

Jude 12-16

These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm – shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted – twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.*

¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: “See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” ¹⁶ These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. [NIV]

*may be translated “hidden reefs” or similar. [NLT,CEV]

We continue our study in Jude this morning, if you'd care to turn there with me. This fierce little letter, written by Jude, and addressed to a church that was on the verge of embracing the heresy of *antinomianism*, which is a presumption upon grace. It is the thinking that says, “I can sin all I want – I can behave in any way I choose, yet God's grace will cover me in the end.”

In this case, it was sexual sin – immorality – that was the issue.

“I can do what I like with my body. I can give my body to whatever makes me feel good in the moment. I can ignore all of God's moral commands regarding intimate behavior, because, in the end, you see, God loves me too much to let me go. God's grace will come through for my salvation.”

That, Jude says, is heresy. That way of thinking is utterly false. It is arrogant, it is completely self-centered. It is presumptuous, and if given free reign for long enough in one's life, it will most certainly lead a person right out of relationship with Jesus and, frankly, right into a godless eternity.

It is the epitome of that rights-centered, I'll-live-the-way-I-like-regardless-of-what-God-or-anyone-else-thinks thinking, and it was being excused by God's grace, of all things.

And all this was being spread through this church by people who had wormed their way into places of influence and leadership.

That is why Jude writes: in order to do nothing less than save the church from buying into this heresy, and, in so doing, hopefully save the church from eternal, self-destruction.

That's how serious this was to Jude.

And we know this because he paints all sorts of pictures of the sellers of these lies, such that – when you understand something about the context and why he chose the images he did – they just send chills up your spine. These men (we presume they were men) were the worst sort of infestation – the most destructive sort of infestation a body of Christ can have.

Jude compares them to murderers.

He calls them slanderers and greedy, rebellious, grumbling, fault-finders who were willing to say and do anything in order to get their way. Even in places where they were ignorant, they spoke in ways and took liberties in judgment that even the most powerful angel would not take against even the worst enemy of all humanity.

That's how presumptuous they were. And Jude's concern was to reveal these liars for what they were and to avoid the eternal loss of this body of Christ.

So, Jude goes on in our text for today, painting for us pictures of what these false teachers were.

Back in verse 8, Jude describes them as misguided people who mistook their dreams for prophecy.

In verse 10, he likens them to irrational animals who follow only their basest instincts.

Here, midway through verse 12, Jude tells how they mimic some of the chaotic parts of the natural world. You see the descent here, from persons to animals to the inanimate. He calls them clouds without rain, autumn trees without fruit, wild waves of the sea, and stars of the sky with no chartable course.

All of these images have their own nuances to them, but, taken together, Jude is using these images to say that these men had nothing good to offer – that they were of no good use to anyone, even though they should be.

You see, you'd expect clouds to give rain.

You'd expect trees to give fruit.

You'd expect waves of the sea to push ships onward.

You'd expect stars to be dependably in their places, so sailors of Jude's day could chart their courses by them.

But none of this characterized these teachers. They looked the part, but didn't deliver.

All style, but no substance. All bun, and no beef!

But, you know, even all this was not the most dangerous part about them. There was something else.

As I've mentioned before, I was part of a large family: my dad was the 11th of twelve children who all grew up, married and stayed in their little hometown, and most of their children – my cousins – did as well. There were a lot of Diddles in East Liverpool, Ohio 30 years ago.

Every summer, a bunch of the men and boys would take a week-long fishing trip to Canada. We went to different places, but for a couple years when I was a teenager, we went to a place called La Verendrye Wildlife Reserve, near Val D'Or, Quebec, and specifically to Lac Granet.

It was an understatement to say that it was remote. It was still quite cold at the end of May, and always extremely quiet. The only living things we saw while we were there, besides the dozen or so of us, were a few fish and approximately ten billion black flies.

It was at Lake Granite that my cousin Bruce caught what wound up being a sturgeon, but what he was

convinced was the world's only freshwater shark, and so he wanted to take it back to civilization and claim his reward or glory or whatever.

We did not do that. We chose instead to eat it. We should have taken it back, because, frankly, it wasn't very good.

But what made Lac Granet so memorable was the very grave warning given to us by the park ranger on our way in. He handed us a map of the lake and pointed to dots all over the map—all over the lake, out in the middle, near the shore, in every bay, totally random. He handed the map to us and said, with steely eyes, "These mark the places where, at this time of year, enormous rocks sit just under the surface of the water. Understand that the lake is so deep and the water so dark that, if you are going fast, you will not see them until it's too late. There is a fortune's worth of boats and motors on the bottom of this lake left by people who did not take this seriously, so take this seriously."

Now, fortunately, my cousin Bruce was not in charge of this trip, or we would have very likely left our equipment at the bottom of the lake, too. Instead, it was my uncle Ray, who led us out to see how accurate the ranger was.

And was he ever accurate!

Out in the middle of this vast lake, right where the dots were on his map, there would suddenly appear a huge rock monolith under the surface, and I mean just an inch or two under the surface and that you would never have seen without warning.

I have a picture of me standing out in the middle of this huge lake with nothing around me for yards and yards—it looks like I'm walking on water.

But, of course, my wife would tell you that I could never do that.

In the picture, I'm standing on this huge underwater boulder, with deep water all around me.

There were places like that all over the lake, and without that map—without that warning—and without someone in our family who took it seriously, we would have been in trouble.

Underwater danger—a hidden reef: that's what Jude calls these false teachers there in verse 12. The word is *spilas*, which means "rocky ledge hidden by waves." The reason some translations read "blemish" or "stain" is probably because **that** Greek word is *spilos*, which newer translations have corrected. Certainly "stain" still applies, but not quite as dramatically.

These false teachers weren't merely imperfections or spots of impurity, you see? Much worse than that, Jude says. They had the potential to cause disaster and to sink ships.

And all this was happening, ironically, Jude says, at the church's love feasts.

Now, the Love Feast was a practice of the early church—lasting up through the middle of the fourth century—in which every week on the Lord's Day the church would eat something of a reenactment of the Passover together, along with celebrating Holy Communion. It was banned at

the Council of Laodocia, but actually we do something like it on some Maundy Thursdays.

Its purpose, like the purpose for most meals in the Hebrew culture, was never just to eat. Its purpose was to communicate with one another and to promote relationship and love and unity.

For Jews and Christians, eating together—especially in this context—was a sacred event, but these people were using this sacred time to spread their lies and sinful thinking and behavior. They were using an event that's designed to promote goodness and holiness and trust to promote just the opposite, you see?

Think of it as something like prostitutes soliciting for themselves in the middle of a worship service—that's the sort of effect their practice had on Jude, which is why he says all that he does.

In this letter, you see, Jude is the park ranger handing out maps: maps of the lake, maps of the rock. And he is pointing out to his original readers, and to us, and to any who will hear and see, the fact that, so often, the most dangerous threats to our walk with Jesus come to us in hidden ways.

They sit just under the surface—just outside our ability to see them.

And unless we're aware of them—unless we have a map to guide us, by the time we encounter them it will be too late to change direction.

Friends, this Bible is a map—given to us by God—to help us avoid the hidden reefs that sink ships.

Within it, the book of Jude is a map, that reveals to us the importance of bodily purity and that urges us to listen to God's word about sexuality.

He warns us about the dangers of striking our own course, and of our inability to see those dangers before it's too late. We can lose it all—for eternity—on this one hidden reef.

Are you taking the map seriously? Do you know what the map says? Do you know how to read it?

God has given it to us, not because He wants to spoil our fun, but because He wants to keep us alive. He doesn't want any of us to wind up at the bottom of the lake by listening to and believing untruths not found in Scripture and false assertions regarding sexual sins.

Jude says to us—God pleads with us and our culture: "Read the map. Believe the map. Follow the map. And don't listen, for even a moment, to those who won't."

Prayer:

Lord how we thank You today for this map—for caring enough about us to put it in our hands.

Help us to take Your word seriously in every way, but Lord, especially in our day, help us take seriously Your words about sexuality, purity, intimacy, and relationship. Help us to see what those rocks can do to a ship, and help us to steer Your course faithfully.

And Lord, for those of us who have in days past rejected Your map, charted our own way, and have hit some of those hidden reefs, it is good to know You restore the repentant. So, would You do that: would You restore us; would You forgive us; would You give us the power to follow Your map from here on out—for our good, for the

good of those we love and who love us, and for Your glory to be made real and evident through us in our world. In Jesus' name, amen.

Service of Holy Communion

The Lord is able to forgive, to guide, to empower. He is able and willing to do anything to help keep His people—His body, the church— from sinking. He gives that grace, even through this feast of love, to those who will follow Him.

I'll lead us through the liturgy of the table— where Jesus meets us and offers the grace for forgiveness, for restoration, for transformed minds and hearts.

I'll lead and you may respond with the words as they're printed on your screen.

Would you hear the invitation?

*You who truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
who live in love and peace with your neighbors,
and who intend to lead a new life,
following the commandments of God and walking in His
holy ways,
draw near with faith,
and take this holy sacrament to your comfort;
and humbly kneeling, make your honest confession to
Almighty God.*

Let's pray the General Confession together:

**Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
maker of all things, judge of all people,
we confess that we have sinned,
and we are deeply grieved as we remember
the wickedness of our past lives.
We have sinned against You, Your holiness and
Your love,
and we deserve only Your indignation and anger.
We sincerely repent, and we are genuinely sorry
for all wrongdoing and every failure to do the
things we should.
Our hearts are grieved,
and we acknowledge that we are hopeless without
Your grace.
Have mercy upon us.
Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father,
for the sake of Your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ,
who died for us.
Forgive us.
Cleanse us.
Give us strength to serve and please You in
newness of life,
And to honor and praise Your name, through Jesus
Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

We continue our confession as we pray together the prayer Jesus taught His disciples.

**Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy
name.
Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it
is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us
our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil:**

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the
glory, forever. Amen.**

I'll pray the Collect:

*O Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who with great
mercy
has promised forgiveness to all who turn to You
with hearty repentance and true faith, have mercy upon
us,
pardon and deliver us from our sins,
make us strong and faithful in all goodness
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.*

Let us pray together for inner cleansing:

**Almighty God, unto whom all hearts are open,
all desires known, and from whom no secrets are
hid:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the
inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love You and worthily
magnify Your holy name,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, who gave in love
Your only Son, Jesus Christ,
to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption,
who by His sacrifice, offered once for all,
did provide a full, perfect, and sufficient atonement for the
sins of the whole world,
we come now to Your table in obedience to Your Son,
Jesus Christ,
who in His holy gospel commanded us to continue a
memory of His death until He comes again.
Hear us, O merciful Father, we ask, and grant that as we
receive this bread and this cup,
may take into ourselves His most blessed body and blood.
Amen.*

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, and said,
"Take and eat; this is My body— given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

And then, after supper He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying,
"Drink of this, all of you, for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

This is the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you. Take it and eat, remembering always that Christ died for you. Feed upon Him in your heart, by faith with thanksgiving.

[Eat]

This is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you and be thankful.

[Drink]

Closing Song

Benediction:

In the communion table, the Lord has spoken powerfully of His love for us all.

As we have received His love, may we then offer that love to a love-starved world.

As God has given us a map that allows us to avoid the dangers that threaten us, let us show and tell others of the map of God that preserves, protects and guides all to real goodness.

And let us guard ourselves from those who are false – who would threaten to sink us by drawing our attention away from God’s way.

Amen.