

Jesu Juva

“Two Hands, One Goal”

Text: Romans 13:1-10; Matthew 18:1-20 (Ezekiel 33:7-9)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Is God right-handed or left-handed?

Perhaps you think that a silly question. First of all, because God is spirit and doesn't have hands like we do. And secondly, because even if He had hands it wouldn't matter. Except, perhaps, for the bad joke you might have heard that God must be left-handed because, as we confess in the Creed, when Jesus ascended into heaven He sat on His right-hand!

But I ask that question in all seriousness because our readings today teach us that the answer is: **both**. Theology calls the civil government and authorities, as talked about in Romans today, as the kingdom of God's *left*-hand, and the Church, as we heard in the reading from Matthew, as the kingdom of God's *right*-hand. **Both** are His, He exercises rule and authority in **both**, and He blesses us in **both** - just in different ways.

The kingdom of the left, the civil government and authorities, rule and bless by the Law. They exist to protect us and punish evildoers. They exist to restrain sin by enforcing the Law, so that there is not anarchy and chaos and we can live in order and peace. Now, they don't do it perfectly. They are sinners too. But murderers and thieves and the like are still brought to justice, we turn to the police and the courts when we have been wronged or are in need of protection, and we are punished when we break the Law. And this is a great blessing from God and how He is mercifully restraining the sin and evil that seeks to tear our world - and us - apart.

The kingdom of the right, the Church, is concerned about sin too, but in a much different way. For it is not by Law and punishment and coercion that the Church is ruled, but by grace and forgiveness. The Church calls sinners not to justice, but to repentance; she exercises not vengeance but love; and she does not punish but forgives. You could say that the government deals with sin from the outside in, but the Church deals with sin from the inside out - God restraining sin by healing our hearts and minds with the medicine of His Word and Sacraments. And, of course, this is a great blessing, too. The greatest blessing, in fact. To have in Jesus a Saviour from the sin and evil that seeks always to tear us away from God.

So God is *both right-handed and left-handed*, dealing with sin in both kingdoms, for our good. Because contrary to what is often our attitude, God takes sin quite seriously. Like

when He impressed upon the prophet Ezekiel how important this was - that this was no joke or optional matter to Him. But us? Oh, we're sorry *when we get caught* - when the policeman pulls us over, when the IRS audit letter arrives in the mail, when our lies don't hold up anymore, when our teachers catch us cheating or when your parents find out that you really didn't clean your room, you just shoved everything under the bed! But if we don't get caught . . . that just emboldens us to do it some more, and some more, and some more. Which is dangerous because the evil one is never satisfied with you just getting away with it - he wants to rule you, to dominate you, to take you over with sin, severing you from others and from God.

So not only has God established the kingdom of the left to restrain and punish our outward sins, even more is He concerned with our hearts and the dominion of sin and satan there.

So while we maybe think it's funny to get someone to sin, poking at them and provoking them and tempting them with our words and deeds, Jesus says if that's you, better for you to have cement shoes and be cast into the depth of the sea!

Or that sin that we think is harmless - our hands doing what they should not do, our feet taking us where we should not be, our eyes seeing what we should not see - and today we could say whether that's *physically* or going places or doing those things *virtually*, on the internet - if that's you, Jesus says, it's better for you to hack off your hands and feet and gouge out your eyes! . . .

That's just not how we think of sin, is it? Which should be an indication to you of just how sick we really are, that we consider rebellion and disobedience so lightly. An indication that the disease of sin has been festering and growing in our bodies and souls and we didn't even realize how bad it was. Just like you felt fine until something burst in you, or until the doctor walked into the room and said, *I have bad news* . . . Yes, our condition really is that bad.

And it would be terminal, we would have no hope, if getting better were up to us. But *surrounding* these terrifying and sobering words of Jesus are words quite different, words of hope for us.

For greatness in the kingdom of heaven? As we heard, that's not something you do, but something that is given to you, like to a child, like to little Eva when she was baptized at only a week old. She, born and brought to those waters a sinner, received God's name, adoption into His family, the gift of faith, the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of everlasting life. And she is dear to her Father in heaven. As you are. These gifts of baptism for you, too. Not to earn but to receive, free. From Jesus to you. To exalt and forgive you. To take your place with Eva. For the Church, the kingdom of God's right-hand is not about growing up, but about going down, in repentance, remembering

and returning to your baptism and receiving *like a little child* from your good and gracious Father in heaven. Being drown in *those* waters of life, instead of the sea with a millstone around your neck.

And then as we heard, your Father has angels to care for you, and when you wander off and go astray, your Good Shepherd searches for you. Even if you're just one in a hundred, He notices and He cares. He wants no one to perish. So when you're called to repentance, caught red-handed in your sin, called out as the sinner you are, don't get angry or defiant or defensive, give thanks to God for His Word, proclaimed in love to you, to call you back from your sin and sinful ways, to repent and receive His Absolution. As you heard again this morning: *I forgive you all your sins*. And it really is His Absolution, spoken here. For as we heard Jesus say to His Church: ***Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.***

And when we return and are gathered with our brothers and sisters in Christ - even if it's just two or three, for greatness in this kingdom is not measured by achievement or age or size - we heard this: ***where two or three are gathered in my name***, Jesus says, ***there am I among them***. And He really is. And not just in some mystical, untouchable, unknowable way, but in a real way, for real you. Here in His Body and Blood, *given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins*.

Given and shed - those are important words. For remember those terrifying, sobering words that should happen to you and should be yours - millstones and hacking and gouging and all that? Here's your answer: **Given and shed for ME**. The hands and feet and eyes of Jesus given for you, in place of yours. The millstone you deserve hung around His neck instead of yours. And the fire of hell He endured on the cross so that you never will. *Given for you* - Jesus, The Son of God. And His blood *shed for you* - divine blood, precious blood, cleansing blood.

For it is He, now, in the midst of us disciples. Did you notice that? These words put us back where we started! Except **the child in the midst of us now is the very Son of God Himself**. Here, in our midst, for you. Here in our midst not as an example, but to forgive sin and give life to the dead. That you have all you need, and more. That as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, *His kingdom come*, even now. His kingdom of grace and forgiveness, His Church, now, and His kingdom of glory when He comes again in glory.

And for that end, God uses both His hands, left and right. Ruling all things for the good of His Church, for this one goal: to deal with sin and give you life. Life now, *protected* from sin, but even more, life forever, *free* from sin. But both with your God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He with us now, and we with Him forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

