

## God pleasing worship - John 15:26-16:4 Exaudi 2021

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

“The hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor Me.” We hear the words of Jesus in our Gospel, and our minds instantly flood with a multitude of examples, both historical/biblical as well as very current and contemporary. Biblically/historically, you can’t escape the immediate context of this discourse. Jesus was speaking this to His apostles on Maundy Thursday evening, mere hours before self-proclaimed God-loving men like Pharisees, Sadducees, and High Priests do all they can in their power to make sure Jesus Himself is nailed to a cross. And why was there such a fevered push to exterminate Jesus? At the heart of it all, it was because, in their eyes, He was a blasphemer. “Who does this guy think He is forgiving sins? Only God can do that! Who does this guy think He is saying, ‘before Abraham was, I am’? You don’t use the name of Yahweh—I am—EVER! That’s God’s name! Yahweh is very clear about the punishment for blasphemy. This guy needs to die.”

Biblically/historically, there’s also the account of a certain young hot-shot Pharisee, who went by the name Saul. Remember his story? He was so very zealous for the right keeping of Torah, so zealous, in fact, that he secured written permission from the high priests to basically serve as a bounty hunter and mercenary for God, his “calling” and charge to hunt down all worshippers of Jesus and put them to death. He really thought he was serving God and being the best, most-faithful Jew God could ever hope for. Thank God Jesus set him straight, right? “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?” And the rest, as they say, is history. “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order

## God pleasing worship - John 15:26-16:4 Exaudi 2021

that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (the words of St. Paul to the Philippians; 3:8-9).

Those are just two Biblical examples! That’s not even mentioning the likes of Peter, John, John the Baptist, Stephen, and all the other martyrs of the faith, killed not by Pagan hordes, but by people who really thought they were serving God. A certain fellow by the name of Martin Luther comes to mind as well. Once he told the Roman Church that they had the Gospel of justification all wrong, he was forced to live out the rest of his life as a marked man. These “Christians” wanted nothing more than to make him the kindling at the next Vatican bonfire. God protected Luther. Many faithful Christians, however, were martyred for holding firm to this same faith.

But...as terrible and reprehensible as all this is, is this the only kind of “service” Jesus was referring to in these words? In a word, no. This is where the English translation kind of lets us down. We hear these words of Jesus, and we immediately think of doing evil, murderous deeds, as in people think they serve God by doing such wicked, murderous things. While this is definitely part of what Jesus is saying here, it’s not the only thing He’s saying here.

You see, the Greek word that Jesus uses here is “leitourgia,” not “diakonia.” There’s a reason I share this with you. It matters. Diakonia is the word we often translate when we want to speak of providing service or care to others in need. We do “diakonia,” works of mercy; works of service. But...that’s NOT the word Jesus uses here. Jesus says that these wicked ones will murder, and deem it leitourgia, which is the word we most often translate as “worship.”

## God pleasing worship - John 15:26-16:4 Exaudi 2021

I want you to think about that. Our worship is referred to as leitourgia. It's where we get the word "liturgy" from. Our service, our singing, our listening, our receiving, our praying to God: all leitourgia—worship. Now, I already know that you can easily identify such false and heretical worship/service in the horrific examples we've already named, from what was done against Jesus, done by S(P)aul, done against Luther. We get all that. Whether it's diakonia or leitourgia, it's all evil, it's all murder, and it's all against God, even though it's done in service to God. We get it.

But...what about us? Can we, too, fall into this category, firmly believing that we're worshiping and serving and praising God with good words and deeds, when in reality we're actually killing and putting to death the good things and good people of God? Perhaps the easiest way to come at this is by simply asking: Who/What is at the center of your worship. You know...a little leaven leavens the whole lump. It only takes a little bit of dissatisfied, self-centered infection to kill and destroy the body of Christ that is the Christian congregation. It happens all the time, and it happens for all the wrong, self-centered reasons and best intentions.

So I'll ask again: Who/What is at the center of your worship? Is the Word of God at the center? Every Christian is quick to say, "It's all about Jesus." Is it? Are His holy and life-giving sacraments at the center of your worship? Is this (Word and Sacrament) where you point people to? Is this what you hunger and thirst for... or do you have other itches that these just can't scratch?

Guys: This is what it's all about. This is what worship—true God-pleasing worship—is all about. It's centered on Christ. It gathers around Christ and His Word, His Baptism, His body, His blood...His forgiveness. True worship repents. True and faithful worship doesn't

## God pleasing worship - John 15:26-16:4 Exaudi 2021

attempt to justify the sin or explain it away, or worse yet, just ignore it or turn a blind eye to it. True and faithful worship confesses the sin, and then calls out to God to be merciful, not for the sake of the sinner, but for the sake of Jesus Christ alone. It rejoices in Christ and His gifts and His grace, mercy, and peace. Here it is. Here He is, right where He has promised to be—Word and Sacrament.

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” Jesus doesn’t mince words, does He? Jesus tells it like it is. Here is the reality of true, God-pleasing, Christ-centered worship. And... WHEN others reject and rebel and fight and slander and divide and murder and act the Old Adam enemies of God that they are by nature; enemies who still want to be in charge and in control and like God, all with the very best worshipful, God-pleasing intentions, of course...be at peace. “I am with you always, even to the end of the ages.” Here He is. Here is Christ, holding out to you His pierced hands, reaching out to you to embrace you, protect you, feed you, nourish you, and love you. I pray that this proper, cruciform perspective is your perspective, your focus, your joy, your assurance, and your peace, now and into all eternity. Amen.