

IN NOMINE JESU

TRUE LOVE OF GOD IS DISPLAYED IN LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

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

This Sunday's theme centers hearers of the Word upon the believer's love of God and love of neighbor. One cannot truly have one without the other. The texts clearly display that such love – true unconditional, sacrificial love – comes to sinners first from God and causes our responses to God and neighbor. From that order - God to sinner, then sinner to God - the Church concludes that one's true love of God is displayed in his or her love of neighbor.

From our Old Testament and Gospel readings in particular, love of neighbor begins with those who have heard the Word – and who may have been considered “in the Church” at one time or another. (That does not mean that we are not to care for the needs of those who have never been in the Church). Reflect on this: the Judahites and Israelites of the Old Testament reading, and the Samaritan and the wounded man in the Gospel reading, were all children of the Promise God had given to Abraham. If they all traced their bloodlines back far enough, they would arrive at Abraham and Sarah. This means that in addition to being from the same family tree, at one time, their families were all “in the Church.”

These texts are as valid for us today as when they were first proclaimed. We are living in a year when two major formerly Christian church bodies publicly gave witness that they have rejected the clear Word of God in doctrine and practice. Their public pronouncements, based upon genuine loving human compassion, display that

they have replaced God's gift of true sacrificial love with their own definitions. Yet, we know that true love of God is displayed in love of neighbor, and that in rightly proclaiming His Law and Gospel.

The Church has recognized their falling away from the biblical definitions necessary to be fulfilled by congregations to be considered part of the universal Church. We may become tempted to view their members as less than we are, or, to put it another way, greater sinners than we. Simply applied from today's texts, we may be tempted to not treat those in need in fallen churches as our neighbors for whom Christ died, and whom He desires to be returned to the Church.

This next point may sting a bit. The concept of caring for neighbors in the church, or those who have fallen from it, mean that there should, in a perfect communion of saints, not be any need for national health care insurance. We are called toward bearing one another's burdens. Long ago, for this was a concern for at least one of the pastors who led to the mission plants that became the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod in the middle of the 1800's, Christians actually helped one another by providing for health care needs - and funding - for members in the Church. Sometime a century and a half ago, the Church turned that caring responsibility over to the State - and we have what we have today!

We are so involved in our culture, and its laws, insurances, etc, that I doubt the Church will ever fully reclaim her God-given role of members caring for members in all aspects of life. By God's grace, we have seen progress here in the caring Diaconate,

its work in leading us to provide food, diapers, etc. for our community. They are beginning to move us toward helping our members with extraordinary medical costs. But, these are beginning steps. Take heart, we appear to be on the Lord's Way in this area. That is, true love of God is displayed in love of neighbor.

Yet, while we work member-to-member, and member-to-fallen-Church-member in caring for needs of body and life, we are also called to rightly maintain God's division of His Word for us and them. That is, we hold the Law that convicts, condemns and kills as pure, that it might bring sinners to recognize their sins. And it means that we hold the Gospel that releases, acquits, and gives life as pure, that it might cause all sinners to turn from sin and walk in new life. This Law and Gospel division is proclaimed with clarity in our texts, and, as is this year's custom, shown forth in the Old Testament narrative. The text is so interwoven that I will not go through it line-by-line today. Even so, I will attempt to lead you to see in this text the Gospel of God's forgiveness, the Law of His Alien nature, and believers' responses to each.

The assumption that underlies the reading from the Chronicler is that the warring people of this text are all related by blood. They were meant to share in the Promise that the lands in which they lived would be theirs forever, as a gift from God. They were to understand, that the lands in which they lived could only be successfully and peacefully as they remained connected to the Promise through the means God provided. In the end, this means that they were to have faith in God's gracious provision for all their needs of body and life. Further, they were to believe that, at the end of their

lives, God would take them to be with Him in heaven because He would provide the final sacrifice for their sins. In other words, all the Old Testament believers were to look with faith for the Christ who would take away their sins once-for-all and open the doors to heaven for them. They were called to a faith in the Christ-to-come.

It is crucial that you hear of the sacrifice of the Christ behind these texts so that you may recall how people, when confronted with their sins, could have power to turn from them. It is not the Law that brings anyone's turn from sin, but the Gospel. This is a key that applies today when you converse with people from the congregations which have fallen from the one true Faith, who have ceased to be Church. You must not assume that they know the Gospel - namely that God took all sin upon Himself, carried it to the Cross, and died to bring atonement for sin. Only that takes away God's eternal fiery wrath against sin. The Gospel is Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sin, your sins, no matter what they may be. Because of Christ, you cannot out-sin the grace of God!

That needs to be made clear, because it is foundational for everything that happened in the true biblical and historical record you heard today. By the time the events of our Old Testament reading occurred, many of the people of the Promise had turned away from the Gospel. Some fell completely from God's inerrant Word. Others turned to the Law of God for salvation. The state of the people of God, of the Church of the Old Testament, was much as it is today. That is, they looked to their own works, thoughts, and preparations in order to appease God's wrath at sin - through idolatry of

various forms, or, they attempted to say that which God had declared to be sin was not sin! (Sound familiar?)

On account of sin, God's once unified people of His Promise were found in two nations, Israel in the North, and Judah in the South. God, who still spoke from time-to-time to His people through His prophets, called them repeatedly to repentance. This He repeatedly had done over decades in both North and South.

When the years given by God for repentance had passed, God brought correction, punishment, to His people – in order to turn them from their sins. This He did as He does today – through means. In the case of today's historical reality, God's means to bring the people of the Southern Kingdom to repentance for their sins, was to use their neighbors of the Promise, the men of the Northern Kingdom. This was to be done in the spirit of: true love of God is displayed in love of neighbor.

From this we understand that the "civil" war that ended before the beginning of today's reading was God's means to bring unrepentant sinners to repentance, and if they would not turn, to remove them from His Presence. For it was, is, and ever shall be, that the unholy cannot remain in the Presence of the Holy. The unholy is consumed by God's Holy fire. His Holy Fire cleanses the repentant, and His Holy Fire eternally consumes the unrepentant.

God intended that His will would be worked among the people of Judah through the hands of their relatives, the people of Israel, in particular those who lived in Samaria. (The old hatred between Jews and Samaritans finds some of its roots in these

texts, and understanding that will firm up your grasp of the Gospel reading for this week). Neither nation was perfect. The chosen punishers had been living under the reign of evil King Ahaz. Their government had firmed up the public worship of pagan gods, even provided images for them, and they sacrificed their children by fiery deaths to those gods!

Perhaps now you may understand how sinful were God's chosen instruments for exercising His wrath. God had called them to war, even though many of them were unworthy, unholy, in His sight. Instead of humbly and obediently doing their duty, truly loving of God loving their neighbors even as their corrected them, they reveled in it. They did not slay their relatives with a sense of remorse over their task while understanding its necessity. They rejoiced in the slaughter. They went beyond the command of God, and they even added personal insults, sins, to the required punishments. They humiliated the vanquished, and took the defenseless of the conquered as victory trophies - without confirmation or order from the Word of God - which had first sent them to punish the unrepentant. Where was the true love of God displayed in love of neighbor?

A lesson here is for the Christian to recall that when he or she is called to bring others to correction for sin, whether that be parent to child, spouse to spouse, or Christian to Christian, that all parties have sinned against God and need His forgiveness. It is a call to humility, to remember that everyone in the Presence of God stands under the fire, and only those who by faith cling to Christ-crucified will repent and be purified.

In other words, when you are called to correct, when the sin is obvious, remember that the goal is to turn the sinner from his sin that he may receive forgiveness and live forever in Christ. Like all who are to remain in the Promise of God, in His family, as part of His eternal household, the correctors still are called to remember that they are also poor, miserable sinners, who continue to sin against Him in thought, word and deed, who deserve, in themselves without His Savior, only sin, death and Hell. The Israelites would have been well-served to live by the statement of a generation of American parents that has passed into glory, "This will hurt me more than it hurts you," as they meted out well-deserved punishment.

Humility that comes from the pure Word came upon the people who had erred in handing out God's wrath when they were confronted by the man of God by their sins. *And they said to them,*

*"You shall not cause to bring the captives here; for (a) guilt against YHWH (is) upon us. The things which you all speak cause to bring upon us our sins, and upon our guilt. For great (is) guilt to us, and fierce wrath (is) upon Israel."*¹

The Law has convicted the people of God. If they did not have the Good News of the Promise, this is where they would have remained. Their recognition of their sins would have caused sorrow, and it would have ultimately crushed them. But, they turned from their sins, repented, because there was, at that time, still a knowledge and belief in the God who forgives sins, who would take even this heinous fratricide and humiliation, and make it right through forgiveness. It is the Gospel that moved those

¹ II Chronicles 28:13.

men to set the stage for the parable Jesus used regarding the Samaritan and the wounded man. It is the Gospel that moves the Church to care for the needs of her neighbors, even those who remain in error for: true love of God is displayed in love of neighbor.

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

Trinity XIII (LSB One-year series)

II Chronicles 28:8-15; Galatians 3:15-22; Luke 10:23-37

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SOLI DEO GLORIA

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT

And the sons of Israel caused to return from their relatives, 200,000 women, sons and daughters. Also they took much spoil from them. And they caused to bring the spoil to Samaria.²

But there was (a) prophet for YHWH, Oded was his name, and he went out to face the army, the one come into Samaria, and he said to them, "Behold in anger YHWH Elhoe of your fathers came upon Judah (and) gave (them) into your hand; but you have slain them in (a) rage which has caused to reach up to the heavens³...and now (of the) sons of Judah and Jerusalem you all say (that you will) subjugate for male slaves and female slaves for yourself. (Is it) not for your own sins to YHWH your Elohim?⁴ But, all of you hear me, and cause your captives to return from whence you have taken them, from your relatives. For the fierce wrath of YHWH is upon all of you."⁵...

And men stood up, (the) heads of the sons of Ephraim, Azariah, son of Johanan; Berechiah, son of Meshillemoth; and Hezechiah, son of Shallum; and Amasa, son of Hadla, against the ones coming from the war.⁶ And they said to them, "You shall not cause to bring the captives here; for (a) guilt against YHWH (is) upon us. The things which you all speak cause to bring upon us our sins, and upon our guilt. For great (is) guilt to us, and fierce wrath (is) upon Israel."⁷ Then the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the faces of the chiefs and all the assembly.⁸ And the men aforementioned by name arose, and they cause to take the captives. Then all the naked ones they caused to be clothed from the spoil, they clothed them and gave them sandals; and they caused to feed them; and they

²² II Chronicles 28:8.

³ II Chronicles 28:9.

⁴ II Chronicles 28:10.

⁵ II Chronicles 28:11.

⁶ II Chronicles 28:12.

⁷ II Chronicles 28:13.

⁸ II Chronicles 28:14.

caused to give them drink; and they caused to anoint them; and they caused to carry all the feeble ones by donkeys. Then they caused to bring them to Jericho, the city of palms, to their kinfolk, and they returned to Samaria.⁹

⁹ *II Chronicles 28:15.*