Next week we will discuss the second half of Jude's little letter. But today look first in the middle. Our gracious God wants us to be...

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What I saw as a boy at the docks with my Dad in the Charleston harbor, you can see on Minnesota lakes too. Only add the salt water and those little dead fish floating in there, sea foam must be one of the most disgusting substances on earth. It's not like a root beer float where you want to taste it. Sea foam slips silently in on the tide. Stir up wind and wave, it just gets worse. It's useless. And that is how the Lord's brother Jude describes the **godless men** who slip quietly into congregations with an agenda.

They are nothing new. Their "*condemnation was written about long ago.*" They've been active ever since Eve let the serpent deceive her into thinking life would be better without God's rules. Does this sound familiar? "*They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.*" "*You already know all this*" from our study of Romans. Speak of God's forgiveness in Christ, and someone always concludes, "Great! My sins are already forgiven. I can do what I want because God will forgive me." Paul asks. "*Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*" (Romans 6:1-4 NIV)

Christians can always raise another cross on their steeple. But what does it matter if we know something is wrong, but do it anyway? If what God calls "sin," is defined as "love" by sinful man, "*wild waves*" are foaming. Jude reminds us, "*The Lord delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe.*" "They must have averaged at least 82 funerals a day for 40 years!"¹

No one should have been surprised. Angels created good decided that serving God was not good enough and rebelled. God has special "*chains*" for spirit beings that keep them confined "*in darkness...for judgment on the great Day.*" God's Word for them is like a chain on a junkyard dog.

¹ Jeske, M. A. (2002). *James, Peter, John, Jude*. The People's Bible (331). Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House.

When law and gospel, sin and grace are proclaimed from Christian pulpits, the chain is short and souls are safe. But when preachers make excuses for sin, the chain gets too long on Satan and the demons. Souls cannot run as fast as the dogs of hell. God gets angry when preachers endanger His children this way. We cannot say divorce is less of a sin than homosexuality. We cannot suggest that the sin of pride is better than lustful desires or that greed is somehow less disgusting to God. God wants us to be **Warned**.

There is a place where you can see it. God's wrath came down so hard He smashed the entire plain below sea level, covered the cities with salt water and rendered all the land no good for farming or anything else. You've heard of Sodom and Gomorrah. Jude's literal translation of their acting out is as gross and disgusting as anything in the Bible. It boggles the mind that some theologians seriously suggest the real sin of Sodom was inhospitality toward angels. How much more clear can God be? The Holy Spirit inspired Jude to conclude: *"In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire."* It comes from using God's grace as a license for immorality.

What they lack is reverence toward God. The archangel Michael showed God-fearing reverence by letting God rebuke Satan for trying to steal Moses' body. The anointed David did the same thing running from King Saul. David's men kept telling him to kill his enemy every chance he got. David left it up to God. *"Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals – these are the very things that destroy them."*

For all their talk of hate-crimes they miss the hatred of Cain who killed his brother Abel in spite of all the LORD's warnings for Cain to admit his sin and repent. Balaam did not listen to his donkey's rebuke or note the fact that he could not curse God's people no matter how much money King Balak offered. For money Balaam finally found a way to get God's people to sin sexually. His money died with him. Likewise Korah out there in the desert complaining that Moses and Aaron weren't the only ones with God's Spirit. Irreverence against God acts out in disrespect against the LORD's chosen leaders. Watch that cloud of dust in the desert. That's where the earth opened up and swallowed Korah and his wife and kids and all his followers, then closed over the top. They went down into the grave alive.

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You think God is too harsh? *"God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day."* (Psalm 7:11 NIV) He will punish every sin, the only question is when? This is why God gave us a Good Shepherd to lay down His life for the sheep. The *"righteous judge"* punished our sin on His own Son – so deep and deadly sin for us, so rich and free God's all-forgiving grace. He calls us away from Satan and sinful desires, consciously or from differences in our body. God warns us in love, then comforts us with kindness that we are **Called, loved and kept by God**.

Paul agreed in that classic passage that calls, *"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* (1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NIV) God's forgiveness frees us from the prison of sin.

Jude knew all this. Jude and his brother James were not apostles, but half brothers of Jesus. At first they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah – until after His death and resurrection. Here Jude would rather call himself *"a servant of Jesus Christ and a brother of James."* Like them, we too were *"called...out of darkness into [God's] wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). Undeserved it is, but we are *"loved by God"* and literally *"guarded by Jesus Christ"* against the assaulting chains of Satan and sin. We have God's heart of *"mercy,"* His prevailing *"peace,"* His eternal *"love"* that will not let us go. Steeples are falling. God's love still stands. **Contend for the Faith** in humility and repentance. Amen.