

IN NOMINE JESU

HIS FIRE BRINGS HEALING

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

But for all of you, the ones fearing My Name, (the) Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, then all of you will be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.

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

Did today's readings strike you as echoing a theme you've heard recently?

The end of the Church Year had readings that encouraged the faithful to watching and waiting for the Day of the Lord. Now, in the special time of the year when we remember the Advents of Christ, His comings, we again have reminders to be watchful. This week, again, the readings remind us of the Final Coming of our Lord, which is both now and not yet. On that Last Day, perhaps today or tomorrow, sooner or later, the great and terrible Day of the Lord comes. On it, you who have been named in Christ as the Father's own will be shown for who you are - sons of the Living God - and be enabled in faith to hold your heads high.

There is encouragement here, in our texts, for those who cling to Christ-crucified as the all-availing sacrifice for their sins. There is discouragement here for those who continue to reject Him as all-sufficient for salvation, eternal life, and making them right with the Father.

When the world seems to be groaning - with wildfires, with earthquakes, with economic distresses - you, dear Christians, may keep your heads lifted high, not in pride, but because you have been vindicated in Christ. That is because you know these signs

are on-going indicators of the coming of Christ on the Last Day. You need not fear that coming, for these signs have been with us since the sky darkened, the earth quaked, and the dead were raised when the Christ died on the tree at Calvary. (There is the “now” of “now and not yet” in the coming of the Lord).

For those who do not have Christ-crucified at the center of their lives, who have rejected the forgiveness that He continues to bring to sinners, the “not yet” will be a day of terror and fire. That coming will be a very different matter for them. Their Last Day experience will be far different than yours. Our Old Testament prophecy begins:

Therefore, behold, the day of (the) Lord comes, and burns as an oven.

The burning fire of God is a purifying fire. This type of fire burns much hotter than a free-ranging fire. The prophet indicates by his example that it will be hot – as in a smelting oven. The oven’s fire burns away all impurities. So it will be for Creation’s final day of purification. Then, all who continue to do lawlessness – note these are those who continue to unrepentantly violate the Law of God – will be burned as if to ashes.

This should not trouble any repentant sinners among us. For, each day, as we return to the death and resurrection of our baptisms, the Lord removes the impurities of sin, the devil, and the world from us. Our lives, that is, the lives of Christians, are daily purified by the cleansing fire of God. This burning comes for us as the Holy Law of God – found in His Word – shows us our sin, convicts us,

and points us to our need for the Savior. Not so for those who are, and remain to the end of their days, without Christ Jesus. Hear how so as our text continues:

And all the arrogant, and all the ones doing lawlessness, will be chaff, and they will be set ablaze in the coming day, says the Lord Almighty, for there will definitely not be anything left remaining out of them, neither root nor branch.

First, these who are warned, are those who hold themselves in high regard, in particular, with regard to the Word of God. These arrogant ones, are they who hold themselves to be arbiters of God's Word, and even to be above it. They, when they feel the refiner's fire coming, the Law and its sting, turn from it and try to prevent its purification by their own thoughts, words and deeds. They, in attempts to make themselves right - either with God, or in the eyes of the world - turn from God's Holy Law and its particular functions of showing one's sin and keeping one from sin. They become in the sight of God, the Burning One, what He through the prophet names them - doers of lawlessness.

Such lawlessness takes on a variety of forms. For some, it comes in the human manufacturing of words and works with which they attempt to appease God. For others, it comes in a total rejection of the Law and its perfection - a blatant, willful disregard for those Ten Words - or more subtle manipulations of the meanings found in them. Such are found in the ones who have attempted to self-interpret the holy, purifying commandments. For example - "you shall not murder" they say, does not apply to preborn humans - for after all they are not viable, the manufactured argument goes. Such manipulation of God's Word has

gone on for centuries, and it is intensifying now in our society. How many times have the ones who consider themselves to be in the Church said with regard to the Word of God, "Did God really say?" (Can you think of who, in human writing and record, was the first to ask a question in that vein? Yes, it was the Serpent, the Old Evil Foe, to our mother Eve in the Garden. He tricked her, who was in the Church, into lawlessness. How much more is He able to trick her children?) Oh, some will say, "all scripture verses are the matter of one's own interpretation."

Silly people, we respond, God's interprets His Word for us and has shown us how to do so. You, beloved of the Lord, are bound to those pure, refined interpretations by the faith of Christ. That is, you look for Him who takes your lawlessness away in all the passages of Scripture. Today, in these texts, Jesus is relatively easy to find, even as we hear:

But for all of you, the ones fearing My Name, (the) Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, then all of you will be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.

From the earliest Christian commentaries, this Sun of Righteousness is none other than the Son of God. (Yes, our language allows some word play). Yet the concept of the burning sun is there, but for the faithful, it brings healing. The effect of the Lord's fire works very differently upon those in the faith and those outside the faith. His fire, for you who remain in the faith, brings healing – as the rising sun brings warmth to our cold desert these recent mornings.

The Day of the Lord that is coming will be your final release. God's justice will be displayed to all creation, and especially to all humans from Adam to the last person conceived on that great and awesome day. You who have been hard-pressed by the injustices you've suffered on account of the Faith, will be released. Your rejoicing is described as that joy experienced by calves used to having their freedom, experience after having been hobbled, fettered, or penned up. They skip and bound about in their new-found freedom, sheer joy in motion. Such exuberance of the faithful on the day of the consummation of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness is further illuminated as the text continues:

Then you will trample (the) lawless ones underfoot, therefore they will be below your feet, in the day I make, says (the) Lord Almighty.

That is, those who have rejected Christ, who have either turned from their baptismal grace, or who have not sought Him while He may be found, will be under the feet of the leaping ones. They who have not experienced the healing rays of the Son of God through the means He chose, by their own fault and not that of anyone else, including God, will be as the dust of the earth. This is not a movie type judgment day (the Terminator, Judgment Day may come to mind with the bones of the slain being crunched underfoot of the conquering machines – get away from that image!) but as being totally consumed with nothing left to remind anyone of their impure existence. There is no crushing of bones, but a layer of dust from which they came, upon which the ones who have been healed of sin and all its

consequences will tread with nary a thought about the fine ground under their feet. It will seem to those who are rejoicing, that those who troubled them on account of the faith, have simply gone, never to persecute, try, harass, reinterpret the Word, again. The encouragement for the purified ones continues:

All of you remember (the) Law of Moses My slave, just as therefore I commanded statutes and judgments to Him in Horeb toward all Israel.

That sentence is to encourage watching in the ones who have been healed under the warming rays of the Sun of Righteousness. That is, while you have been freed from the coming fire, for your sins are daily burned away by Christ, you still are to hold to the Law that God gave to His people. How you do this is by clinging to Christ, who has kept it perfectly for you. When the commandments and justice of God sting you, turn to Christ for healing let the rays of His forgiveness envelope. When you hear the Word and realize you have not kept it perfectly, you turn from your sin, confess your sins to God, believing firmly for the sake of Jesus, that He has taken them away.

These words are not a license to sin, far from it. They are a license to forgiveness. God has said that the smallest part of His Word will not pass away, even though heaven and earth will. You are not freed of the Law. In Christ, you are freed from the Law and its penalties. The Law stands, but so does the Gospel. For the faithful, for you, we pray, the Gospel fulfills the law and forgives your trespasses. How will are the faithful to know when this time of God's Gospel and

Law, His healing and consuming fire, this time of rejoicing and walking is to upon us? The prophet declares:

And behold, I send to all of you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and dreadful day of (the) Lord comes...

This time of the fire that both purifies and heals was to begin when the prophet came. This one, by the testimony of parallel biblical texts, would not be a reincarnation of the long-gone Elijah of the Old Testament. He who prophesied in a time of great Israelite apostasy – falling from the faith – and who called the faithful to repentance is the model for the prophet to come before the rising of the Sun of Righteousness. The Lord is not promising a reincarnation or return of the man, but of the prophetic office that will again call the people into repentance. This one would be one who would fulfill the call encourage the people of God to confess their sins, and to turn from them. Thus he says of this Elijah,

he will turn the hearts of fathers toward sons, and hearts of sons toward their fathers: lest I come and beat the earth with (a) curse.

The illustration the prophet uses is the coming of Elijah that will result in the turning of hearts. That is, the faithful will repent, return to the faith of the ancestors who believed the Word of God. Those who have once wandered from the faith of the faithful will return to the faith, fathers and sons alike.

According to Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, this Elijah has come. He is the one whom God sent to prepare the way for the Day of the Lord. Watch, for that Day is upon us! Wait, for it is now and not yet!

I promise, if the Last Day does not come before next Sunday 10:30 AM, our time, You will have opportunity to hear more of this prophet of the Office of Elijah, his message of repentance into the forgiveness of sins, and his confession of Christ in the next week, as the Church celebrates yet another Advent of our Lord. You can wait and watch for that long - for the faithful before you waited several hundred years for the fulfillment of this week's prophecy.

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

Advent II (Lutheran Service Book one-year series)

Malachi 4:1-6; Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 7, 2008

Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

Translation, second draft:

Therefore, behold, the day of (the) Lord comes, and burns as an oven. And all the arrogant, and all the ones doing lawlessness, will be chaff, and they will be set ablaze in the coming day, says the Lord Almighty, for there will definitely not be anything left remaining out of them, neither root nor branch.

But for all of you, the ones fearing My Name, (the) Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, then all of you will be released and leap as calves released from (their) bonds.

Then you will trample (the) lawless ones underfoot, therefore they will be below your feet, in the day I make, says (the) Lord Almighty.

All of you remember (the) Law of Moses My slave, just as therefore I commanded statutes and judgments to Him in Horeb toward all Israel.

And behold, I send to all of you Elijah the Tishbite before the great and dreadful day of (the) Lord comes, who will turn the hearts of fathers toward sons, and hearts of sons toward their fathers: lest I come and beat the earth with (a) curse.

Malachi 4:1-6 (3:19-24)

19 כִּי־הִנֵּה הַיּוֹם בָּא בְּעַר כְּתָנּוּר וְהָיוּ כָל־זָדִים וְכָל־עֹשֵׂה רָשָׁעָה קָשׁ וְלֹהֵט אֹתָם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יֵעָזֵב לָהֶם שָׂרֵשׁ וְעֵנָף:
20 וְזָרְחָה לָכֶם יְרֵאֵי שָׁמַיִם שְׁמֵשׁ צְדָקָה וּמִרְפָּא בְּכִנְפֶיהָ וַיִּצְאֲתֶם וּפְשָׁתֶם כְּעוֹלֵי מִרְבֵּק:
21 וְעִסּוֹתֶם רָשָׁעִים כִּי־יְהִי אַפֶּר תַּחַת כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֵיכֶם בַּיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת: פ

- 22 זָכְרוּ תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדְּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּחֶרֶב עַל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים:
- 23 הִנֵּה אֲנִי שֹׁלַח לְכֶם אֶת אֱלֵיָהּ הַנִּבְיָא לְפָנַי בּוֹא יוֹם יְהִיָה הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא:
- 24 וְהָשִׁיב לְב-אֲבוֹת עַל-בָּנִים וְלְב בָּנִים עַל-אֲבוֹתָם פֶּן-אֲבֹא וְהִכִּיתִי אֶת-הָאָרֶץ קְרָם:¹

¹⁹ διότι ἰδοὺ ἡμέρα κυρίου ἔρχεται καιομένη ὡς κλίβανος καὶ φλέξει αὐτούς, καὶ ἔσονται πάντες οἱ ἀλλογενεῖς καὶ πάντες οἱ ποιοῦντες ἄνομα καλάμη, καὶ ἀνάψει αὐτοὺς ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἐρχομένη, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ, καὶ οὐ μὴ ὑπολειφθῆ ἕξ αὐτῶν ῥίζα οὐδὲ κλῆμα.²⁰ καὶ ἀνατελεῖ ὑμῖν τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά μου ἥλιος δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἴασις ἐν ταῖς πτέρυξιν αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐξελεύσεσθε καὶ σκιρτήσετε ὡς μοσχάρια ἐκ δεσμῶν ἀνειμένα.²¹ καὶ καταπατήσετε ἀνόμους, διότι ἔσονται σποδὸς ὑποκάτω τῶν ποδῶν ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, ἡ ἐγὼ ποιῶ, λέγει κύριος παντοκράτωρ.²² καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω ὑμῖν Ἡλιαν τὸν Θεσβίτην πρὶν ἐλθεῖν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ,²³ ὃς ἀποκαταστήσει καρδίαν πατρὸς πρὸς υἱὸν καὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου πρὸς τὸν πλησίον αὐτοῦ, μὴ ἔλθω καὶ πατάξω τὴν γῆν ἄρδην.²⁴ μνήσθητε νόμου Μωυσῆ τοῦ δούλου μου, καθότι ἐνετειλάμην αὐτῷ ἐν Χωρηβ πρὸς πάντα τὸν Ἰσραηλ προστάγματα καὶ δικαιώματα.²

¹*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia : With Westminster Hebrew Morphology.* 1996, c1925; morphology c1991 (electronic ed.) . German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary: Stuttgart; Glenside PA

²*Septuaginta : With morphology.* 1996, c1979 . Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart