

John 6:24-37

It might be somewhat embarrassing for some of us if we were asked to say aloud, truthfully, why we came to church this morning, or why we serve as workers in the church, or why we put money into the offering plate. It could be embarrassing because we might be ashamed to have others know the real reason. We often do the right thing from the wrong motive.

And in the eyes of God, the right thing then, is a useless act and an empty performance, without any genuineness, sincerity, or faith. Being a Christian has nothing to do with pride in our performance, or appearance, or standing, because Christianity is not self-centered or self-seeking. If that's what the Christian Faith means to someone, then he has a groundless faith, an empty religion, and a false hope.

The people in our Gospel reading today were coming to Jesus for this wrong reason and He told them so. Many today also wear this false type of Christianity. That's why, this morning as we look at Jesus words, we want to discuss *how to come to Jesus*, for He says, "Him that comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out."

Note the emphasis, "him that cometh to Me." And that's important. It's how we come to Him; how we regard Him; how we seat our self at His banquet table. Christianity is not something you can force upon anyone. It is not possible to bring someone to Jesus by laying down a large number of rules and regulations, although many people would prefer it to be that way. There are those who would like to bring the Christian Faith down to the level of a mathematical equation. In the same way that $2 + 2 = 4$, they feel that putting in time and effort into the church, along with giving an amount of money into the offering plate will equal being a Christian and having a place reserved in heaven. To many people, that's all that Christianity is—doing certain religious things, not because it means something to them, but because they think that coming to Jesus is as simple as walking in the front door of the church now and then, along with stuffing a few dollars in an offering envelope.

In John 6 the people that were following Jesus felt that they were very religious people, perhaps better than anyone else. Do you know why they felt that way? Not because their religion meant something to them; not because they trusted in God and believed in His promised Messiah; but because they were descendants of Abraham and their forefathers were led by Moses in the desert. Jesus made it quite clear, however, that unless they repented of this self-centered attitude and came to Jesus believing His words and trusting His promises, they were going to die in their sins just as their ancestors perished in the wilderness.

"Him that comes to Me." As you listen to Jesus' words today, He wants you to come to Him for the right reason. Not because it may be fashionable to be a "church-going Christian." Not just because your family does. Not to impress others. But because He means something to you—He is your Lord and Savior. He lived, died, and rose again for you, and He is here in Word and Sacrament for you, to bless you with forgiveness and salvation. "Him that comes to Me."

And then there are those who think that coming to Jesus is some great work that they have accomplished. "I came to Jesus!" "I found Him!" But notice where the emphasis is—not on Jesus, but on me and what I am doing. In John 6 the people had that same wrongful

attitude. “What must we do,” they asked Jesus, “to do the works of God?” But the Christian Faith is not about “me for Jesus,” but “Jesus, and what He does for you.”

There is a line in a contemporary Christian song which goes: “I gave my life to Jesus.” But that’s not true. It’s Jesus who gave His life to you and for you. It was the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable who was so proud of himself, as he prayed in the temple, because he was good enough to come to God on his own. He didn’t need anyone’s help, let alone God’s help. But that’s not how to come to Jesus. It’s really He who comes to us! He finds us, lost and helpless in our sins. He brings us to Himself in Holy Baptism, and He washes us clean and declares us holy in the eyes of God.

The way to come to Jesus is not like the Pharisee in the temple, but like the Publican, who was found and received by God. He was humble and penitent. He was sorry for his sins. He was not coming to Jesus with fanfare and trumpets, but in sincere humility and faith. That’s why Jesus said that the Publican went to his home forgiven.

Friend, you and I are here today, and we are all full of wrong motives. We are altogether unclean. Not only would we come to Jesus with the wrong attitude, but we wouldn’t even come to Him at all if it were up to us. Like the people of our text who were following Jesus, not because of who He was, but because He had filled their stomachs with food, we also, who are so filled with sin, come here into Jesus’ presence with proud hearts, self-centered attitudes, and sinful motives.

But listen carefully to what Jesus says: “Him that comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.” Jesus, we ask, is this beautiful promise for us today? How about the poor and unfortunate, the widow and the orphan, the sick and the invalid? Jesus, we ask, will you have time and love for those who often are passed by unnoticed? In answer hear His universal invitation: “Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Throughout His life, Jesus showed that He cared for the sick and needy, the oppressed and persecuted. And no matter how poor and forgotten you may be in your life, there is help and hope for you in Christ. Others may turn away from you, but Christ your precious Savior laid down His life for you. This is His promise, “Him that comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.”

Again we ask, O Jesus, what about those who have turned against You, or who once confessed You but have now deserted and denied You? The answer is His Word which says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Peter, who had denied His Lord, was returned to grace and discipleship. Paul, who had persecuted Christians, became a forgiven Apostle. And there is no one today, no matter how far he has gone away from the Savior, whom Jesus does not welcome back with open arms. If you have been indifferent and neglectful of Christ’s Word, He pleads with you, “Return to Me, for I died for you.” Here is His promise: “Him that comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out.”

Again we ask, O Jesus, will you accept terrible wicked sinners, even blood-stained murderers? What did Jesus do with the thief on the cross who pleaded to be remembered in his dying hour? Did He turn away from him and say, “I have no promise for thieves!” No! Here is Christ’s promise, “Today, you shall be with Me in paradise.” What about the woman who was taken in adultery and condemned by the leaders of her people? Did Jesus

cast a stone at her? No, He forgave her and freed her from her life of sin. What about David, who after he committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband murdered in cold blood? Yet, when he came to God with a repentant heart the Lord received him and restored him. There just isn't anyone whom Christ will not receive.

Once more we ask, Lord Jesus, will you receive me? Can I be assured that You will certainly not cast me out? Here we think of our sins, our selfishness, our neglect. How often haven't you and I rebelled against God? How often haven't we gone our own sinful way in life? Are we really entitled to think that the Lord will take us back with all the shamefulness in our life? Yes, for Jesus loves you and He has already died for you, and through His death He has earned eternal life for you. He was cast out of Jerusalem and thrown onto a cross so that you would never be cast out of the presence of God.

It is not your work, but the "work of God" that you believe in Him whom He has sent—Jesus Christ. And God does not bring you to Christ so that He will turn you away. I assure you, with all confidence, that for Jesus' sake God forgives you. There is nothing in your life, therefore, which can cause Jesus to cast you out of His presence. He doesn't turn you away; rather, He draws you to His Holy Supper where He gives you the Bread of Life—Himself for you and your salvation. He draws you to the life-giving waters of Baptism that you may always belong to Him.

"Him that comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." Friend, these wonderful words are for you—each and every one of you. Amen.