

GOD HAS PITY ON HIS PEOPLE

Our sermon that breaks through Lent's fast on this Feast Day is taken from our Gospel:

Thus says YHWH, "In time of favor I answered you; and in day of salvation I have helped you; and I have given you for (a) covenant people to establish (the) land, to cause them to apportion desolate heritages."¹

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

When the people who witnessed Jesus multiply bread in the wilderness, in fulfillment of the prophecies of the ancient Israelite prophets, they did not know what they had seen with their eyes, touched with their hands, heard with their ears, and tasted with their mouths. They, who had been catechized and taught from their youth the Word of the Lord, did not grasp that Word by faith. Rather, they held to the Word in the forms and with the understandings that had been handed on to them by tradition. It is for that reason that, when the feeding of the multitudes was over,

then the men beholding the sign He did said, "This One remains truly the Prophet, the One Coming into the world." Jesus, then knowing that there were about to come and seize Him that they might make (Him a) king, again He departed into the mountain alone."²

Was it some weakness peculiar to their time that caused the ancients to reject the Savior for Who He is; to attempt to hold Him as they desired Him to be – the One who merely filled their mortal stomachs with food that perishes?

¹ *Isaiah* 49:8.

² *John* 6:15.

Those people were not any different than any other people who have heard the Word of God, even memorized the Word of God, without faith in the true Christ, who miss the true Christ. They, and many who would be called Church today, hold a different Christ than the Savior declared by the prophets of Israel. They want a Savior of prosperity, a Savior of power and brilliance, and not the Savior of the Cross. As a result, they miss, as did the ancients, the Day of Salvation and time of favor, when God the Savior took the full wrath of God against sin upon Himself. Instead of looking to the cross for Salvation, they look to the good things of this earth as a measure of God's pleasure with them. Yet even to them, the prophet's words still declare:

Thus says YHWH, "In time of favor I answered you; and in day of salvation I have helped you; and I have given you for (a) covenant people to establish (the) land, to cause them to apportion desolate heritages."³

That passage begins with words that indicated to its first hearers that a new prophecy was coming. God's concern, expressed through the prophet, is to give His troubled servants an answer to their complaints that they seem to be laboring in vain under the "crosses" of this life. A fourfold blessing is declared in the opening words of this week's text. In it the people who are groaning under sin in this world are to hear of security, of enjoyment, of liberation, and of transformation. With regard to God's promise fulfilled, it has been said that,

³ Isaiah 49:8.

*God's word is shining and calling; you have plenty of reason and opportunity to heed it, even as regards temporal wealth.*⁴

Why then do you, at times when life gets tough, when finances and retirements are dwindling, looking for God to rescue you in ways He has not promised? Why do you desire to shrug off the crosses that are laid upon you on account of your good confession of the Lord's Salvation? In a word the answer is "sin." Against that, God says through the prophet:

*"Say to (the) prisoners, 'All of you come forth;' to those which (are) in darkness, 'appear.' Upon (the) ways they shall feed, and in all bare heights will be their pastures."*⁵

There we heard God's deliverance from imprisonment to Satan declared. They, you, are called out from sin's prison house. You are free to leave the darkness of sin and death because it has been shoved back by the Light of Life. God is promising in the day of His Yeshuah that He will bless, keep, feed, and nourish them. He declares that in the Day of Salvation God will feed His people with the bread of Salvation.

In our Gospel reading, this Day was declared as Jesus fed the 5,000 men (plus women and children) from five barley loaves and the small relish fish. In the Church of our day, the Day of Salvation is fulfilled by Jesus in the feeding of millions every Sunday, on Feast Days, and whenever they gather with His Word and rightly administered sacraments. It is a feeding with the bread of life. Here, today, the Lord

⁴Luther, M. 1999, c1962. Vol. 45: *Luther's works, vol. 45 : The Christian in Society II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

⁵ *Isaiah* 49:9.

of Salvation will give His own Body to the eaters who are traveling on the way of mortal life into immortality. In the strength of this meal, God's people will be led by God into the verdant green pastures of the everlasting Garden of Paradise. Here is a foretaste of the Promise given by the prophet:

*"They will not hunger, and they will not thirst, and the scorching wind and sun will not cause to smite them. He who has pity on them and will lead them, and by all springs of waters He will guide them."*⁶

God declares the time of His provision, protection and guardianship of the people whom He draws to Himself. The guiding thought of the passage for this day is that God has pity on His people. He is one with them, for, in the Day of His Salvation, He became one with them. He took on their flesh, your flesh and mine, and their sins, yours and mine, and bore them into the grave. He took human flesh into death and then brought it back to life, eternal life with the Father. In our flesh, the Savior ascended to the Right Hand of God, and rules there, in our flesh, over all creation.

Because He has taken His place, you who remain in Him will have your place with Him. He has had pity on you despite the sins of Adam which you inherited, and the sins you commit daily. He is merciful to those who continue to call upon Him by His faith. You are to know that this Savior is yours.

This is because you have been led by Him to springs of fresh water. You may remember that whenever you make the sign of the cross over your head and

⁶ *Isaiah 49:10.*

breast. You pass the water in the font – when combined with the Word of God a spring of living waters - on the way to the Table of the Lord’s heavenly bread, His food of immortality, His food for the multitudes who continue to call upon Him, trusting His Word, confessing their sins and their Savior, recognizing His Real Presence where He has promised to be. To you who approach Him by faith, remaining in your Baptisms, holding fast the conviction that in yourself you are but a sinner, and by the grace of God in Christ you are forgiven, He comes and brings you food that strengthens you to everlasting life. How important it is to rejoice – do not confuse that with happiness – to rejoice as Jesus the Savior comes to touch you with His crucified, risen and ascended Body and Blood in, with and under the elements of bread and wine. Here is the awe the ancients awaited, and the multitudes did not understand. Here is the Bread of Life, the Word of the Lord given to feed His people, to forgive His people throughout their life’s journey in this world of sin, darkness and death.

In the Word and in the Sacraments, the Savior promised long ago comes to lead His people to the eternal Promised Land. There is only One way into that Land. Though it is narrow, it is the Way that anyone may travel to heaven’s pastures. God has promised, and in Christ delivers, just as God promised with these words:

“And I will make all My mountains (a) way, and My highways will be raised up.”⁷

⁷ Isaiah 49:11.

The way to the Lord in the time of favor, on the Day of salvation, is likened to a level path. All hindrances that might prevent the sojourners going into the Lord's Promised Land are removed. Rugged mountains are leveled, low valleys are raised, and people pass straight through, on their Savior, to their God. You are, in reality, the level Way to the Lord is through the Savior. Jesus, who is the Way, removes all obstacles to the Father's land – sin, death and even the devil are conquered by this Savior. Those who remain on this Way will come to the Promised Land – to dwell in bliss and peace forever. Who are they? The Lord through the prophet declares:

“Behold, these from afar will come; and behold, these from (the) North, and from (the) waters, and these from land of Syene.”⁸

Those words bring forth a remembrance of the Exodus deliverance of the people of the Old Covenant. Now, in the Day of God's favor, in the Day of Salvation, God has made His people one of His New Covenant for all those of the world. That is, they come to Him from North and South, West and East, drawn to the Lord by the people of God who have experienced and live in His salvation.

“All of you sing for joy, O heavens; and exult, O earth; and break forth, O mountains singing! Thus YHWH has comforted His people, and on His afflicted He will have compassion.”⁹

That ode to joy is on account of the Promise of the Savior. God has given Him power to be Savior of His people, and the Nations. In Him the comfort and consolation God is given. In the Gospel of Isaiah, the heavens and earth represent the

⁸ Isaiah 49:12.

⁹ Isaiah 49:13.

totality of creation resounding in the joy of God's salvation. So that all will hear, Isaiah used the images of the ancients, the mountains which were the places where good news was heralded.

The words of today's prophecy have been fulfilled for you. You, dear Christians, are living in the time of the Lord's favor, in the Day of His Jesus. You have the benefits of heaven, and the strength of Christ with which you may bear all the crosses of this life. In the death of the Savior, you have the comfort that God will not count your sins against you. In the afflictions of Christ, you receive the compassion of God. Hold fast, then, to the Christ of the Scriptures, as His Word guides you this week:

Thus says YHWH, "In time of favor I answered you; and in day of salvation I have helped you; and I have given you for (a) covenant people to establish (the) land, to cause them to apportion desolate heritages."¹⁰

Know that you are God's people of the New Covenant. In you He continues to establish the eternal Promised Land. In you, He will turn those who live in the desolation of the world without Christ, to make them co-heirs with you in blessed eternal life. God will declare His Promise through your lives. The time of favor is here: the Day of Salvation has come! Rejoice!

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

Lent IV (LSB One-year series) Isaiah 49:8-13; Galatians 4:21-31; John 6:1-1 March 22, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

¹⁰ Isaiah 49:8.

SOLI DEO GLORIA

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT:

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"They will not hunger, and they will not thirst, and the scorching wind and sun will not cause to smite them. He who has pity on them and will lead them, and by all springs of waters He will guide them."¹³

"And I will make all My mountains (a) way, and My highways will be raised up."¹⁴

"Behold, these from afar will come; and behold, these from (the) North, and from (the) waters, and these from land of Syene."¹⁵

"All of you sing for joy, O heavens; and exult, O earth; and break forth, O mountains singing! Thus YHWH has comforted His people, and on His afflicted He will have compassion."¹⁶

¹¹ Isaiah 49:8.

¹² Isaiah 49:9.

¹³ Isaiah 49:10.

¹⁴ Isaiah 49:11.

¹⁵ Isaiah 49:12.

¹⁶ Isaiah 49:13.