

## SERMON FOR SUN. OCTOBER 3, 2021

Pent 19 B Mark 10:2-16 “It’s Not About Rules - It’s About Life.”

Dear fellow redeemed, in today’s Epistle, we heard, **Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. . . . [H]ow shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?**

God inspired the author to remind us not just to pay attention but to pay ***much closer attention*** to God’s Word.

Lest we drift away from it. Drift away - like a boat its owner forgot to tie to the dock, which slowly, silently, little by little, floats away until it is lost.

For to neglect God’s Word is to neglect our very salvation.

So perhaps we should translate this verse like this: **Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from Jesus.**

Because slipping away from the Word of God is slipping away from Christ. Christ, who is the Word made flesh. And so, to lose the Word is to lose Christ, and to lose Christ is to lose our salvation.

**Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard.** But, what does that mean practically?

Well, did you hear and pay close attention to the Word of God I read it just a few minutes ago?

If I gave you a pop quiz about what each of the readings meant, could you tell me without looking in your bulletin?

Or how about yesterday’s Portals of Prayer devotion? Do you recall what it was about?

And if you remember, have you applied that Word to your life? Or is the Word of God, for you, mostly stories about *other* people and *other* times and *other* places, words with no discernible impact on your thinking or in your life?

The truth is: ***we all*** need to pay much closer attention.

But I have not yet mentioned the greatest danger we face in paying attention to reading the Word of God, and that is ***to regard the Word of God as a rule book.***

Perhaps you’ve seen the bumper sticker, “The Bible: Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth. In other words, the Bible is essentially an instructional manual on how to live on earth.

Many folks believe that God’s Word is ***primarily*** instructions about how they are to live and what they should do if they want to be a Christian and go to heaven.

That is the greatest danger because it **sounds so good and right and holy**, but it's not. It's losing the forest for the trees.

Now, are there rules in God's Word? Of course. Are there instructions about how God wants us to live? Certainly.

But God's Word isn't *primarily* an instruction book or a rule book.

For the Word of God is first and foremost about Christ, not you; it's about His life, not your life, and it's about what He has done, not about what you must do.

And so, to **pay much closer attention** to the Word is to hear the Word of God not giving us rules, but giving us Christ, giving us life, giving us hope and forgiveness and salvation.

For as we heard in our Epistle lesson, Jesus came so **that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.**

And so the Word of God is not so much about burdening us with rules but about setting us free.

Free from an endless and futile search for self-justification through good works. Free from death, free from fear, free from slavery to sin. **PAUSE**

And so if you recall the words of today's Holy Gospel, how did you hear them? Most people, when they hear those words, think immediately: **rules!**

***You're not allowed to get divorced. And if you get divorced, you're not allowed to remarry. And if you do get divorced and get remarried, you're no Christian! Because Christian doesn't do that kind of stuff.***

Well, here's a news flash: Christians *do* do that kind of stuff. Sadly, the divorce rate in the Church is just as high as it is in the world. That doesn't make divorce okay, it's just to say that if the Word of God is a rule book, we're not following it perfectly.

That's why we confess every week that we are poor, miserable sinners, for we're not very good at rules, whether in the Church or at home or work.

Following the rules is what the Pharisees were all about, and so they tested Jesus with their question about marriage.

*But how did Jesus respond?* Notice, they pointed to a word of Moses about rules, Jesus pointed to a word of Moses about **life**. Jesus points them back to creation when God gave life, making man and woman and joining them in marriage.

Because truly, divorce isn't just about keeping or breaking a rule - **divorce is death**. The death of something, a marriage, that God created good.

Adam and Eve brought sin into the world when they failed to **pay close attention to the Word of God** and decided instead to pay attention to the word of satan.

God had said to them that **on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die**- and we, their descendants, have been dying ever since. For we have been sinning ever since.

Thus, a good way to think of sin is not just breaking the rules but dying. Every sin, a little death. The death not only of marriages but of reputations, of trust, of love, of contentment.

Satan promised our first parents that sin wouldn't kill them. He said, "**God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.**"

He omitted the fact that they'd only known good up to that point, and of course, God didn't lie; Satan did. And we've believed that whopper ever since.

But God so loved the world that into our world of sin and death came Jesus, the Lord of life - the One who is life to *give* life.

He didn't come simply to teach us **about a** better way but **to be that way** for us - the way of life.

He didn't come to be a new law-giver, but a law forgiver. He knew we couldn't follow a bunch of new rules, we couldn't even obey one simple rule: Don't eat from that tree.

***So Jesus came to be for us what we could not be,  
to do for us what we could not do,  
and to give to us what we could never achieve for ourselves - life.***

Because if you're dead in your trespasses as Scripture says we are, you can't make yourself alive - something or someone from outside of you must do that.

And so the Lord of life came to give us life - life from the dead in the forgiveness of our sins.

For if sin brings death, then when sin is forgiven death no longer reigns, and if death no longer reigns then we are free to live by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

That's why Jesus's life goal was to ascend the cross.

He came to bear the guilt of our sin, die our death, and by grace through faith in him, give us life by the forgiveness of our sins. And His resurrection shows he achieved all he'd come to do.

Jesus rose from the dead not because He was simply more powerful than death, but because that which *causes* death - sin - has been done away with. If there is no more sin, then there is no more death, and if no more death, then there is life.

And that's why Jesus now comes to us here: to give us life in the forgiveness of our sins. That the life He won by His death and resurrection would be not just a historical footnote but a present reality for you.

And not a life that you have to search for find, but a life that He brings to you here in His Word, connected to the water of Baptism and the bread and wine of His Supper.

For His Word makes this water not just plain water, but living and life-giving water, Spirit-filled water which washes away sins and gives life.

And His Word makes this bread and wine much more than plain morsels of food and drink, but His very body and blood, the body and blood which passed through death to life, to give you that life by giving you His forgiveness.

For the Word of God accomplishes what it says. The Word proclaimed and given joins us to the Word made flesh, and we are united as one - Christ and His Bride, the Church.

And Christ, the bridegroom, withholds nothing from His bride, the Church. And so His victory is ours, His life is ours, His salvation is ours that we may no longer be **dead in sin but dead to sin** and alive in Him.

And so, **for you**, there is forgiveness, in Christ. Jesus desires to bless *all* His children with life.

And we all need His life, for sin has inflicted death upon us all. The good news for you this morning is that just as there is no sin that does not kill, so there is no sin that Jesus did not defeat.

And so from first to last, God's Word is not primarily a word not of rules, but of life.

All Jesus does He does for our life. If that means blessings, then blessings; if it means we have to bear crosses, then crosses.

Whatever serves His goal of giving you life, that is what your Lord and Savior will do for you.

You may not always understand his ways, and it may not be easy, but that's okay. But by faith, we trust that He knows what He's doing, and what He's doing is granting life.

One of my Elders at my last church liked to repeat a quotation about that in Bible class, which says: ***Jesus did not come to make bad men good, but to make dead men live.***

That little quotation summarized what I've been talking about here this morning, and it's the primary point of the Word of God.

That's why it's so important. That's why we must not drift away from the "dock" of God's Word and where it is "anchored" here for us in water, words, and bread and wine.

Because it's not about rules, it's about life—the life of Christ.

Come, taste and see that the Lord is good. Come and receive His forgiveness. Come, and live. In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.