

Be at Peace with Each other

✠ **United in truth** (vv.38-41)

✠ **Saved by faith** (vv.42-48)

✠ **Salted with fire** (vv.49-50)

In the name of Jesus, God's love and **Peace** for hurting hearts, dearly beloved of God:

Last Sunday Pastor Gawrisch introduced us to a heartless situation Jesus encountered with His disciples. He had told them about His suffering, death and resurrection, but they didn't want to hear it. After failing to help a demon-possessed boy, they were travelling back to Capernaum, arguing about who's the greatest. So heartless! But that's why Jesus was headed toward Jerusalem. He first wanted to make **Peace** between us selfish sinners and holy God by His own selfless sacrifice on the cross. But that same all-forgiving grace teaches and empowers us to **Be at Peace with Each other**. His grace gets us...

✠ **United in truth** (vv.38-41)

See, it's not just us Baby Boomers who want to make everything "about *me*." Generation X'ers and Millennials might think, "We're better off because it's all about *me and my friends*." Actually, I admired my own kids who grew up as Millennials born from 1980 to 2000. They're so loyal to their friends. I really loved being their dad other teens came home with them. Sweet kids! Good times!

But never underestimate the insidious nature of hell's fallen angel to warp something good into something terrible. Jesus says that out of our hearts "*come evil thoughts...*" (7:23) Our sinful nature, that bad part we all wish we didn't have, is right there ready and willing to screw up everything.

Like Jesus' disciples roadside arguments about who's the greatest show how little we understand His mission to seek and save the lost. Being served always seems better than serving others. Jesus used a little child to show who really is the greatest in His kingdom. Let's humbly listen and learn.

Today's opening verse (9:38) shows Jesus' disciples at it again. Unable to drive out that demon from the man's son, they now try to stop another man from driving out demons in Jesus' name. Why? "He does not follow us." **Each** wants to be Lord and master instead of Jesus. Maybe it's not all about "*me*," but why can't it be about "*me and my friends*"? Churches and pastors fall to professional or denominational pride whether we're convinced of sound doctrine and practice or fall into the "ecumaniac" (Habek) camp of "forget doctrine; let's all just get along." Our cherished fellowship in the WELS can slide into a sick competition that robs God of His glory and silences the Good News for us. Jesus calls us to repentance with this: "*Do not stop him,*" Jesus said. "*No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.*" Yes, God gives rewards of grace as His **Peace** brings us together, **United in truth** and...

✠ **Saved by faith** (vv.42-48)

Can you handle the truth? Only by following Jesus and kneeling at the cross.

Jesus puts this in shocking terms to show we can only be **Saved by** grace through **faith**. To all the Christian rationalists who insist that children and infants can't believe, Jesus gives this stern warning: "*And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck.*" Bring the babies to Jesus by Baptism.

“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”

Who would purposely cut off a hand or foot or gauged out an eye? Jesus already told us the real problem comes ***“from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.”*** (Mark 7:21f NIV84) But hell is a real place where every outstanding sin must be punished. It’s not an end of existence, but an existence without end in torment of undying worms and unquenchable fire. Some men scoff, “At least I’ll be with my friends!” Yes, but you won’t see them in that outer darkness Jesus calls a ***“fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*** (Matthew 13:42 NIV84) He does not want you there.

So how do you amputate sin from your life? Start with the fact that you are **Saved by faith**. Let me share two illustrations from my own teen years working on my Granddad’s ranch in Central Oregon.

Some of you have used chainsaws to cut down trees. First the face cut wedge to aim the fall in the right direction. Then the back cut to finish. But sometimes the weight of the tree pinches the cut closed on the saw blade. It’s embarrassing when the motor can’t turn the chain. If you can’t push the tree over, sometimes you can drive wedges into the cut. But they get stuck too. It’s like your relationships when you’re really trying to make good with your friends but nothing seems to work. Pride drives wedges you can’t get out. But then comes a gentle breeze in the top of the tree. It bends ever so slightly so wedges and saw come loose. The gentle breeze of God’s Word can even topple the tree. Trust God. Believe!

✠ **Salted with fire (vv.49-50)**

For mortals in every generation, easier said than done. In fact, we cannot come to faith or decide for Christ until His Gospel makes us alive inside. We can’t grow in faith unless God works His awesome Word and sacrament. Jesus calls this being **Salted with fire**. And ***“everyone will be salted with fire.”***

Roman wants this to be about purgatory. But Jesus said to the dying thief on the next cross, ***“I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.”*** (Luke 23:43 NIV84) And just before Jesus died, He said, ***“It is finished.”*** It’s not finished if we have to go to some purging place to get rid of more guilt.

Here’s a better explanation that squares with Scripture and comforts your spirit. ***“Salt”*** is God’s Word which purifies and preserves us as salt prevents spoilage and makes meat taste better. ***“Salt is good”*** especially if you’re eating fresh food. One doctor told a mother whose son had learning disabilities to put more salt on his food. Salt is needed for brain function. God uses the ***“fire”*** of affliction to help us pay attention to His Word. Modern preachers try to take the sting out of God’s ***“salt,”*** but ***“if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”***

Last tree falling story: My Granddad’s hired man trained loggers with axes before chainsaws. But there was one tree he would not cut with branches heavy toward Granddad’s house. Naturally, that was the first tree I chose. Dummy me! Deep face cut to fall parallel with the fence which needed to be moved. But I watched that tree spin on its stump and fall 90° across the fence, over the road just a few yards from his house. As I was limbing it out, Granddad’s Mercedes comes slowly up “Bide-a-Wee” Lane from visiting my Mom. “I’d better face the music,” I thought. He didn’t get mad, just asked a few questions. Then left me with this: “Don’t let it make you afraid to cut the next one.” There were plenty more.

That’s how God’s grace sets us at **Peace with Each other**. When wedges trap our relationships and mistakes hurt the cause, Christ comes quietly to remind us, ***“Be of good cheer. Your sins are all forgiven.”*** Then even our troubles help us as we are **Salted with fire** – growing tall and strong together. For this we humbly praise the saving Name of Jesus. **Be at Peace with Each other**. Amen.