

Jude 20-25

We meet several types of people in the Epistle of St. Jude. Let's be clear, before we go any further, which type you are. "*But you, beloved...*" is how St. Jude begins our text. Do you hear your name? You should. "*Beloved.*" That's you. There are the grumblers, there are those who find fault in others, those who follow their own lusts, those who speak arrogantly, there are those who cause divisions, who are worldly-minded, those who are devoid of the Holy Spirit. St. Jude mentions all of these in the verses prior to our text. And then this, "*But you, beloved...*" He is not saying that we never grumble, or find fault, or struggle with lust, and so on. He doesn't speak of where you and I fall short. Jude speaks of who you are...beloved.

How do we get this word? Well, we take two words and put them together. The word "be" and the word "loved." To be loved. That's you. You are the beloved. We speak of a beloved wife or husband; our beloved children. God speaks this way of you. You are His beloved. It's not in the past tense..."were-loved." Nor is it in the future tense..."will-beloved." God speaks to you through His Apostle Jude in the present tense. Right now, at this very moment, you are loved by God. To be loved by Him is in the eternal present tense. Every moment of every day of your life, no matter where you are in life, no matter how sinful, how fearful, how full of doubts, you are one who is loved by your God. To be loved is who you be, who you are, always.

Because you are the beloved, you are aware that these are the last days. This present world is passing away. You are one who, as Jesus puts it in our Gospel reading for today, is called to stay awake. How do you do this? How do we stay awake in the midst of our world which is passing away? By doing four things, says St. Jude: "*Building yourself up in your most holy faith...praying in the Holy Spirit...keeping yourself in the love of God...and waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

We can summarize these in this way: God's beloved, who wait on His mercy, are in His Word and in prayer. It's not one or the other. It's both together. To be in the Word will lead to prayer. To be in prayer leads back to the Word.

Beloved wives and husbands, and beloved children, communicate with each other. If a husband and wife are not speaking to each other, they are not really beloved spouses, are they? And parents who refuse to communicate with their children can hardly call their children beloved. It's the same with God and us. Because you are beloved of God, the communication lines are open. He speaks to you in His Word, and so you open the pages of His Word in your home, and you come here to His House to hear His words to you, and you speak to Him in prayer throughout your daily life.

The Word and prayer. These two things characterize the beloved of God. Those who are not God's beloved do not hear His words, nor do they speak to Him in prayer. ("*Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God*" John 8:47.) You are not God's beloved because you pray and hear His Word. Rather, you hear His words and pray because you are His beloved.

And so not all are beloved of God. How should we, who are God's beloved, deal with them? In two ways, says Jude: Save those that we can by snatching them out of the fire...and to others show mercy even as we must let them go their own way.

If you were to come upon a house that was on fire, would you not try to save anyone who was in the burning house? This is what God did for you. He snatched you out of the fire. The fire of Judgment. The fire of hell. God sent His beloved Son into our burning house. Jesus dragged you out of the fire. He saved you by dousing you with the saving waters of Holy Baptism. But in rescuing you out of the fire, Jesus was burned by the very same fire. To bring you out of hell, Jesus had to suffer the torments of hell. To rescue you from the righteous judgment of God, Jesus came under that judgment Himself and was condemned to a cross.

Yet He did this willingly, joyfully, because you are His beloved. But He did this also for those who are not His beloved. He entered the fire also for them. There isn't one person on earth who needs to perish in the eternal fire of hell because Jesus endured that fire for all. That's why, through His Apostle, God says to us, "Save some out of the fire."

Parents, if your child was sleeping in bed unaware that a fire was destroying the house, would you let him or her sleep? Would you be unwilling to wake them because they had a long day and were so very tired and needed to sleep? How foolish to even suggest such a thing! Of course you would wake them! And if they wouldn't waken - perhaps the smoke had rendered them unconscious - you would physically carry them out of the burning house. "*Snatch them out of the fire,*" is how St. Jude puts it.

Yet what do we see parents doing? They let them sleep in on Sunday mornings in various ways. They do not insist on Bible reading in the home, or Sunday School and Bible Study along with worship in church. And not just parents. Spouses do this to each other. They refuse to snatch them out of the fire. Congregations and pastors do this to their members. They let sleep those who remain in the burning house because they don't want to offend them by waking them.

Shame on us! Shame on me...shame on you! If we who are the beloved do not snatch these out of the fire, who will? The house is burning. This world is passing away. The time is short. We who are awake must rouse those who sleep. We must snatch them out of the fire.

But not all will be saved. The Apostle Jude tells us this very thing. "*Save some,*" he says, "*but to others show mercy.*" Martin Luther sees this as letting them go. If someone refuses to leave the burning house, you must let them alone. Now is the time to give them into the hands of God. He may use drastic measures to bring them out of the fire, or He may decide not to show mercy. But when our efforts fail, we turn such ones over to the mercy of God. We pray, we set a Christian example. But we leave them be and turn our focus to those whom we can snatch from the fire.

Do you have loved ones who refuse to wake up; who refuse to leave the burning house? There is no better way of showing mercy to them than by praying for them. So many lost souls over the centuries of time have been snatched out of the fire at the last moment because God's beloved kept praying for them. The thief on the cross is one such soul. Jesus showed mercy to him, not by speaking to him, but by praying for him: "*Father, forgive them...*" And His heavenly Father did show mercy. He turned that thief to Jesus in repentance, and Jesus carried him out of the fire.

This is the very mercy in which you live, and move, and have your being. You do not live under judgment. You live under mercy. God forgives you. In Christ, He forgives your sins. He forgives you for failing to rouse those who sleep. And through this word of forgiveness, He will use you as a vessel to snatch some out of the fire. You are the beloved of God. To you God has shown mercy. Now watch as, through you, He shows that same mercy to others. Amen.