

# "The Christian Odyssey: Silencing the Sirens and Confessing the Son"

## Hebrews 4:14-16

The Festival of Pentecost - May 18, 1997

The Confirmation of  
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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

O LORD, our Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter, as we come together to hear of Your Word grant that we may worship You in spirit and in truth. We humbly pray that You may open our hearts to the preaching of Your Word, so that we may repent of our sins, believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear us for His sake. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and especially you,

Carrie, Cameron, and Lili ....

The Christian life is truly an odyssey: an extended, adventuresome, exciting, sometimes meandering voyage; one fraught with dangers, seasoned with awful questions, filled with joyful times, tempered with days of sorrow, rich with excitement, and saturated with liberating doctrine. Call it what you will, but do not call the Christian life booooring!

The epic adventure begins with that shocking plunge into the killing waters of the baptismal font wherein, by and in the Name of the Triune God, the Christian Odyssey begins and the battle is joined as young and old are consecrated to the Lord God. The apostle asks, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Romans 6)*. In the processional hymn, *Life High the Cross*, we confessed this doctrine when we sang -- "All newborn soldiers of the Crucified, Bear on their brows the seal of Him Who died."

For a decade and more, you three have been marked by the water and Word of Baptism. You have been a part of this epic adventure called the Christian faith since that day when God gave you all the blessings of Christ. However, you have a God Who does not simply place you in a journey and watch you from a distance. The Son of God has journeyed into this world, endured all in order to call us His own, and made certain that all the provisions we need to go from here to eternity are ready and available. Even in the journey and the battles ahead, Jesus continues to lead us as we confessed in that same hymn, "Come, Christians, follow where our Captain trod, Our King victorious, Christ, the Son of God."

That sobering and triumphant hymn stanza, being an inspirational invitation to follow the Lord into the Paradise of God, journeying where and in ways He permits, I direct your attention to Hebrews 4:14-16 and ask you to hear of ...

... *The Christian Odyssey*:

*Silencing the Sirens and Confessing the Christ*

*Since then we have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the Throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Cameron, Carrie, and Lili, this Jesus Christ - this High Priest - this Captain whose ship you entered when you were baptized - has come into this world for the very purpose of redeeming you and everyone else in the world. He did this, not by coming down from heaven and imposing His power and justice and judgment from on high, but by humbling Himself and taking on the servant's role. This was His Odyssey and He came to rescue us by being *stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted* (Isaiah 53).

He thirsted in body and soul that you might have the Water of Life. He suffered the agonies of the Divine wrath against all sins. Jesus was tempted by both Devil and man. He is a very different Captain and Hero, not simply because He did battle for us, but He also, by His death and resurrection defeated death, conquered sin, and subdued Satan. You see, Lili, Carrie, and Cameron, *we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.*

Jesus bids us to follow Him, for His earnest, sincere, and Life-giving desire is to take us to His home in the Paradise of God. Getting there is an epic journey that lasts a lifetime. The adventurous voyage is not without danger, for there are many who would like you to reject the Christian faith you have been taught and you now confess. They would like you to listen to them and be drawn away from the Lord and His Church. Thus, you three and all the rest of you as well, remember that the Christian Odyssey involves silencing the sirens. That may sound strange but please listen.

The Greek poet, Homer, wrote an epic called *The Odyssey*, in which the hero, a man called Odysseus, King of Ithaca, led his men on a journey intending to return home to his wife, Penelope. On board ship they wandered about being tossed to and fro by the whims of the gods and the winds of the world. Odysseus was warned about the land of the two Sirens, who enchant all who come near to them. Anyone who comes too close to their shores and whose ears hear the beautiful voices of the Sirens is lost. That man would not be able to resist and he will never complete his journey. For as many as hearken to the sounds of the seductive Sirens, the same number will be lost. Homer tells that the shores of the Sirens are littered with the bones of dead men -- the flesh still rotting off them.

Carrie, Lili, Cameron, and all here today, on this journey called the Christian Odyssey, what are the Sirens along the way that would call you from following the Lord Jesus? Wouldn't it be helpful to know what these dangers are? Indeed, there are many and the first ones that come to mind are the easiest to identify; ones we recognize quickly - gangs, the drug scene, illicit sex, homosexual behavior, divorce, murder, terrorism, and the like. "Easy!" you reply. "No problem; I understand that those activities are unChristian and to be avoided like the plague."

But if you are correct in your identification of such Sirens of this land (and indeed, you are correct!), why do so many Christians fall victim to these activities even though they are so easily identified? Dear people, it's because they overestimate their own strength and underestimate the beautiful songs of those Sirens. They experiment and take tiny, seemingly harmless, steps in the direction of the enticing voices and soon they are shipwrecked on the shoals of tomorrow. I remember one girl sitting where you are this day, who believed she could not only go to, but proudly be a Christian witness at a particular secular university - to go where angels fear to tread. She now absents herself from the confession of the Christian faith here at Our Redeemer, her ears evidently having hearken to the voice of the Sirens of this land.

Please recall, we have only identified the easy ones. What are the Sirens that sound so beautiful and so correct that even Christians will pledge their allegiance and give their lives, their bones soon littering the islands on the land of the lost? Dear friends in Christ, there are Sirens that beckon you to continue mouthing the Apostles' Creed while trusting in yourself and your good works. Using the subtle motivation that doing so is a mark of growing up, they urge you to abuse and dilute the Bible (the written Word of God), to demote the Captain of your soul (the Incarnate Word of God), and to leave His Church behind.

Indeed, the Sirens might be so close as to be a pastor or a Sunday School teacher who urges you to compromise the Good News of salvation by grace through faith with just a wee, tiny speck of legalism that will soon grow to a stature that shipwrecks your hope. But that is not the closest and most subtle of the Sirens you will encounter. Verily, the Siren might be *your adversary the devil* (prowling) *around like a roaring lion, seeking some one to devour (1 Peter 5)* and finding rest in your ears. But even Satan is not the closest and most subtle Siren you three will face. Verily, verily, the Siren might be a mother, a son, a husband, a wife, a daughter, or a father urging you to set aside the confession of Christ in order to follow them in a hope based upon genealogy. But a family member is not the nearest and slyest of the Sirens you three will hear.

Odysseus, in order to keep his men from hearing the songs of the Sirens as they beckon from the distant shores, fills their ears with wax. They could go about their business ignorant of the enchanting songs and listening to the sounds of silence. That simply will not work for the Christian, the reason being the closeness of the most seductive Siren of all. To discover just who this is, please listen to the Word of God, written for us by Jesus' brother, *each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death (James 1)*. Moi? Me? Indeed, this is most certainly true! 'Tis no wonder that generations of Christians have picked up the catechism and memorized that such baptizing with water ...

"signifies that the Old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."

Odysseus desired to listen to the seductive songs of the Sirens and, knowing that he would be unable to endure and resist the temptations of their enchantments, he ordered his men to bind him securely. Thus, they took him to the mast and fastened him tightly with ropes, the captain's arms stretched out on the crosspiece of the ship's mast. The Sirens saw the ship and began with their singing. Odysseus longed to hear them further and made signs by frowning to his men that he should be untied so he

could come down from the crosspiece and go to the land of death. He could not resist the temptation and would have come down and died had his men not tied him tighter.

Not so with Jesus, dear people, for what fastened Him to the cross was neither manmade rope nor Roman nail. The just demands of the law of God and the sacrificial love of grace of God kept our Lord on Calvary's crosspiece. *For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.* Behold then, dear people, *the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world (John 1) Who came not to be served but to serve, and to give His Life as a Ransom for many (Matthew 10).*

Carrie, Lili, and Cameron, the bones of your Savior lie neither on the scattered shores of the Sirens or within a stone-sealed tomb in a rock garden outside the city of Jerusalem. The Church confesses, *It is finished (John 19), He has risen (Mark 16), and this High Priest Who is seated at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in heaven (Hebrews 8).* Since you and I *have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

With the Lord, we have the only God Who is really looking out for our welfare - now and forever. The Son of God has provided an accomplished salvation and, through the Son and by the Holy Spirit, we may approach our Father Who art in heaven, knowing that He will hear our confession of sin and Savior, showering us with the forgiveness that we need each moment of our lives. The writer to the Hebrews declares the invitation of the Lord and the confidence of Christ, that we may, *draw near to the Throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

In every journey of such epic proportions, there come times of trouble, temptation, making the wrong choices, and living with the consequences. The Christian Odyssey is no different. Cameron, Lili, Carrie, and all who are here this day, you will hear the Sirens of pride, sloth, envy, covetousness, gluttony, anger, and lust. Despite these being contrary to the will of God and that these are transgressions of His Law which are never to be done, you have already fallen and will continue to one or more or all of them in your lifetime.

You may find yourself hurting, alone, and wondering if anyone in the world cares about you. The greatest condemnations often come from within. However, remember the Good News of the Lord from His Word which declares that we may *reassure our hearts before Him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything (1 John 3).* Or, as a wise man once wrote to me, "This affords me more opportunity for confession. Let us rejoice that our Lord has died for more sins than we could commit!" (Pastor Tim Pauls). Or, as another pastor declared it, "Do not think that such a Lamb paid such a meager price for your sins" (Pastor Martin Luther).

There may be many such times of need when you are searching for such help. In the journey called the Christian Odyssey, the silencing of the Sirens is a continual battle and it is waged and won daily by the continual, Spirit-driven confession of the Christ.

Dear people of the Lord .... God go with you. Amen.

*Since then we have a great High Priest Who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One Who in every respect has been*

*tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the Throne of Grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Amen.*