

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for the sermon is the Gospel heard before, Mark 9:36-43,45,47-50.

**36 He took a little child and set him among them. He put His arms around him and told them, 37 “Whoever welcomes one of the little children like this one in My name welcomes Me. Whoever welcomes Me welcomes not Me but the One who has sent Me.” 38 John told Jesus, “Teacher, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out demons in Your name. We tried to stop him because he was not one of us.” 39 Jesus said, “Do not try to stop him! For no one who works a miracle in My name will be able soon afterwards to speak evil of Me. 40 For he who is not against us is for us. 41 For truly, I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ will certainly not lose his reward. 42 “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life maimed than to go into hell with two hands, into the fire that will never be put out. \*1 45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. \*2 47 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, 48 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. 49 “For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good. However, if salt loses its saltiness, how will you make it taste salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another!”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us in your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.  
Dear Friends in Christ,  
Peace be with you.

Hell is far worse than anything we can experience in this world. It's so terrifying that many people refuse to believe that it exists. Even more people believe that it so distressing that we shouldn't talk about it. Today's reading from Mark's Gospel account forces us to talk about hell because Jesus talked about hell. He said, "**43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life maimed than to go into hell with two hands, into the fire that will never be put out. 45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47 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, 48 where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out.**" (Mark 9:43, 45, 47-48) Jesus described hell with terms such as unquenchable fire and undying worms. He also said it was better to lose body parts than to enter hell with an intact body.

Jesus then spoke of one of the many reasons we deserve to go to hell. He spoke about causing someone or something to sin. Jesus said, **42 “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out!**

The Greek behind the phrase causing someone to sin is from the word that gives English the word scandalize. Whoever scandalizes one of these little ones who believe in me ... If your hand scandalizes you ... If your foot scandalizes you ... If your eye scandalizes you ... throw it into the sea. Cut it off. Gouge it out. Do whatever it takes to get rid of the scandal.

Notice also that Jesus used the word if. Although that word is only two letters long, it's very important. Yes, the eyes see the scandal. Yes, the feet take us to the scandal. Yes, the hands participate in the scandal.

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<sup>1</sup> For 9:44 in some manuscripts, see v. 48.

<sup>2</sup> For 9:46 in some manuscripts, see v. 48.

Nevertheless, are any of these body parts the root cause of the scandal? Jesus said that if - they are, we should get rid of them. But did any of these body parts participate in the actual decision process that led to the scandal?...NO!

Ultimately, none of these body parts had any choice. It's the mind that interprets the information from the eye and distributes orders to the feet and the hands. The eyes, the feet, and the hands have no choice. It's the mind that's the true source of the scandal. In the Gospel reading from a few weeks ago, we heard Jesus say, **21 For from inside, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual sins, thefts, murders, 22 adulteries, sinful desires, greed, wickedness, cheating, shameless lust, a jealous eye, slander, pride, and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside, and 'defile' a person.**" [Mark 7:21-23] So it's our thoughts, feelings, desires, and so on that are the true cause of scandal. And, if Jesus is right about removing the cause of scandal from our lives ... and He is ... then it's our inner being that has to go. That means that we must die.

It's at this point that I begin to wonder if Jesus hasn't painted Himself into a corner. He has said that in order to enter eternal life, we must remove everything that scandalizes us, but at an earlier time in His ministry, He taught that main source of scandal is our inner being ... our essence ... the thing that makes me ... me. Has Jesus really gotten us to the point that we must understand that God gives us eternal life by destroying the self? Has He really said that God gives us eternal life by putting us to death?

This is one of those marvellous paradoxes that God gives to us. In order to avoid death, we must die. Like I've said before it doesn't sound right, does it? You see, that's the reason that God must do the work of rescuing us from sin and death. It's God who must put us to death in such a way that we live forever.

The earlier words of Jesus give us a hint at how this might work. He said, **"If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.** While this is horrible, crushing law, there is also Gospel as well.

Here's a hint. Consider the teaching of Martin Luther in the Small Catechism: ***What does such baptizing with water indicate? It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.***

Do you believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins? Then you are one of those little ones who believes in Jesus. Do you also have a sinful nature that constantly leads you into scandal? Martin Luther often talked about that sinful nature and he called it the Old Adam. His words tell us to remember our baptism every day. Every day our baptism ties a stone around the neck of our old sinful nature and throws it into the deep waters of baptism.

Now, although people call us Lutherans, we don't believe in something just because Martin Luther said so. Instead, we follow Martin Luther's example and believe in things because we can find them in God's Word ... the Bible. So where did Luther get his teaching of drowning the Old Adam?

One of the places we find this teaching is in the words that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the Romans. **"Or do you not know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that, as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might begin to live a new life."** [Romans 6:3-4]

The Apostle Paul then went on to say, **."If we have been planted together with Him in the likeness of His death, then we shall be planted together with Him also in the likeness of His resurrection. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with Him, that our sinful bodies might be rendered powerless, in order that we might not be slaves to sin any longer. 7 For the one who has died has been declared free from sin. 8 If we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 because we know that, since Christ was raised from the dead, He will not die again. Death no longer has any mastery over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives He lives to**

**God. 11 So you too, reckon yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!"** [Romans 6:5–11]

These words teach us that our old self ... what Luther called the Old Adam ... was crucified with Jesus. The sinful corruption that was already part of us at conception along with all the sins that we actually committed were crucified with Jesus. As Jesus hung on the cross, He took on all the guilt and the punishment of our sin. It all died with Him.

But Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose from the dead and when He rose, He left our sin and its guilt in the grave. Since His body no longer carries our sin, it's immortal.

Our Baptism joins us to Christ so that we died with Jesus. But it also promises that we live with Him. We are now dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." [Romans 6:11.] Although we must pass through death, on the Last day, Jesus shall raise us just as He rose. The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. **53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.** [1 Corinthians 15:52–53.]

It's utterly impossible for us to cut off the true cause of scandal in our lives. Even if we killed ourselves, we would only accompany our scandal into the eternal punishment **where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies.** Only God can deal with the scandal in our lives. He did this by sending His Son into the world to take up our human flesh and suffer the punishment of our scandal in Himself. Only in this way can He put us to death in order to give us eternal life.

In the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are already **"to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus!"** [Romans 6:11.] We already have eternal life in Jesus, but we cannot experience it to its fullest while we live in this world. **"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."** [1 Corinthians 13:12.] **16 For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead who are in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord.** [1 Thessalonians 4:16–17. Amen

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

### **Prayer of the Church 19th Sunday after Pentecost 30 September 2018**

**P** In joyful confidence that our heavenly Father hears our requests and answers them according to His good and gracious will, let us pray for the Church, the flock redeemed by Christ the crucified, and for the needs of all people.

*Brief Silence*

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, for the mercy shown to us in Your Son, Jesus Christ. By His life-giving death and resurrection, now proclaimed in Your church, forgiveness of sins is freely distributed among us. Grant us faithfully to proclaim and bring this good news into our midst, and make us bold to tell one and all of the hope that is in us.... Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, for by His once-for-all sacrifice Your Son has brought peace by reconciling us to You. Grant that same peace continually within our congregations and where there is division, grant healing; where there is grumbling send forbearance, so that our very lives may show forth the abundance of Your grace.... Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, for Your goodness knows no bounds. You daily provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant us hearts that are content, whether we are in plenty or in want. Teach us to look solely to You for all our needs, and instill in us true thankfulness for all Your benefits....

Lord, in Your mercy,  
**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, for You have commanded us to pray and promised to hear us. Open Your ears to our cries for mercy on behalf of the sick [*especially* and all those who suffer needs of the body. Grant healing according to Your will, teaching us to bear our infirmities with a patient trust that all things work together for good for those who love You.  
Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, You have commanded Your church to pray for labourers for the harvest. Instill in the young men in our congregations a love for Your name, that from their number You might raise up some to serve as pastors to Your flock. Give receptive hearts to older men as well to consider serving in Your church.... Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Blessed are You, O Lord, Your invitation we joyfully gather around the banquet table of Your Son Jesus to feast on His life-giving body and blood. Grant us the sure confidence of sins forgiven and fellowship restored within the body of Your Son, the Church.... Lord, in Your mercy,

**C** **hear our prayer.**

**P** Father, the Source of all life and the life that never ends, receive our prayers this day that we offer to You in the name of Your beloved Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C** **Amen.**