

***Pastor Janetzke, Keynote Speaker,
Read on October 26, 2008 for the 125th Anniversary
of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Fairmont***

Hebrews 13:8 – “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.”

What a great joy and privilege it is to return to St. Paul's after nearly ten years in Michigan. While the theme for your anniversary celebration emphasizes how the Lord is changeless and how His blessings continue the same year after year, such is not the case for we who serve Him. This congregation has changed perceptively over these years and so obviously have I. My hair is grayer, my weight is down, Marguerite and I are empty nesters and we are in-laws. We own our home along with a major mortgage company. Health challenges life every day.

But on this anniversary Sunday, lots of memories came to mind as I prepared this message, memories of corn fields and bean fields and hog operations, memories of saints who have passed on to await our celebration together in the Savior's everlasting arms, memories of youth trips out west and up north and to Atlanta, memories of our Centennial festivities. Memories of corn fields and bean fields. There are memories of church and school secretaries and janitors and a great faculty in our school, memories of weddings and funerals and funeral luncheons and ham suppers and baptisms and shut-in communions, of installations and retirements and synodical presidents preaching in our pulpits. Did I mention memories of corn fields and bean fields and hog operations? Yes, things have changed, I have changed, the congregation has changed over these 125 years, but the love of Jesus Christ endures and it is Him that we want to focus on in these next anniversary moments.

Will you think back with me to the founding year of St. Paul's? Life on the rich blue earth of the prairie in 1883 was rough. The pioneers faced many trials to establish homes and a congregation here in Fairmont including prairie fires that burned up to the lakes, harsh weather, grasshoppers wiping out their crops. They made many sacrifices to establish a church where Christ crucified could be preached. From the very beginning Christian education was important and the establishment of a Lutheran school made for many long wagon trips in from the countryside and long walks in for confirmation classes. Over these many years quite a number of sons and daughters of the parish were motivated by their Christian training to become teachers and pastors of the church. Strong pastors were provided the flock gathered in our part of Fairmont – Zemke, Krause, Harley among them. Death was a constant companion and only the love of Jesus Christ provided the strength to go on for JESUS CHRIST IS THE SAME YESTERDAY AND TODAY AND FOREVER.

Truly this is a day of rejoicing in the Lord. Our hearts swell with gratitude for all the blessings that have come to this parish and its people from the giver of every good and perfect gift. “The Lord has done great things for us, for which we are glad.” God in His mercy gathered to Himself a church in this place and

lavished his blessings upon it these 125 years. In spite of trials and changes He enables you to rejoice before Him for the harvest of souls He has gathered here through the ministry of Word and Sacrament.

For all these decades St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church has been "a city set on a hill," a beacon light shining into the community and around the world, a dispenser of the means of grace, a proclaimer of the whole counsel and will of God, a haven for spiritual joy and peace. This must never change to be sure!

Yet we live in an era of continuing changes. Ministry is different today than when Pastor Mueller began gathering German Lutherans for worship and education. People are different – society is different – Hey, the world is different! And not all the change has been a blessing to those who have sought God's solace and peace in this place. Thus we need to hear again and again as life rushes past us: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever."

The same? This cannot be said of any one of us. We cannot say: "I am the same that I have always been; the advance of years has left no mark on me!" Nor can we think this of our friends or of our family relationships. Friends come and go, they move or move on. Our children grow up and step out on their own. How quickly the years speed by!

The same? This congregation surely has seen a fair amount of change. Changes in pastoral leadership and in physical plant and in your faculty and staff and in the makeup of the congregation have brought a multitude of changes. I am curious. How many of you are lifelong members of St. Paul's? You have helped to shape this parish to be the soul-saving place it is today. The rest of you have come over the years to use your gifts in service of the Lord here in this place at this time in St. Paul's history.

Amid life's shifting scenes what a source of comfort and strength to turn to – One of Whom it is said "You are the same yesterday and today and forever." Here is One who never fails the heart that leans on Him for rest. Health may fail us, adversity may crash upon us, friends may leave us, age may steal over us, but here is One Who is as a "hiding place from the wind, a shelter from the tempest." He is the Author of life, Son of the Living God, Author and Finisher of faith, Lover of souls, our most Blessed and Glorious Savior.

Jesus – the Name above all Names, the One we love, our God and our Savior, born in Bethlehem King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Jesus the Same, the One Who is always in the here and now, the Great "I Am." This Jesus Whom we worship and adore has indeed been our salvation, beating death on Calvary's cross, throwing open the tomb, ascending to heaven to prepare a place for us. Even now he pleads for us before His Father, giving us forgiveness and new life through His blood shed for us. Amid all the changes and chances and challenges of this passing life we continue to fix our hope where our true joy is found, in Jesus Christ, our Brother and our friend, our Lord and our God!

"Yesterday" causes us to think of the history of this parish and of how the founding fathers and mothers rested their hope upon the Christ who was dead but is now alive and holds in His hands the keys

of death and hell – the same faith we cling to today. Jesus gave substance to the work begun in this place because it was begun and continues to focus on the same command to “go and teach and baptize and make disciples.”

Think for another moment with me about the founding year of 1883. Karl Marx, the founder of communism died that year. Gold was discovered in Idaho. The Brooklyn Bridge opened to traffic in New York City. The *Ladies Home Journal* began publishing. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island*. Buffalo Bills' Wild West Show began its 20 year run. Krakatoa blew up in an awesome volcanic eruption off Thailand. And Oscar Mayer wieners had their beginning in Chicago. Travel was by foot or wagon or ship. Communication was by word of mouth or telegraph or mail. From those historic events to today life has changed yet people still need Jesus and the proclamation of the Gospel is still best done by word of mouth.

“Today” the Lord of the church still forgives our blackest transgressions and sins. He still calls to the weary: “Come unto Me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.” He still says to His church: “Your sins are forgiven. Go and sin no more.” He still gives His precious Body and Blood in the Holy Supper. His Word still hammers with the force of the Law calling sinners to repentance. And the Gospel still saves and salves with its wondrously glorious Good News as it pours over the heads of our babies and reaches our hearts in its still small voice.

Our hearts are still messed up, that stays very much the same unfortunately. This side of heaven we will never find the perfect church or the perfect pastor or the perfect fellowship. We will never be all that God wants us to be as individuals or as a congregation. But saved by His grace, filled with His love, sheltered in the wounds of Jesus, lifted from death to life by the cross of Christ – this we can be for today and forever.

St. Paul Lutheran Church – one of the churches of our Savior – your work tomorrow will be the same as it is today, as it was yesterday: to know Him and to make Him known. And in this task you will have the help of His presence, for He is still in all the tomorrows of our history. He is the same forever.

Yes – forever! “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” Because of Jesus the best is yet to come. Amen!!! And Amen!!! And may the Lord watch between you and me while we are absent one from another. Go in His peace and joy. Happy 125th!!

“And To God What Is God’s”

Matthew 22:15-21

Sermon for St. Paul Lutheran Church’s 125th Anniversary
Rev. Gregory J. Schultz

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Matthew 22:20-22 ***They brought [Jesus] a denarius, and He asked them, “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. Then He said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.” When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.***

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ our Lord. The Lord of the Church be thanked and praised for St. Paul’s 125 years of tremendous blessings from His gracious hand. The Lord of the Church be thanked and praised for allowing me and my family to be part of this great celebration with you, as I am indeed honored to be with you all this weekend. But let us talk more about those things in the festivities later today and tomorrow. For now, let us turn our hearts and our ears to the much more important Word of God for our consideration this evening.

In our Gospel reading the Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus in His words. They wanted to pull Him into a political dispute. They even brought the supporters of Herod with them, although these two groups had nothing in common except their perceived need to get Jesus out of the way.

The first thing they do is try to fluff up Jesus with flattery. ***“Teacher, we know You are a man of integrity and that You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by men, because You pay no attention to who they are.”*** Now, you know that when someone approaches you like that, your first thought is, “Yeah, right. And just what is this going to cost me?” Children do that to their parents: “Mom, how pretty you look today!” “Dad, what a nice shirt that is; it really brings out the beautiful blue in your eyes!” And you know you’re being buttered up for something like a raise in allowance or permission to do something they do not ordinarily have permission to do.

For Jesus, the attempt to butter Him up culminated with the question, “Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” Now, to be sure, this was a subtle trap. If Jesus says, “No, it is not right to pay taxes to Caesar,” then He is guilty of treason against Rome and the Herodians will be the first ones to run off and report Him. If Jesus says, “Yes, it is right to pay taxes to Caesar,” then He is guilty of being disloyal to Israel, and the religious leaders would turn against Him. Either way, the Pharisees knew Jesus was going to be in trouble.

Of course, Jesus sensed their trap. He knew that “They had no King but Caesar.” He knew they had no interest whatsoever in taxes. So Jesus has them bring Him a coin. ***“Whose portrait is this? And***

whose inscription?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. The coin had a portrait of Tiberius on one side and a picture of him seated on his throne on the other. The inscription declared Tiberius to be “The Great Ruler.”

Actually, Tiberius wasn’t that great of a ruler. Though he was highly regarded going into office, history tells us that the reign of Tiberius was cruel and vindictive. But Jesus doesn’t say a word about that. He distinguishes the office from the person, and says **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”**

So, the first thing we learn from this Gospel is to distinguish the office from the person. Jesus doesn’t say, “Give to Tiberius,” but “give to Caesar.” Tiberius was not a terribly moral or ethical man, but he was nonetheless the ruler. And Scripture declares that God works through the instrument of the government, whether the one who governs is a believer or a pagan, whether he is a good king or a bad one.

So, again, Jesus teaches us to look to the office, not the person. The person holding the office may be wicked, cruel, or unethical, but that does not entitle us to speak ill of the office. The office – the position – is God’s gift whether occupied by a scoundrel or a saint. If we use the wickedness of rulers as an excuse to despise and dishonor government, then we will bring down God’s wrath upon ourselves. One of the big problems that we have with government is that we tend to tear down both the person and the office. No matter who wins the election on November 4, we are to honor and respect the person for the sake of the office. Whether we approve of him or not, we are to **“give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”**

The second distinction that Jesus makes is the proper distinction between Caesar and God. **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”** This distinction is extremely important, and often misunderstood. We tend to confuse the two. We either turn God into Caesar, or Caesar into God. We either set God against the government or we make the government into a god. We either reject the gift of government, or we expect too much from it, as if electing the right Caesar would solve all our problems. Even if it were possible to elect nothing short of St. Peter as president and St. Paul as vice-president, we would still have the same problems because we would all be the same citizens doing the same things to each other.

Jesus speaks in terms of both God and Caesar, and He speaks of the two properly distinguished. **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”** We call that the “two kingdoms” or the “two-fold rule of God.” God’s rule of power and His rule of grace – the state and the church. Not separated, as some people quite erroneously think, but properly distinguished. You don’t cease to be a Christian when you walk into a voting booth or take public office. And you don’t cease to be a citizen of this country when you walk into a church. We have obligations and duties – both to God and to Caesar.

To distinguish Caesar and God properly is to keep our verticals and our horizontals straight, our life before God and our life before one another. When our verticals and horizontals get confused, we get dizzy and disoriented; we don’t know up from down from sideways. When we get the two reigns of God confused, our public life gets disoriented, and we start thinking the state is a church or the church is a state.

The two rules of God are like God's left hand and His right hand. By His left hand, God rules in power through whatever temporal government he has established – whether a representative democracy, a king, a dictator, Caesar, or whatever He has established. There is no divinely instituted form of government; God works through all of them.

By His right hand (the one where Christ is seated), God rules in grace over all things through the death and resurrection of Jesus so that all people might be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, that in the death of Jesus, the entire forgiveness of sins has been won for the you and for the world and that in His name all people are offered the gift of eternal life.

With His left hand of power, God gives us earthly blessings, First Article gifts – daily bread. He defends us from danger and protects us from evil. He ensures that we have roads and sewers and policemen and firemen, and everything that protects our body and life. With His right hand of grace God gives eternal blessings, Third Article gifts – forgiveness, life, salvation.

God's left hand punishes and restrains. The policeman that pulls you over for speeding is an extension of God's left hand; so is the judge who sits behind the bench. With his right hand, God comforts and consoles us in Christ. The pastoral office is an extension of God's right hand – offering forgiveness, eternal life, reconciliation, peace with God.

God's left hand works to make people outwardly good. God's right hand works to make people inwardly holy.

Practically speaking, it means that God has not given Caesar the authority to tell the church how to worship. It also means that God has not given the church the authority to tell Caesar how to govern. Now that doesn't mean Christians don't participate in public life; we do. We vote, we hold office, we speak up in defense of others, especially for those who have no voice, we seek justice for the poor, the widowed and orphaned, the homeless, the alien, the oppressed, the unborn. And God honors that work and works through it, even if it is through the unbeliever.

God doesn't explain what He's up to with His left hand. ***"I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things."*** That's left-handed talk. The left and right hands of God work in different and opposite ways. It isn't that God's left hand doesn't know what His right hand is doing, it's that we don't see how they are connected. All we know is that God is working with both hands for our earthly and eternal good.

God doesn't explain why or what He is up to. We simply must trust that the God who sent His Son to die for the world knows best how to manage the kings and kingdoms of this world. God has his fingers on all the buttons, and He orders everything "for us and for our salvation," as we confess in the Creed, working all things toward the day when Jesus appears and every king must bow down before the King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the meantime, that is until Jesus appears in glory and we appear in glory with Him, we are to **“give to Caesar what is Caesar’s.”** And what is it that we are to give Caesar? Taxes. Who would have thought that, yes, paying taxes is a holy work in God’s sight? But it is. And we hate the thought of paying taxes. We fought a revolution over taxes. We still revolt. We begrudge paying taxes, though we do expect Caesar to pave the potholes in our streets and keep peace in our neighborhoods. We expect lawbreakers to be caught and convicted. We expect our toilets to flush and clean water to come out of our faucets. We turn to Caesar for help when winds, fires, and earthquakes attack us.

But, you see, Christians have an even higher purpose for paying taxes than for what we get back from Caesar. By paying taxes, we are honoring God’s left hand. St. Paul writes, **“For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due; respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due.”** If we were to sum up everything the New Testament says about what we owe Caesar it would be: taxes, respect, honor, obedience (when it is not against God’s Word), and prayer. That is true Christian “patriotism” – to pay our taxes, to give respect and honor to those who govern for the sake of their office, to obey them when it does not go against God’s Word, and to pray for them. By these things we honor God’s left hand, and so we honor God.

As Christians, dear friends, we hold dual citizenship. We are citizens of the nation by birth or by naturalization. And we are citizens of heaven by our Baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus. As dual citizens, we not only give to Caesar, but **we “give to God what is God’s.”** We honor both God’s left hand and his right hand. We know that Caesar wants our taxes, but what does God want? He wants our wholehearted fear, love, and trust. He wants broken and contrite hearts that grieve over sin and desire to be forgiven. He wants our faith, hope, and trust; our time, our talents, our treasures.

Psalm 116 says: **“What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? I will offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and call on the name of the Lord. I will take the cup of salvation, and will call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all his people, in the courts of the Lord’s house, in the midst of you, O Jerusalem.”**

We give God our selves, because He has claimed us as His own in the water and the Word. The highest honor and worship that we can give to God at His right hand is to use Christ against our sin, to receive the forgiveness that Jesus won for us when He died on the cross to save us. We can never be sure about what God’s left hand is up to, though we trust that in the end it means blessing. But we can always be certain of His right hand, for Jesus is seated there for us to give us eternal life. And it is from the right hand of God that we receive all that Jesus died to give us – our Baptism, the absolution of our sins, the Body and the Blood, our citizenship in heaven.

In the end we must confess that we have not given to Caesar what is Caesar’s, nor have we given to God what is God’s. We daily sin much, in the way in which we deal with God’s representatives on earth,

and in our neglect of the gifts of our salvation. And for that and for all other sins, we deserve God's judgment and eternal wrath.

But God in His mercy has extended his right hand toward us in His Son Jesus. Jesus came to live perfectly under both God and Caesar for you. He perfectly kept the Law for you. He died for your sins under the same Caesar who was pictured on the coin that the Pharisees and Herodians brought to Him. This same Jesus now reigns at the right hand of God as the risen King of kings and Lord of lords, whose kingdom shall have no end. The future of the nations, the future of His church, your future rests in his hands. And there are no safer hands to be in than in God's hands.

Remember who you are. You are condemned sinners and will face God's wrath and damnation because of your sin. You cannot save yourselves. You cannot do anything to make God love you or forgive you. You can only plead for His mercy.

But remember also whose you are. You are a baptized child of God. You have been given the gift of eternal life through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – the same Jesus who took all your sins to the cross and took your place in being punished for those sins. You are a redeemed, forgiven, and saved child of God, set free from sin in the death and resurrection of Jesus for you and in your place.

And you are a rejoicing child of God this weekend, rejoicing in His 125 years of grace and mercy, rejoicing in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Come, now, and receive that mercy and forgiveness in the most personal way – in your Lord's own body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.