

Jude 17-25

November 7, 2015 + Compline
Doxology Encore + Chiara Center, Springfield, Illinois
Pastor Tim Pauls

In the name of Jesus. Amen

"You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ," says Jude. "They said to you, 'In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.'" There will be scoffers in the last time: and if Jude's hearers were living in the last time, then you're certainly living in the, um, last-er time. You're not waiting for the time when there will be scoffers who follow their own ungodly passions, nor has it just recently arrived. It might just seem like it has because we've been blessed with a relative peace in our own land, where Christianity had enjoyed tolerance and favor until now.

Now, it's pretty evident that you're up against scoffers who follow their own ungodly passions.

It comes in a variety of ways. Last spring, I engaged in a bit of a discussion with a local minister on her blog. She's a vocal advocate for same-sex marriage, and was busy praising the state for punishing Christian bakers and florists for not wanting to participate in them. I'll spare you the details of the back-and-forth, but for two. In the course of that discussion, I suggested that out of respect for conscience a same-sex couple might just go to a different bakery where they felt more welcome. She considered my opinion to be bigotry; so after a few more exchanges, she publicly advised me that she would no participate in discussion with me, and so I should just...go to a different blog where I felt more welcome. You've got to love irony.

The most startling thing she said was this, though. When I wrote that the Church wasn't bigoted, but it was there to offer forgiveness to all repentant sinners, she asserted firmly that the Church is not about forgiving sins: that's God's business, not ours.

So there you go: it's not just that you're bigoted and unloving for calling sin sinful; according to that church and pastor, you've departed from God's will by being about the forgiveness of sins. That, my friends, is scoffing by those who follow ungodly passions. They are a worldly people. They are devoid of the Spirit; and yet they are doing what they do while claiming the name and blessing of Jesus.

It's disheartening. All of this is the devil's design to knock the wind out of you even more. Things weren't going all that swimmingly for Lutheran congregations before this tidal wave of immorality. For years, experts and consultants have advised that the Church needs a facelift because the forgiveness of sins just doesn't sound terribly relevant. Now it's not just irrelevant, but many declare it to be wrong, even evil.

When castles were besieged in the Middle Ages, the assault took place above ground in plain sight; but where the ground permitted, engineers would tunnel underneath the walls, setting off fires or explosions so that the fortress caved from within. The public jeers against the Church are the frontal assault, but beware the underground attack. It's the scoffing of your sinful nature, the restless fear that what we do is irrelevant, out of step, and that maybe we should be doing something else as the Church instead. We've got to do something, but what?

Jude says "what." He counsels you to keep yourselves in the love of God. How? By building yourselves up in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit and waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ. Build yourselves up in the holy faith, he says; and what joy is in

those words, for he counsels you to immerse yourself in the Word of the living God. Pray in the Holy Spirit, he says; and what joy again, for the Lord delights that you commend your cares to Him and rub His promises in His ears, so much so that He has appointed the Holy Spirit to intercede on your behalf with groanings too deep for words. And wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has already come and redeemed you; so as you await His coming in glory, you rejoice that you know where He is found now: in His Word, in Baptism and in His Supper. As you thus cling to the Word, you know that you are kept in the love of God. He calls you beloved children, no matter what scoffers might say.

What are the beloved children of God to do? Jude says, "Have mercy on those who doubt, save others by snatching them out of the fire, show mercy with fear, and hate even the garment stained by the flesh." As those who have heard and know of God's grace in Christ, you speak it to others. You declare the promises of God to those who doubt, that they might be assured of His grace in Jesus; for it is only by that grace that any are snatched out of the fire, delivered from hell to heaven. You show mercy with fear, hating the garment stained by the flesh: rather than countenance sin, you mercifully preach the Law so that sinners might be aware of God's wrath and rightly fear it; and you mercifully preach the Gospel so that they might hear that Christ has died so that they might be forgiven.

That is what the Church is to be about in the last times, says Jude. Hear the Word and be forgiven, speak the Word so that others might be forgiven too. Be where Jesus is for you, in His Word and Sacraments; and then tell others that Jesus is there for them too.

That is what you are about; so where you are visited by fear and anxiety, repent. You are not wrong, for you speak the truth of God. You are not irrelevant, but most relevant so that devil and world must shut you up. You are not trying to take the world back to the dark ages, but you are declaring Jesus Christ who delivers sinners out of darkness and into His marvelous light.

I recently had occasion to read Luther's essay on the seven marks of the Church: where you see these things, you have found the people of God. They are possession of the Word, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because it's in these means that Jesus is present; also the office of the ministry and the exercise of the Office of the Keys so that Christ's grace might be given out; prayer, praise and thanksgiving because the people of God respond to His Word; and then suffering under the cross because the world will hate it.

This is not what the Church looks like only 16th-century Germany, according to Luther. This is what the Church is to be at all times, according to the Lord in His Word. Next Sunday when you're back home, remember Jude and those marks of the Church. I'm betting that next Sunday, it will be a service of the Word where the pastor preaches Law and Gospel, where Baptism and the Lord's Supper are remembered, if not celebrated. The absolution will ring out, the Keys will be exercised, and the people of God will sing praise despite their sufferings.

This is not an old-fashioned, out-of-step tradition in need of a paradigm shift. This is what the Lord has gathered you to do in this world, at this time, for all who will hear around you.

Scoffers will scoff, and they are always loud as they try to drown out the cries of the penitent. Let them scoff and make known their hearts, but do not be afraid of them. They will not sit on the judgment seat. Christ will, and He has already died for your sins so that He might declare you fully pardoned. He has already cleansed your garment by His blood so that you stand righteous and holy and forgiven. He visits you in His means of grace, keeping you in God's love; and He honors you with the privilege of declaring His mercy in this unmerciful scoffing, world.

You are His, His by His sacrifice, His by His death, His by His blood.

The Lord Jesus Christ keep you from stumbling and present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy. To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and even now in this wicked time, and forever. Amen