



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

www.mzluth.org

August 15, 2021

Pastor Randy Ott

12th Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [1 Kings 19:3-8](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 34

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Hebrews 5:11-6:3](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 6:41-51](#)

Faith Responds by Resisting Materialism

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

I didn't know it until I was driving back from the Twin Cities on Thursday but it was National Middle Child Day. I had no idea but I heard that on the radio as I was driving home and I thought it was kind of interesting because I was in the Twin Cities to visit our middle child, Tim, and his wife, Sheila. A week from yesterday, Tim and his wife, Sheila, are moving to the U.S. Virgin Islands. Tim took a new job there. He will be brewing for Leatherback Brewery on the Virgin Islands. So we went over to visit. I drove over from here on Wednesday and stayed Wednesday night. Paula drove over from South Dakota. We took Tim and Sheila out to eat. Then it was one of those nights when you have the idea that you're not going to see them for a long time, so you stay up way too late talking about any and everything just because you don't want to go to bed and you don't want the night to end.

So when I was driving back here on Thursday, I was falling asleep as I was driving because I stayed up way too late, and I called Paula to talk just so I could hopefully stay awake a little better as she was driving back to South Dakota. We talked about how much fun it was and then we talked also about how we had always said we were going to do this more often, go see Tim and Sheila. We always said it, but we only did it a very few times. Now those chances are gone. It makes you kind of sad that you didn't take advantage of these opportunities that were put in front of you because quite frankly you are too busy at times with day-to-day life (the things you need to do, the places you need to be, what you need to get done) that you don't always take the time for the things that are really important and meaningful.

I wonder how often we do that in our spiritual life. We are here today I'm assuming, unless a spouse dragged you here, because you love Jesus. You know He is the most important thing in your life. You know He lived and died in your place. You know that when you lay your head on a pillow for the last time, you are going to wake up in heaven because Jesus did this for you. Your God acted before eternity so that you would spend eternity with Him in heaven. That's the most precious and most important thing in the world. But I wonder how often we get so caught up in day-to-day living that we don't live as though the spiritual is the most important thing and make time for the spiritual things. The material things (materialism) can become all-consuming in our daily life (what we need to get done, what we have to do) and then we can get in kind of a rut that we don't grow to be as close to God as God would have us be.

I wonder if that's what the letter to the Hebrews is for as the Holy Spirit had him write his letter to them and for us today. Look at what he says to them. He had just been talking about a priest and Jesus is a Priest in the order of Melchizedek, his eternal priesthood. I'll grant you, it's a deep subject. But he says to them, "***We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.***" "You're content just to say 'I know who Jesus is and what He has done for me' and you're not taking the time to grow and to grow to maturity in your faith. You are content to live on spiritual milk instead of moving on to solid food about the deeper truths that God expresses in Scripture." I think one of the reasons this often happens is because we get so consumed with materialism; the things we need to do to live and the things that are there in front of us. Those things aren't bad. They are blessings from God, yet sometimes we get so focused on the blessings that we forget to acknowledge God behind the blessings.

Maybe it's family. Family is a wonderful blessing from God. Recreation—it's a wonderful blessing from God. Time to rest or relax—a wonderful blessing from God. Jesus Himself did it. He went off by Himself so often in the Gospels. If you've read the Gospels, you know He took time to rest and relax. But then you also know that some of those periods were devoted to time with His Father and being close to His Father. Even in those times, the spiritual was still in the forefront.

I don't think we always do that. I think our rest and relaxation, which is a wonderful gift from God, sometimes trumps our being close to God. I think rushing our family, our children, here, there and everywhere (which can be a wonderful blessing from God) at times keeps us from moving on past the elementary teachings to spiritual maturity. We, as sinners, often sin and don't respond in faith by keeping the spiritual the most important things as God tells us to.

As a congregation, I think it's important for us to look at this and think about this. We can spend a lot of time focusing on things that enable us to share the Gospel of Christ as opposed to focusing on the Gospel of Christ itself. We can talk about different things and disagree about different things the congregation should be doing in THIS physical

thing (material thing) or THAT material thing and then we can end up spending so much time talking about those that we forget to plant Gospel seeds in our personal mission field to talk about Jesus, which is why God has us here. He doesn't have us here just to debate what the best material thing is for our congregation to do, as though that's service to God alone. Yes, it is service to God, ***But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*** ([Matthew 6:33](#)). God tells us the priority is always the spiritual.

Do we at times get so caught up in the material or physical sides of a congregation that we forget God put us here because we're supposed to share Jesus to encourage one another, to build one another up, to reach out to those who are straying, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to bring those who don't know Jesus to this incredible gift of faith? This is what He has called each and every one of us to do.

We've been looking at that on Sunday mornings in the basement as we look at the "one another" passages. Last week we focused on "forgive one another," which I still think is incredibly hard. I think it's easy and natural to carry a grudge against someone that has hurt you, but to forgive them in your heart? Even if you can't announce God's forgiveness to them because they haven't repented, but to forgive them in your heart and not carry that against them, that's hard! Especially if you're one of the spiritually mature because even as the spiritually mature you still have a sinful nature and your sinful nature wants to say "Hey! You get there! You're at church! You're at Bible study! I read my Bible every day! They should too and if they can't, well to hell with them! I'm not going to use my time to go talk to them." Which is the exact opposite of what God calls us to do, isn't it? As the mature, He calls us to imitate Him, to be little Christs, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to love as we have been loved. ***"As I have loved you, so you must love one another"*** ([John 13:34](#)). How many times did Jesus say that on the night He was betrayed? That says we who consider ourselves spiritually mature, if you think of yourself as spiritually mature, you have an obligation to those who are still on spiritual milk to lovingly, kindly and patiently encourage them to stay close to Jesus; to lovingly, kindly and patiently point them to God's love for them in Christ as they struggle. Sometimes struggles with the material things of life are incredibly hard and difficult. But we have a God who is so loving and kind and gracious. We have a God who is so desperate for others to know that. And He has entrusted to us the Ministry of Reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors as though Christ was making His appeal through us. That's what God calls every Christian to do.

One of the ways we do it in our congregation is through our Barnabas Ministry, which we are now trying to get going again. We met this past Tuesday. One of the things we were going to do in the last month, before last Tuesday, was find other people willing to serve, approach people and ask people. This is a ministry that is there to encourage people to stay close to Jesus, to encourage people to make use of the means of grace; not to read them the riot act, not to berate them with the Law, but to encourage them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ to move beyond spiritual milk to solid food (exactly what

this passage is talking about). At that meeting Tuesday night, not a single person there was approached that agreed to help serve in this ministry. I understand not everyone has those gifts. I understand that perfectly well. But I also know that we have spiritually mature people who have the gifts to serve in this ministry, who have the love of Christ in their heart and want others to have that same love to move from the milk to the solid food, and there is work to be done.

I don't even know for sure what exactly we have as membership right now. I'm old and forgetful. You could have told me before church and I'd forget by the time I'm talking about it now. Around 720-730 members I'm going to guess. Average weekly attendance right now is 250, 45-50 online. That leaves a little room for encouragement of those that aren't making regular use of the means of grace, doesn't it?

We can be involved in and focus on a lot of ministries that do physical things. Those are good and wonderful. But God is telling us to not stay focused just on them. Resist the idea that the material is the only thing that is important. What is truly important is spiritual. Our spiritual life consists of our connection to Jesus Christ. We have opportunity to move people from spiritual milk to solid food. That's what God has called us to do.

I will guarantee you this—as individuals and as a congregation we often will fail our God. We won't focus on the spiritual because sometimes it makes us uncomfortable. Sometimes we think we won't know what to say. We won't know what to do. We'll be more willing to talk about the material. We'll be more willing to talk about too much rain or not enough rain. We'll be willing to talk about the Packers and the draft picks as opposed to the things that God has done for us. And we at times will fail our God. We will fall short of the response of faith that honors and glorifies God. We will sin.

But this is the incredible thing about our God that those who are mature know and rejoice in: He is desperate to tell us "I forgive you, through faith in Jesus." He is desperate for us to grow in our faith through daily use of the means of grace. He is desperate for us to move onto solid food so that we can be the individual Christians and the body of Christ that He desires us to be in our community and so we can encourage one another, not just with "Hang in There" cat posters but with the message that God loves you and that will never change. This is what He has called us to do.

So we can either say "You know what? I reached the end at my confirmation and now I know all I need to know (the elementary teachings)," or we can build on that foundation and move onto the solid food, which is growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, that God has called us to. He loves us. He forgives us. And He will equip us to do the work He calls us to do. Amen.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.