

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
Matthew 7: 15-23

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July 22, 2018

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

You have heard the saying: Don’t judge a book by its cover! Or, outward appearances aren’t that important, it’s what’s on the inside that counts! Chances are that everyone has made the mistake of judging a person or a book based on outward appearances.

Too often we tend to follow worldly wisdom instead of using God’s Word when it comes to making sound judgments.

In Matthew Chapter 7, Jesus is concluding his sermon on the mount, and he is giving a strong warning. In verse 15, Jesus telling us: **“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”**

How do you identify a wolf that is dressed in sheep’s clothing? You can’t tell by looking at appearances, because the wolf looks like a sheep. Instead you have to listen to what they have to say, to determine if they are a true teacher or a false teacher.

The standard to judge a pastor or teacher of God’s Word by is the Word of God. If the message matches the true Word of God, then that one is a true teacher. If the message does not match the pure Word of God, then you are dealing with a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Wolves have been here ever since the fall, and they follow after their master, Satan himself. Wolves come inside the church to seek and destroy the sheep. There are many examples in the Scriptures. In the Garden of Eden, Satan came as a wolf in sheep’s clothing and caused Adam and Eve to commit the first sin.

Satan appeared to Jesus in the desert and attempted to mislead Him by using the Word of God. Satan never tells us who he is, or what he is. He is the great liar and deceiver. False religious teachers look very innocent, like gentle sheep, but actually they are vicious, like ravenous wolves.

During the time in which Jesus preached his Sermon on the Mount, he taught as one who had authority, and not as scribes, or teachers of the law. The Pharisees and the Sadducees taught in the name of God, and yet their message was in complete opposition to Jesus’ message, because they taught works righteousness.

After Jesus completed his work of salvation, the church began to spread throughout the world. There was a church in Galatia that struggled because there were vicious wolves that attacked the church. They were called Judiasers who taught works righteousness. They opposed Paul, and the message of Christ crucified for your salvation.

In **Romans 3**: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.” You are all justified by God’s grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This is the message that the false teachers oppose.

God tells us through the Prophet **Jeremiah 23**: “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who steal my words from one another. I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, declares the Lord, and who tell them, and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them.”

Galatians 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.

False prophets are everywhere in our world. They speak and teach a message in opposition to God. Jesus says we will be able to recognize them by their fruit. A false prophet is like a diseased tree which can not bear good fruit.

In verse 22 Jesus proclaims: **“On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’”**

On the surface it looks like good fruit: casting out demons and doing might works in the name of Jesus. But remember, you can’t judge outward appearances; you have listen with your ears to hear what they have to say and match it to the Word of God. If the message doesn’t match God’s Word you are dealing with a wolf.

¹⁶You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

The second thing you look for is what the false teacher doesn’t say. The wolf will consistently leave out the message of Christ crucified alone for salvation.

A wolf comes to kill, destroy, and rip away your faith, and tear you from the true church of God. Wolves come to keep you from hearing God’s Word in its truth and purity.

What happens when you wander away from God’s Word? According to Luther, when you do not listen diligently to God’s Word, and allow your hearts to wander away from the Word, there the wolf, which is the devil, has free access and incites a person to the extent that he falls into flagrant errors.

All of us turn away from God's Word, instead of holding it sacred and gladly hearing it and learning it.

How do you prepare to combat false teachers in this dangerous world? Jesus proclaimed: "If you continue in my Word, then you are truly my disciples. And you will know the truth and the Truth will set you free."

God's will is that you believe in Christ, Live a Holy life, which means living in daily repentance and faith. Part of daily repentance and faith, is being on guard against false prophets, and studying God's Word and the Catechism on a daily basis.

In his Word is where God promises to be. In Baptism, you received the Holy Spirit through water and the Word. You are attached to his death and resurrection through the gift of Holy Baptism. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

Having put on Christ, you have the power to withstand Satan, when he comes to tempt you in sheep's clothing.

You are covered with Christ's righteousness by the shedding of his blood, which blots out all your sins. He gives you new life, and the peace which surpasses all understanding.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is the door, and the gate, he is the Alpha, and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Whatever problems you have, go to Jesus. Whether it is a problem with your health, or family, or a problem at work. Cast all your cares on Jesus and He will your refuge. A mighty fortress is our God.

God gives you forgiveness and strength for the journey ahead when you receive What Jesus gives to you in the Lord's Supper, His true body and blood.

John 15:5-8 ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

How can you tell a true Christian from a false Christian, by their fruits. **James 2:26** For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

In Christ you are children of God producing Good Works to help those in need. It might be your family, or maybe it's someone in need across the world, or your next-door neighbor. They all need your good works

Galatians 5:22-23 ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Amen.