C, Advent 3

Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, Brookings, SD

Rev. Matthew Wurm

December 16, 2018

Sermon Text: Luke 7:23

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The sermon text for this morning is Luke 7:23, *“And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”*

 The word in Greek that is translated in our text as “offended” is “scandalidzow”. It is the word that we get scandalized from. When we hear the word scandal, our minds probably think of news reports with juicy details of gross behavior. Former NBC host Matt Lauer made his own scandal over the years and now reaps his reward for it. Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein have scandalized themselves as well as many others in the entertainment industry. In the corporate world, financial scandals kill their businesses. Why? Scandals are offensive. Like an offensive odor, or offensive talk, or an offensive sight, scandals repel. People don’t trust and don’t want to be associated with scandalized, offensive people and corporations. Those who scandalize, those who offend, repel others away from them.

 So how does Jesus “offend”? What does it mean when Jesus says, “*“And blessed is the one who is not offended (scandalized) by me”?* Jesus does not harm nor seek to harm anyone. He only seeks the wellbeing of the world, never His own well-being. He is self-sacrifice. He lays down His life to save your life. He is God. He is wholly trustworthy because He is Holy. Jesus is love. Jesus is not self-seeking and offensive, scandalous, like Matt Lauer, Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, nor the executives of Enron, but He died to save them too. Maybe that is what causes the offense? That Jesus dares to show compassion to everyone – even to the scandalized. He talks with the prostitute at the well. He eats in the home of tax collectors and sinners. He touches the leper. He goes to those whose sight, whose smell, whose lives were scandalous and were made so evermore by the Scribes and Pharisees.

 From the perspective of the Scribes and Pharisees, the cultural and religious elite of Jesus’ day, Jesus and His ministry were so scandalous, that to them, the only way to end His scandal, His offense, was to put Him to death. His disciples didn’t wash their hands in the traditional way. He did not keep the Sabbath and did the work of healing on it. He had compassion on the offensive Gentiles and other sinners. He acknowledged the humanity of lepers, cripples, the infirm and unclean and had compassion on them and healed them. His preaching and His teaching were offensive in the sight and in the ears of the Scribes and Pharisees because He forgave sin. Death on a cross was the just punishment for scandal in those days and that’s what He received. To add to that, anyone who aligned themselves with Him after His death was put out of their synagogues. They wouldn’t allow the offensive name of Jesus, or anyone who bore it, to remain in their presence. After His ascension into heaven, many followers of Jesus were arrested and even killed because they chose to follow Him. You and I are followers of a first century scandal. Jesus hasn’t offended us. He saved us. But He offends many in the world yet today.

 How does Jesus offend yet today? Well, He still goes against the cultural and spiritual elite and He and His followers (you and I come) across as giving offense. A young follower of Jesus joins in the conversation at the school lunch table and says that gay marriage isn’t part of God’s good design or will because Jesus said that God designed humans as male and female for marriage and the making of babies, something gay marriages cannot produce. This young girl gives offense to her classmates who parrot the positions of the cultural and spiritually elite of our day because she dared to speak of the truth of her faith. Will she too be put out of the cool kid’s lunch table as the early Christians were put out of the synagogues?

 A caring mother and wife of a farmer joyously watches, prays for, and feeds the workers employed on their farm. She speaks freely and comfortably about the blessings given to her and to all mankind by God the Father and Creator of all. To her, the earth is obviously God’s handiwork and she sees His lovingkindness everyday as the seasons come and go. But to some of those she blesses with the compassion of her heart and the work of her hands, she gives offense. She’s “one of those churchy ones” who talks about God in a man’s workplace. The culturally elite preach and teach that there is no room for God in the workplace and ridicule those who state obvious reality.

Men who work hard in industry and the trades see no value in the weakness of a Jesus who submits and gives His beard to be torn from His face and His back flayed open with a whip. Weakness is not manly to men hardened by the rigors of life on the road, in the mud and the dirt. Weakness gets one killed and Jesus, in weakness was killed. Following the words of the One, who appears in His weakness to submit to death, death on a cross is offensive to the culture of the manliness of men on the road *“Blessed is the one who is not offended by me,”* Jesus says. He means it.

 What is it about Jesus and historic Christianity that is so offensive, so scandalous, that repulses the cultural and spiritual elite? It is not as if Jesus ever sinned or committed scandals like those I mentioned earlier, Lauer, Cosby, and Weinstein. It is the cross. It is its shame and weakness. In the cross, victory for mankind was won by the Son’s submission to the Father’s will. Victory through submission is foolishness. Those who believe in the death of the Holy One of God – live. Salvation and victory over the powers of sin, death, and the devil comes into the world as an infant child, born to a teen-age mother. In the eyes of the wisdom of world, the story of salvation looks weak, impotent, and scandalous, offensive to our world’s enlightened sensibilities. “*And blessed is the one who is not offended by me,”* Jesus says.

 Following Jesus, though we may think it a popular thing here in this less-than-one-percent of the population of Brookings, never will be a popular thing. The path is narrow, the door hard to find and few find it, Jesus says. But blessed are you who find it and are not offended by Jesus and His cross. It is the power unto salvation.

 Throughout the centuries, this weak, infant child who was promised to us and born for us, who grew up to fulfill all of the Scriptures and appease the Father’s wrath by His death on the shameful cross, this child, this Savior has called millions to follow Him and be blessed for all eternity. You, dear friends in Christ stand in that mighty throng (crowd) following Christ as He makes His story of salvation your own. Along the way, you will likely give offense to people in this world as your words and actions become ever more aligned with His. So be it! You are blessed for all eternity for His love has not offended you.

 The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.