

THE LORD IS NOT SLOW

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this second-last Sunday of the Church Year:

*The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some count slowness, but long-suffering for us, not counseling anyone to perish but for all to enter into repentance.<sup>1</sup>*

**Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**

When you heard the readings today, or perhaps when you studied them as you prepared for this day, did you note that these may be used as texts for “fire and brimstone” teaching? Who among us has not discerned some of the connections revealed in today’s readings? There are many, yet they may be summarized with two words: Law and Gospel. The Law that convicts – derisively called “fire and brimstone” by those who do not want to recognize its place for Christians who remain infected with sin – that Law must still be preached . The Gospel that acquits – the Good News that God’s will is to place the punishment for our sins on Jesus – is also to be preached that sinners convicted of their sins will turn from them, believe, and be saved.

Today’s readings have clearly revealed the will of God. First, and foremost for we who are suffering mightily in these Last Days, God makes it known that the proclamation of repentance extends over all people, as does the Gospel. *God’s revealed will involves both items: first, that he would receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ; second, that he would punish those who deliberately turn away from the holy commandment and involve themselves again in the filth of this world, prepare their hearts for Satan, and outrage the Holy Spirit, and that he would harden, blind, and for ever damn them if*

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<sup>1</sup> II Peter 3:9.

*they continue therein... God does not will sin and has no pleasure in sin, so he also does not will the death of a sinner and has no pleasure in his damnation.* <sup>2</sup> All that is the revealed counsel of God, declared from His own heart, and summarized by St. Peter's words,

*The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some count slowness, but long-suffering for us, not counseling anyone to perish but for all to enter into repentance.*<sup>3</sup>

In His own counsel, as God pondered the years, centuries, millennia that He would delay His judgment on mankind for our sins, God determined to exhibit patience toward us. That is, He decided to suffer long with our individual and collective sins, so that some from each generation, upon hearing the preaching of repentance and renewal, would be turned and enter into life-eternal in Him. God, who exists outside time, who created time when He separated the light from the darkness, the day from the night, knows the Day when He will end this creation. For Him, it exists at the same time as the first day of creation. For this reason, the Apostle declares that *God is not slow concerning the promise, as some count slowness.*

God is above time, yet He has also entered the creation, the time He created. He did this at various times, but most especially when He took on our flesh in the womb of the Virgin. In Jesus, in His incarnation, God entered bodily into His creation, into time, that He might redeem - buy-back - creation and time, from those created beings who had, have, and continue to corrupt them. The eternal reality that God has saved those people who do not continue to reject Him is another connection that binds this week's readings.

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<sup>2</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>3</sup> II Peter 3:9.

The reminders to the faithful have been declared into your ears: that you continue to call upon God in the day of trouble, for He will deliver you; into the vision of Daniel concerning the final Day of deliverance; from the words of Jesus that reveal the position of honor for people who cling to Him by faith, through grace, and do, out of that faith, the good works He has prepared for us to do; are summarized by Peter when he declares throughout the ages:

*for we, according to His promise, continue to await new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.*<sup>4</sup>

The Church keeps, year in and year out, the Promise of God before her children. This is because, in the wisdom of the ancients, illumined by Holy Scripture, and guided by the Holy Spirit, the end of each year, and beginning of the new was planned to remind us that God who created all things would on the Last Day, re-create all things. That which was once declared good, which was corrupted of the sin of the first Man, would once again be declared good, revived, restored and recreated on account of the sinlessness of the Son of Man.

It remains necessary, that some might be saved, to continue to declare that the Father has given to the Son the responsibility, trust and honor *to give life, to execute all judgment, to have all authority in heaven and on earth, to have all things given into his hands, to have all things under his feet, to cleanse from sin, and so forth.* These are not created gifts but *divine and infinite qualities... given and communicated to the man Christ.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> II Peter 3:13.

<sup>5</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church.* Fortress Press: Philadelphia

Those things you know about Jesus because God has granted you faith, His faith, through His Word. You, as the pressure of these final days presses in upon you, you cling to the reality of God's promises revealed in Christ Jesus, knowing in your inmost being that if you do not turn away, God has promised His grace to keep you firm in the faith to the end, and to complete it in you. God has given His Word, and He is faithful.

God has given, with His Word of Promise, His Word of judgment. Hence we have the images revealed in the visions of Daniel and the words of the Son of God for this week. The "fire and brimstone," declarations, of which many people in the church do not wish to hear today, stand as more than warnings for the unbelievers among us. They also stand to let us who remain in the Faith that these times of trial, persecution, injustice, tribulation, will all pass away. Peter declares to the Church:

*The Day of (the) Lord comes as (a) thief: the heavens will disappear with (a) roar; the elemental things with burning heat will be dissolved; and the earth and the works in her will be exposed.<sup>6</sup>*

Does that coming day bring fear to you? The cleansing fire of God is coming, and all sin, and its effects will be consumed. The Word of the Lord stands, and will be declared on that Day as an eternal reality – it is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!<sup>7</sup>

(I know: "fire and brimstone" again! Oh, how many times has it been said that preaching like this has not been heard for 40 or 50 years in our churches!) Yet, with our failure to strongly, forcefully declare the Law of God and its eternal results for the

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<sup>6</sup> II Peter 3:10.

unrepentant sinner, has come the great decline of our western, first-world, churches. If one who has been, and is being, saved, does not have the proclamation of the Law, one begins to believe that one is good, and cannot do evil in the sight of God. So, texts like these which remind the Church of the coming Great and Terrible Day of the Lord, are still proclaimed, and “fire and brimstone” are still preached, that no one might be lost. In holding to the ancient teaching and preaching of God’s completed and coming judgment, the Church hopes that all would see their need to daily turn and believe in that which is greater – the Gospel. In these Last Days, it remains necessary for this Word to sound forth its clarion call:

*This first all of you must continue to know, that scoffers will come in the last of the days, scoffing according to their own desires, continually coming and saying, “where is the promise of the Coming of Him? For from (the time of) our fathers falling asleep all things thus continue as from the beginning of creation.”<sup>8</sup>*

Isn’t that the position of the agnostics, those who claim that they will believe God when they see Him? It is the position of the world, of the devil (who knows he is defeated, yet rages that his time is now), and even our sinful flesh (“it is such a small sin, this...fill in the blank... I’ll have time to ask for forgiveness”). Time passes, and the Promise does not come.

Yet, that is only so for we who are bound to time. For He who transcends time, yet enters into it, the delay is not long, nor may it even exist! From His eternity, God has declared that we remain in the divine understandings that He has revealed, namely,

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<sup>7</sup> Paraphrase of Hebrews 10:13.

<sup>8</sup> II Peter 3:3-4.

*This they are willingly ignorant of, that (the) heavens were of old, also (the) earth out of water, and through water stood together by the Word of God, through which then (the) cosmos being deluged was destroyed.*<sup>9</sup>

There is a reminder to we who are being saved, of the biblical, historical, and geological truth of the destruction of the first world, on account of rampant sin, by water. That world has passed away, and even pagan cultures, in their myths, throughout the world, have record of its passing through the Great Flood.

For the believer in Christ, there is another tie that may be developed from the destruction of the sinful world by God through water by His Word. What is it?

It is the destruction of sin in us through the Water, and the Word of God. It is no mean error that the Church's baptismal rites have, for centuries, when possible, included the Flood Prayer. Sin has been drowned in you with water, and you may return to that every day, dear Christian.

With that drowning came your resurrection, by fire, that of the Holy Spirit. Your New Man has been raised up, cleansed and freed, having had the dross of sin burned away. For you, in Christ, the Last Day has come. Judgment Day was brought to you through simple means, the water/word/Spirit and fire.

Therefore, you have no need to fear these words,

*But the now heavens and the earth by the Word of Him remain treasured up for fire, kept into day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly men.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> II Peter 3:5-6.

<sup>10</sup> II Peter 3:7.

You who remain in Christ do not need to fear, for you, in Christ, due to the purifying fire of the Spirit in the Word, are not the ungodly. Therefore you are free to declare the “fire and brimstone” to others by your life, words and/or deeds. (You don’t need to be a powerful orator to do this. One of the greatest hellfire sermons ever delivered “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” was reportedly read word-for-word, in a quiet, unemotional manner, by a man with an high-pitched voice. Yet, the Law was so strong, that people clung to the pews and the pillars of the church building that they would not be sucked into hell’s yawning abyss). Your lives declare God’s “fire and brimstone” not to eternally condemn sinners, but to lead them to an awareness of their lostness and coming destruction. Then, in the knowledge that the world which was once destroyed by water, will be soon cleansed by fire, you may share with them the foundness and coming life that is yours in Christ. For this reason, we recall the Word for the week:

*The Lord is not slow concerning the promise, as some count slowness, but long-suffering for us, not counseling anyone to perish but for all to enter into repentance.<sup>11</sup>*

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

Second Last Sunday of the Church Year (One-year series)

Daniel 7:9-14; II Peter 3:3-14; Matthew 25:31-46

November 16, 2008

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**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>11</sup> II Peter 3:9.

τούτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι ἐλεύσονται ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν [ἐν] ἐμπαιγμονῇ ἐμπαίκεται κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῶν πορευόμενοι καὶ λέγοντες, Ποῦ ἐστιν ἡ ἐπαγγελία τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ; ἀφ' ἧς γὰρ οἱ πατέρες ἐκοιμήθησαν, πάντα οὕτως διαμένει ἀπ' ἀρχῆς κτίσεως.

λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας ὅτι οὐρανοὶ ἦσαν ἔκπαλαι καὶ γῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι' ὕδατος συνεστῶσα τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ, δι' ὧν ὁ τότε κόσμος ὕδατι κατακλυσθεὶς ἀπόλετο·

οἱ δὲ νῦν οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἡ γῆ τῷ αὐτῷ λόγῳ τεθησαυρισμένοι εἰσὶν πυρὶ τηρούμενοι εἰς ἡμέραν κρίσεως καὶ ἀπωλείας τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἀνθρώπων.

Ἐν δὲ τοῦτο μὴ λανθανέτω ὑμᾶς, ἀγαπητοί, ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία.

οὐ βραδύνει κύριος τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, ὡς τινες βραδύτητα ἠγοῦνται, ἀλλὰ μακροθυμεῖ εἰς ὑμᾶς, μὴ βουλόμενός τις ἀπολέσθαι ἀλλὰ πάντας εἰς μετάνοιαν χωρῆσαι.

Ἦξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς, ἐν ἧ ὁ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται στοιχεῖα δὲ καυσούμενα λυθήσεται καὶ γῆ καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτῇ ἔργα εὐρεθήσεται.

τούτων οὕτως πάντων λυομένων ποταποὺς δεῖ ὑπάρχειν [ὑμᾶς] ἐν ἀγίαις ἀναστροφαῖς καὶ εὐσεβείαις, προσδοκῶντας καὶ σπεύδοντας τὴν παρουσίαν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμέρας δι' ἣν οὐρανοὶ πυρούμενοι λυθήσονται καὶ στοιχεῖα καυσούμενα τήκεται.

καινοὺς δὲ οὐρανοὺς καὶ γῆν καινὴν κατὰ τὸ ἐπάγγελμα αὐτοῦ προσδοκῶμεν, ἐν οἷς δικαιοσύνη κατοικεῖ.

Διό, ἀγαπητοί, ταῦτα προσδοκῶντες σπουδάσατε ἄσπιλοι καὶ ἀμώμητοι αὐτῷ εὐρεθῆναι ἐν εἰρήνῃ <sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Aland, B., Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., & Wikgren, A. 1993, c1979. *The Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) . United Bible Societies: Federal Republic of Germany

## **BOOK OF CONCORD**

**Daniel 7:14**

**601.55**

The statement is, of course, correct and true that Christ's human nature in and by itself possesses all the created gifts which have been given to it. But these do not measure up to the majesty which the Scriptures, and the ancient Fathers on the basis of Scriptures, ascribe to the assumed human nature in Christ.<sup>55</sup> For to give life, to execute all judgment, to have all authority in heaven and on earth, to have all things given into his hands, to have all things under his feet, to cleanse from sin, and so forth are not created gifts but divine and infinite qualities. Yet according to the statement of the Scriptures these properties have been given and communicated to the man Christ (John 5:21, 27; 6:39, 40; Matt. 28:18; Dan. 7:14; John 3:31, 35; 13:3; Matt. 11:27; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 2:8; 1 Cor. 15:27; John 1:3, 10).<sup>13</sup>

### **II Peter 3:9 621.28**

Hence if we want to consider our eternal election to salvation profitably, we must by all means cling rigidly and firmly to the fact that as the proclamation of repentance extends over all men (Luke 24:47), so also does the promise of the Gospel. Therefore Christ has commanded to preach "repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name among all nations." For God "loved the world" and gave to it his only begotten Son (John 3:16). Christ has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29); he has given his flesh "for the life of the world" (John 6:51); his blood is "the propitiation for the whole world's" sin (1 John 1:7; 2:2). Christ declares, "Come unto me, all who are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "God has included all men under disobedience so that he might have mercy on all" (Rom. 11:32). "The Lord is not wishing that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). "He is simultaneously one Lord of all, rich toward all who call upon him" (Rom. 10:12). Righteousness "comes through faith in Christ to all and on all who believe" (Rom. 3:22). "This is the will of the Father, that all who believe on Christ should have eternal life" (tr-1073) (John 6:40).<sup>14</sup>

### **621.32**

Thus the Spirit of God gives "witness" to the elect "that they are the children of God," and when they "do not know how to pray as we ought," he intercedes for them "with inexpressible groanings" (Rom. 8:16-26).<sup>32</sup> In the same vein Holy Scripture also assures us that God who has called us will be so faithful that after "he has begun the good work in us" he will also continue it to the end and complete it, if we ourselves do not turn away from him but "hold fast until the end the substance which has been begun" in us. For such constancy he has promised his grace (1 Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:6ff.; 2 Pet. 3:9; Heb. 3:14).<sup>15</sup>

### **629.82**

And as God does not will sin and has no pleasure in sin, so he also does not will the death of a sinner and has no pleasure in his damnation. He does not will that "any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). It is written in Ezekiel, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11).<sup>82</sup> And St. Paul testifies with clear words that God's power and operation can transform the vessels of dishonor into vessels of honor when he writes, "If any one purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work" (2 Tim. 2:21). He who is to purify himself must beforehand have been impure (tr-1091) and therefore a vessel of dishonor. Concerning "the vessels of mercy" he says specifically that the

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<sup>13</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>14</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>15</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

Lord himself “has prepared them unto glory.”<sup>8</sup> He does not say this of the damned, whom God has not prepared but who have prepared themselves to be vessels of damnation.<sup>16</sup>

## 630.84

It is to be considered diligently that God punishes sin with sin, that is, because of their subsequent impurity, impenitence, and deliberate sins God punishes with obduracy and blindness those who have been converted. This must not be misconstrued as if it had never been God’s gracious will that such people should come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. God’s revealed will involves both items: First, that he would receive into grace all who repent and believe in Christ; second, that he would punish those who deliberately turn away from the holy commandment<sup>9</sup> and involve themselves again in the filth of this world (2 Pet. 2:20), prepare their hearts for Satan (Luke 11:24, 25), and outrage the Holy Spirit (Heb. 10:29), and that he would harden, blind, and for ever damn them if they continue therein.<sup>84</sup> Hence Pharaoh (of whom we read, “For this purpose have I let you live to show you my power, so that my name may be declared throughout all the earth”)<sup>1</sup> did not perish because God did not want to grant him salvation or because it was God’s good pleasure that he should be damned and lost. For God “is not wishing that any should perish,” nor has he any “pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rom. 9:23.

<sup>16</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>9</sup> Most manuscript copies and the German printed text of 1580 read *Gebet* (prayer), but this is an obvious slip for *Gebot* (commandment), the reading of the Latin version (*mandato*).

<sup>1</sup> Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:17.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Pet. 3:9; Ezek. 33:11.

<sup>17</sup>Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran church*. Fortress Press: Philadelphia