

In the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen.

Love and marriage, sings Frank Sinatra, go together like a horse and carriage. There are things, thoughts, ideas that just seem to go together: mom and apple pie, for example. You can probably think of some more. How about this one for Christians: faith and works.

And there does seem to be an order in most of them: love is supposed to come before marriage; a horse certainly goes before a carriage; moms come before apple pies, after all they make them. And so it is with faith and works. Faith comes before works. Indeed, good works are impossible without faith, for “*without faith it is impossible to please [God]*” (Heb 11:6). C. F. W. Walther teaches us that “the Word of God is not rightly divided when ... sanctification [is preached] first and then justification; ... good works first and then grace” (Walther, Law and Gospel, Thesis VII).

Moreover, we know that there are no works of our own before we become Christians that prepare us to receive God’s grace. We are saved simply by grace through faith, pure gift of God, not by our doing (Eph 2:8-9). “*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*” (Rom 10:17).

Scripture teaches us, we confess, that “people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works,” but rather that they “freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake” (Aug Con Art IV). Moreover, this faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, working “through the Word and Sacraments,” “not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake” (Aug Con Art V). And then we confess that from this faith flow good works: “our churches teach that this faith is bound to bring forth good fruit”; indeed, “it is necessary to do good works commanded by God” (Aug Con Art VI). We do good works, but we don’t merit salvation because of them.

All this is said to forestall any suggestion that today’s Gospel elevates Jesus’ mercy ministry over His ministry “*to save His people from their sins*” (Matt 1:21), for today’s Gospel is full of Jesus’ compassion and mercy.

Right away at the beginning of this Gospel lesson, Jesus goes to the house of Simon Peter with the four we heard Him call into discipleship earlier. Jesus there encounters Peter’s mother-in-law, sick with fever. Jesus went to her, took her by the hand, and healed her. And you can tell this is a miraculous healing, for right away, after the fever left her; she didn’t have to regain her strength, but immediately “*she began to serve them.*”

And Jesus isn’t done. Whether because they heard about His latest healing or about the power and authority He had demonstrated with the man with an unclean

spirit in the text immediately before our Gospel, *“the whole city”* brought *“to [Jesus] all who were sick or oppressed by demons.”* They all *“gathered together at the door,”* as Jesus *“healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.”*

Now, I can hear many exclaim, “yes, this is what Jesus is all about, and Christianity, too.” He is all about lifting up the downtrodden, caring for the sick, welcoming the stranger, etc.” And, to be sure, part of Jesus’ ministry was showing mercy to those in need — as people cried out, *“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us,”* Jesus did (Luke 17:13). Moreover, He showed His church, not only by His call to love and serve our neighbors, but also by His example, how she, too, ought to show mercy. In his pamphlet, *“The Church Is a Mercy Place,”* Pastor Harrison warns us: “we dare not miss the fact that love and mercy toward the needy mark the church’s corporate life. If not, it risks denial of the very Gospel and sacraments which constitute it.”

Therefore, we are to be about these things, even if we do not do them as well as we should, and no doubt, we do not do them as well as Jesus did. Repent, therefore, for “love and mercy” do “mark the church’s ... life.”

Nevertheless, these acts of mercy are not what Jesus is about. Not only are they not His main mission, but for Jesus they could even detract from what He came to do, what He came to proclaim. You recall, in our Gospel, Jesus got up early to go out to a desert place to pray after a day of showing mercy to the multitudes. On another occasion, after Jesus had fed the multitudes, He withdrew to a mountain to be by Himself. Then, they had wanted to make Him king (John 6:15). This time, it’s not clear what the people may have wanted to do with Jesus, but it likely would have diverted Him from His mission.

Of course, His ultimate mission of ascending the cross for the salvation of the world was still a few years off — for that *“hour had not yet come”* (John 7:30). In the meantime, He had another mission—to continue as He began: preaching, *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). And so, when Peter and the others found Him, He said to them, *“Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”*

Now that same proclamation of the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation and the coming of the kingdom of God in Jesus continues to be proclaimed by the Church, but we in the full knowledge of the cost: *“not ... perishable things such as silver or gold, but ... the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot”* (1 Pet 1:18-19). We still preach and teach for that is what Christ sent His church to do — preach Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:23). We still baptize and proclaim a baptism into the death of Christ (Rom 6:3). We still preach *“repentance*

*and the forgiveness of sins in His name*” (Luke 24:47), that is, through faith in Christ Jesus, for even so Jesus sent His church (John 20:21). We still proclaim the Lord’s death for us, “*as often as [we] eat this bread [of Jesus’ supper] and drink the cup*” (1 Cor 11:26) for Jesus said, “*Do this*” (1 Cor 11:24, 25). We still preach: “*believe in [this] gospel*” (Mark 1:15) — faith; and we preach that we have been made new creations by God’s workmanship, made to walk in good works (Eph 2:10), besought to do them (Rom 12:1, 9-21) — and works. Faith and works.

Love and marriage, horse and carriage, mom and apple pie, Law and Gospel, faith and works — these things do go together, and they have an order to them. God grant that we hear Jesus’ preaching — it’s why He came out — and believe in Him in whom “*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses*” (Eph. 1:7); and God grant that we may “*ever walk with Jesus, [following] His example pure*” (LSB685) of love and mercy toward our neighbors. The Lord strengthen you for this life by word and sacrament.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.