

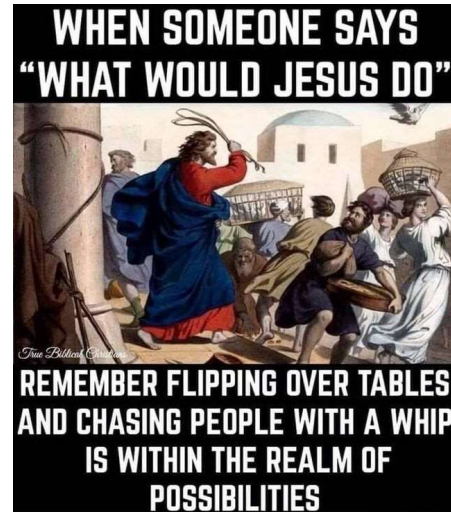
March 26, 2023  
Third Sunday in Lent  
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH  
Pastor Joel Sutton

1 Corinthians 1:18–31 (John 2:13–22)

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

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

In a sermon in the later part of the 19th century, Reformed Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon was exhorting his hearers to imitate Christ by asking the question: *"What Would Jesus Do?"* One hundred years later in American Evangelicalism there was a resurgence of the phrase: *"What Would Jesus Do?"* You could buy bracelets, bumper stickers, and almost anything else bearing the logo: *"WWJD"* or *"What Would Jesus Do?"* Maybe you did.



The driving force behind the *WWJD* popularity was pietism and the social Gospel... to inspire people to a higher moral standard of living by imitating a Jesus that is kinder, gentler, and fun-loving. It was also an attempt to improve society through social reforms. [sarcasm on →] The fun-loving Jesus wouldn't talk about sin, death, and eternal damnation because that repels people. He'd cleanse the church of the old relics like stuffy hymnody, liturgy, altars, and crucifixes and make the church more entertaining. [← sarcasm off] Unfortunately the *WWJD* movement downplayed the reason Jesus entered His creation in the flesh of man – to die to save sinners. It downplayed the sinfulness of mankind and its need of a Savior.

Of course, not *everyone* who adopted the phrase *"What Would Jesus Do?"* as their motto was guilty of pietism or following the social Gospel. So, if you have one, there's no sin in wearing the *WWJD* bracelet or having bumper sticker. Asking the question *"What Would Jesus Do?"* is the easy part. Answering the question is another matter. On social media there's a popular meme that says:

*"When someone asks "What Would Jesus Do?" remember flipping over the tables and chasing people with a whip is within the realm of possibilities."*

And that takes us to our Gospel reading for this morning. The Passover of the Jews was at hand and according to Jewish Law, every Jewish male twelve years old and older was required to travel to Jerusalem and offer their sacrifice. So Jerusalem is overflowing with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from the surrounding countries and from as far away as Rome, bring their Passover offering to the temple treasury and to offer their Passover sacrifice.

Since it was difficult to transport your sacrificial animal and it remain without blemish over great distances, for the people's convenience, vendors were selling sacrificial animals. The temple tax had to be paid with Jewish shekels, so money changers were on hand to exchange the foreign

currency into local coins. For the sake of efficiency, the dealers weren't located down the street in the shops. They weren't stationed just outside the temple gate. Our text says they were located *in* the temple. (cf: John 2:14) It was the least amount of effort for the Jewish people, and they expected God's maximum blessings.

The Passover is at hand. Jesus is a Jewish male over the age of twelve. ***"What Would Jesus Do?"*** He comes to Jerusalem and into the temple with a purpose. He comes as the temple cleanser. With zeal for His Father's house, finding the sellers selling animals and money-changers brokering coins, God the Son clears the house of God the Father from the unrighteous commerce. Zeal is an angry and jealous love, not anger from hatred, but it springs from the love toward God. In an act of holy wrath and righteous indignation, Jesus poured out coins, flipped over the tables, and drove the people out of the temple with a whip of cords.

The temple cleanser is the one whom John the Baptist declared to be:

***"... the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*** (John 1:29)

He's not a gentle fun-loving Jesus who attempts to improve society through social reforms. He doesn't give sappy feel-good sermons about living your best life now. He knows you and all mankind are sinners in need of a Savior so He came to die. He knows that keeping the Ten Commandments is God's good and gracious will for your life, but He also knows that you and I cannot do it as God demands. So He enters this broken and sinful world to suffer and die to win salvation for you and me, broken and sinful people.

Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law or the Prophets but to fulfill them. (cf: Matthew 5:17) He didn't come into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. (John 3:17) In obedience to the Law, on the eighth day of the Jesus' life He shed His blood for the first time at His circumcision and is named Jesus, the name which means Yahweh saves. (ANLEX, 203) Already on the eighth day of Jesus' life, His destiny of a bloody atonement is revealed in His Name and in His circumcision.

So ***"What Would Jesus Do"*** for the rest of His earthly life? He spent it entirely on keeping the Law perfectly on your behalf and fulfilling the Scriptures. In our Gospel text, He comes to the very center of Judaism's sacrificial system to replace the old covenant animal sacrifice with the New Covenant sacrifice in His blood. (cf: 1 Corinthians 11:25) The Jews wanted a sign by whose authority Jesus does these things.

***"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"*** (John 2:17)

He was talking about His crucifixion and resurrection of His body. (cf: John 2:18–22) The Word become flesh, the very Lamb of God, comes as the true paschal sacrifice to shed His blood on the altar of the cross, suffering God's wrath against your transgressions and pay the wages of your sin. He was delivered up for your trespasses and three days later He was raised for your justification – meaning – by faith in Jesus, you're declared not guilty of your sin. (cf: Romans 4:25) The old temple of stone is replaced with the new and purified temple which is Christ's Body, the new place of worship for God's people. (cf: Revelation 21:22) Today the Lamb has taken His place on the throne at the right hand of God the Father and shares in the one heavenly rule.

When the question is asked ***“What would Jesus do?”*** if the answer doesn’t make you uncomfortable, then you probably have the wrong answer because He would suffer and die the most horrific death to save the most horrific sinners. St. Paul describes this in our epistle reading where he says:

***“... the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18)

He continues saying:

***“... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:23–24)

If you have not yet, I encourage you to open your email or your email spam folder and read my March Newsletter. The point of the Newsletter is for you to plan your funeral. Plan and have a Lutheran Christian funeral. Put everything down in writing. Tell your family that you want a public funeral and visitation right here at St. Timothy because your funeral is your last opportunity for you to show your love to your family and friends who might attend so that they hear Gospel message about ***“What Jesus Would Do”*** and what Jesus has done: He loves them enough to die for them so that when they die, they might pass from death to eternal life.

The preaching of Christ crucified is folly to those who are perishing. It’s uncomfortable – but to us who are being saved it’s the power of God to create faith in unbelieving hearts, forgive sins, and grant eternal life in heaven. A funeral is uncomfortable for the unbeliever because at the funeral, the wages of sin is on full display. No matter how good, pious, and holy you believe yourself to be, unless you’re alive on Judgment Day, you will experience death. Scripture teaches:

***“... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** (Romans 3:23)

and: ***“For the wages of sin is death...”*** (Romans 6:23)

Because all have sinned and the wages of sin is death, ***“What did Jesus Do?”*** The answer is uncomfortable. Jesus gave Himself over to a torturous, painful, and bloody death on the cross – for you. That’s why we: ***“... preach Christ crucified...”*** for the crucified ***“... Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God.”***

He came to save you from your sinful selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, and fear that’s within you. You try to hide it away in the dark places in your heart and mind. You see it in the world all around, and you can’t stop yourself from being infected because it wells up from within your sinful flesh and is drawn to bear fruit within you by the temptations from the evil one.

Jesus didn’t come to be an inspirational fun-loving teacher focused on social reforms. He didn’t come into Jerusalem to only take on the religious leaders and the forces of evil. He came to die on the cross to defeat the very enemies that haunt you: the devil, your sin, your death, and your grave.

Indeed Scripture teaches:

**“... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and [because of Christ crucified] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”** (Romans 3:23–25)

They teach: **“For the wages of sin is death, but [because of Christ crucified] the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 6:23)

Many misguided preachers continue to downplay the reason Jesus came into the world. They downplay the sinfulness of mankind and its need of a Savior. And when they do preach the word of the cross, they dress it up with perfume and lipstick so their hearers find it more palatable. The world marches to a different drummer. Its enthusiasm always is for whatever seems attractive, wise, and successful. Some want a religion of wisdom. Some want a religion of power. Others want a religion of miracles. We preach Christ and Him crucified. The cross is God’s wisdom. The cross is God’s power. The cross is God’s miraculous work of salvation for all mankind. The world thinks it is foolishness.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when you behold a suffering, bleeding, and dying Savior on the cross – for you – it is something that requires reflection, soul-searching, and self-examination. Even for the most pious believer. In the cross of Christ, you see God’s wrath against your own sin and death. The cross of torture and crucifixion was used for countless executions in the ancient world. [pointing to the crucifix] But this cross is now the altar of the Lamb of God’s sacrifice for your sin of wanting the fun-loving Jesus, your sin of selfishness, greed, hatred, jealousy, and fear.

**“What would Jesus do?”** If the answer doesn’t make you uncomfortable, then you probably have the wrong answer. The world calls the word of the cross weakness and folly. What wisdom could there be in watching the holy God become a holy man only to be treated as a criminal and subject to abuse, scorn, and death? The world watches in amazement and turns away in disgust. For us being saved, Christ crucified is the power of God.

He reveals Himself in the suffering and death of Jesus. Here in this place is where God pours out all the gifts that Christ won for you on the cross. The Gospel proclaims Christ crucified for sinners so that the Holy Spirit can create and sustain faith. Your Baptism joins you to Christ’s death and resurrection. In the Lord’s Supper God feeds you, body and soul, with Christ’s body and blood that take away all your sins. For the sake of Jesus, God bestows upon you grace upon grace, exchanging your sinfulness and death with His righteousness, sanctification and redemption, and resurrection of your dead body on the last day.

That’s not foolishness. That’s the power and wisdom of God!

Amen.

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