

**CHRIST IS THE PERFECTION OF THE CHURCH**

Hear the theme derived from the Word of God for this sixteenth Sunday after Trinity:

*The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant united in Christ bear God's Name.*

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

The first, second and third articles of the Apostle's Creed draw much of their basis for truth's confession from the words of today's section of the Letter to the Ephesians. In St. Paul's inspired words, written to Christian believers in a city whose ruins remain to this day, the Father, the Son and the Spirit all receive the glory due their Name and attributes. That is, God the Father of His chosen eternal family is declared. God, the Christ in whose Name the everlasting family is united is proclaimed. God, the Spirit Who works through the Word to grant the faith and eternal life in the family of the ages, is preached. The Family of God, the Church, is revealed in perfection as she is displayed united to Father, Son and Spirit. This week, all of those divine realities are declared in one long sentence:

*For this reason I bow my knees alongside the Father, out of Whom all (the) family in heaven and upon earth is continually being named, that He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, the Christ having dwelt through the faith in the hearts of all of you - in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation, that you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) surpassing knowledge, that all of you might be filled into all the fullness of God.<sup>1</sup>*

Those who are regular hearers of the preaching here now understand why this sermon did not begin with a theme verse! It would have been that text. It contains 125

words as translated. That is a verse that in the ears of the hearers contains too much to absorb, digest and reflect upon at a single reading. A summary was needed. That is why we have this theme declared:

*The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant united in Christ bear God's Name.*

Before we progress further, the two Churches named should be clarified. The Church Militant is the term we use for the Church on earth, sinner/saints who struggle daily in Christ under the assaults of our defeated enemies – sin, death and the devil. The Church Triumphant is the assembly of the saints whose sinful natures have been completely removed by God, who have completely died, can sin no more, and cannot be accused by the devil. The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant are one Church, united in Christ, bearing the Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One dwells in this age, and the other dwells in the ages of the ages. Therefore I declare to you God's revealed Truth:

*The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant united in Christ bear God's Name.*

St. Paul, knowing full well the revelation of the resurrection of the dead in the Old Testament – including our reading for this week – and the revelation of the dead in the New Testament – including our reading for this week – takes the occasion of his letter to a young congregation to encourage and exhort. He writes out of his own time of trials, from his own experience of persecution and tribulation (literally pressure) for the Truth to encourage those who might become discouraged with their lives in the Church

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<sup>1</sup> *Ephesians* 3:14-19.

Militant. Our text begins:

*Therefore, I ask all of you not to surrender to evil in my tribulations concerning you, which remain your glory.<sup>2</sup>*

Paul begins with “therefore,” or “so.” This is a concluding statement then, for that which has been written before. That is, Paul has affirmed the fact, that at the time of the writing of this letter, he was already a prisoner for his confession of the Triune God and his work of declaring the revelation of God to those who were not of the Jewish race (Gentiles). He has just declared them to be one with Jewish believers in Jesus, united not by human rites, but by the true confession of the faith, through Word and Sacraments. Those who had no covenantal rights under the Torah, now had covenantal rights under the Gospel of Jesus. For this Paul would continue to suffer. He did not want the pressure the Jews, and the Roman government, were putting upon him to cause the Gentile believers in the congregation at Ephesus to fear, to lose heart, to become cowardly in their confession of Christ in particular because that great servant of Christ was suffering on their behalf.

To strengthen them in their confession, he declares his suffering to be for their glory! The cross of the Christian is proclaimed as part of this life, that which comes to those who, no matter their position in the Church, no matter how eloquent their confession of Christ, no matter how humbly they may present the Truth, the cross that comes as part of being united to the Church Militant. In other words, if Paul, the great Apostle so suffers for the Truth, you are able to suffer for the Truth. Cowardice and

trembling may be set aside by the faithful on earth. That is because we are part of the unified congregation of the family of God. Times of trial, pressure and persecution will have their ends for each member of the family. Further, one day, not so very far away in terms of eternity, the entire family of God will no longer suffer under the stings of our defeated enemies. Paul's opening words for this week, *therefore, I ask all of you not to surrender to evil in my tribulations concerning you, which remain your glory,*<sup>3</sup> drive their hearers to our theme:

*The Church Militant and the Church Triumphant united in Christ bear God's Name.*

The three articles of the Creed were mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, and the opening verse seems to be focusing our attention on the Third Article. However, that is only because we began where the text began. Now, with the tribulations of the Church, by those who are named with God's Name, having been proclaimed as the Christian's glory in this life (this is not the self-empowerment preaching of Schuller, or the prosperity gospel of Osteen, it is the preaching of Paul, of Christ, of the cross) the Church hears again one sentence that lies behind her confession of the first, second and third articles of the Church:

*For this reason I bow my knees alongside the Father, out of Whom all (the) family in heaven and upon earth is continually being named, that He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, the Christ having dwelt through the faith in the hearts of all of you - in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation, that you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) surpassing knowledge, that all of you might be filled into all the*

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3:13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

*fullness of God.* <sup>4</sup>

You who are diligent students of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians know that it is full of the Trinitarian confession of the faith. It is rife with acknowledgement of the suffering in this life that comes to former Jews and Gentiles for their pure confession and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Ephesians declares the glory of God in all its fullness for all who have been named by God as part of His earthly and heavenly family. The central sentence for this week begins , then, with a first article declaration:

*For this reason I bow my knees alongside the Father, out of Whom all (the) family in heaven and upon earth is continually being named, that He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory...*<sup>5</sup>

Paul, out of the pressures of this life brought upon him for his good confession of Christ Jesus for those who were by birth once outside the family of God, tells of his attitude in petitioning for all who bear God's name. He speaks of bowed knees, a bodily position of humility and submission before the Creator of all. His is the attitude of petitioner before King, of subject before Ruler. It is not because of his tribulations that he bows before the Father, but out of the pure, right and true confession of the Faith in the Father Who names His own on earth and into heaven. How did the Ephesian Gentile Christians know that Paul rightly understood both the good confession he was making, and the pressures it brought upon him? How do you know if you hold to the same?

The answer is declared in the One Who is granting His Name to all believers. That is, Paul knew he had been named with the greatest of names when he was baptized into

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<sup>4</sup> *Ephesians* 3:14-19.

the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. You have the same assurance. There, at the font, you are free to remember that blessed assurance that you are participating in the glory of God when you suffer on account of the Faith, in the good confession of Christ. My, we have tried here for years to forcefully proclaim into your ears the truth that God's glory is displayed most clearly in the cross – the Cross of Christ with His lifeless body upon it – and the crosses God deems to declare you worthy of honor to bear in His glory. Take heart when you suffer for the good confession of Christ-crucified: for God has deemed you worthy of the family name with which He has named you! Paul's inspired declaration continues, and jumps to the third article:

*That He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man...<sup>6</sup>*

Proceeding from the Father, declaring the Son, the Spirit grants the power of God to believers. The "inner man" is the new nature God grants to those whom He has named into His family on earth when the Word is proclaimed, attached to earthly means. This new man in all believers is strengthened out of the glory of the cross. Its power comes through Word and Sacraments. It gives Paul, and all mortal Christians, God's strength to bear all the assaults of the devil, the world and even one's own sinful flesh.

Because Christ died in glory, bearing on His cross all your sins, you may bear all things in His glory. There is a divine progression in the words of Paul that lay behind the Church's third article confession. That is, the glory of the Father, of the cross, of the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ephesians* 3:14-16a.

<sup>6</sup> *Ephesians* 3:16.

Spirit (through the means of grace), into the Faith, and ultimately into unconditional, sacrificial love. That is declared as these words are added to those proclaimed before:

*The Christ having dwelt through the faith in the hearts of all of you - in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation, that you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) surpassing knowledge, that you all might be filled into all the fullness of God.*<sup>7</sup>

Remember, those second article words are written to those who have been named by the Father with His name, and granted by the Spirit through God's chosen means. There is declared the Apostolic teaching that Christ Jesus, crucified for the sins of the whole world, dwells in the assembly of believers. Hear the reality revealed again, as St. Paul declares, *the Christ having dwelt through the faith in the hearts of all of you...*

That means that God works the confession of Jesus in us, the faithful, as the family of God. Christ dwells in the center of being, life, emotion and mind of the members of the family the Father has assembled from the continued proclamation of the glory of Jesus' crucifixion and death! The members of the family of God have not been given His Name to remain individuals, but to be joined together through our confession of Christ, namely - - *in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation.*<sup>8</sup>

God is not calling His children to be rooted and grounded in ourselves as individuals. He is declaring that, in the unconditional, sacrificial, love of Christ, God unites us on that which has strength to weather the storms of this life and depth to bring forth the life-giving sustenance we need to grow into eternal union with Christ. The

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<sup>7</sup> *Ephesians 3:17-19.*

importance of that is declared with these revelatory words:

*That you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth...<sup>9</sup>*

Joined together with the Church Triumphant, the Church militant is free to share in the fullness of God's revelation. The Father who has named His family, sends with the Son the Spirit who declares the Son, that the Church on heaven and earth be united in Him. (Our time is drawing short, but this congregation needs to hear from that the following mystery revealed): when St. Paul uses the terms in which he describes the Church united, he uses a geometrical formula. Suffice it to say for now, that the ancients, especially the Greek Gentiles (the first primary hearers of this letter) considered the cube to be the symbol and image of perfection. The breadth, length, height and depth of the cube, especially when it was comprised of the perfect number, 10, cubed, brought to their minds ultimate beauty, purity and glory. That is *the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant united in Christ bear God's Name*. The divine cube intimately knows the sacrificial love of God that fills all of you with the God's fullness. As a result, I declare to you:

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

Trinity XVI (*LSB* One-year series)

I Kings 17:17-24; Ephesians 3:13-21; Luke 7:11-17

September 7, 2008

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**

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<sup>9</sup> *Ephesians* 3:17b.

*Therefore, I ask all of you not to surrender to evil in my tribulations concerning you, which remain your glory.*

*For this reason I bow my knees alongside the Father, out of Whom all (the) family in heaven and upon earth is continually being named, that He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, the Christ having dwelt through the faith in the heart of all of you - in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation, that you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) surpassing knowledge, that you all might be filled into all the fullness of God.*

*Now to the One (Who has) power to do all things superabundantly we continue to ask or in mind, according to the power of the effectual working in all of us: to Him the glory in the congregation and in Christ Jesus into all the generations of the aeons to the aeons, so shall it be! <sup>10</sup>*

#### **ADDITIONAL NOTES:**

**No BOC references.**

#### **Luther's Works:**

3:16-17 - Since we, therefore, live here amidst perils and always in expectation of all kinds of suffering, such as the agony of death and the pain of hell, fear will prompt us to pray that God may not long delay his Word, but may be with us today, now, daily, to give us our daily bread, and, as St. Paul says to the Ephesians [3:16-17], grant that "Christ may appear in us and dwell in our inner man." Therefore we do not say "tomorrow" or "the day after tomorrow," as if today we were secure and delivered from fear. No, we pray "today." It is also better to say "today" than "tomorrow" when God's will is about to be done and our own will dies in agony. Yes, at such a time the word "today" is almost inadequate, and we would wish that the bread be given us in this very hour and not merely today. In the Scriptures the word "today" is also used in the sense of a whole lifetime on earth. However, I shall not enter into that now.<sup>11</sup>

3:17 - If they insist on the basis of these passages that Christ is no longer with us, they must also conclude that Christ is not with us spiritually either. For the words stand there clearly, "I am no more with you," which declares positively that he is not with us at all. "Yes," they

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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 3:18.

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 3:13-21.

<sup>11</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1969. Vol. 42: *Luther's works, vol. 42 : Devotional Writings I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

say, "but we have clear passages to the contrary which assert that he is with us spiritually, such as John 16 [14:23], "We will make our home with him," and Paul in Ephesians 3[:17], "Christ dwells in your hearts," etc. I reply: My friend, if they can find these passages to be opposed to the others, why shouldn't they also find the text in the Supper to be opposed to the same? If Christ can be present with them in a certain form without contradicting the text, "I am not with you," then he can also be present with us in the Supper, notwithstanding the same text, "I am not with you." If that text does not invalidate their passages concerning the spiritual nature of Christ, neither does it invalidate our text concerning the invisible nature of Christ in the Supper.<sup>12</sup>

3:17 - What Christian heart can or even wants to believe that the Holy Spirit, and not rather the loathsome devil, is continually at work in them because they interpret the clear words of the Lord, "Take, eat; this is my body," according to their own capriciousness and wantonness on the basis of their fancy that he is present spiritually and not bodily. For we know very well, even though the Lord Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (as St. Paul teaches in Ephesians 3 [:17]), which is called a spiritual indwelling, that he has nonetheless not assumed a spiritual body or blood nor given it to us, as he says, Luke 24 [:39]: "Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have." And yet he lives spiritually in our hearts.<sup>13</sup>

3:20 - In this passage (Deut. 18:18) Moses shows with what fervor and longing of the heart the Word of grace should be desired. It is truly that gift of God about which Paul seems especially to be speaking when he says to the Ephesians (3:20): "God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." He hates lazy and cold petitioners, who hope to gain their end through much speaking (Matt. 5:7); he wants sighings that cannot be uttered (Rom. 8:26). Certainly no one can have all this who spends his days in a good life and dwells in the land of luxury. This is only for those who are moved to despair by the feeling of death and the bite of sin, so that, like the people of Israel, they refuse to go on hearing the voice of God or seeing the mighty fire, that is, the power of the Law and the prick of sin, namely, death and the wrath of God, which already consumes them like a fire, so that they long to hear the Word of life.<sup>14</sup>

3:20 - This, then, is the meaning of these words of the Mother of God (Luke 1:50): "In all those great and good things there is nothing of mine, but He who alone does all things, and whose power works in all, has done such great things for me." For the word "mighty" does not denote a quiescent power, as one says of a temporal king that he is mighty, even though he may be sitting still and doing nothing. But it denotes an energetic power, a continuous activity, that works and operates without ceasing. For God does not rest, but works without ceasing, as Christ says in John 5:17: "My Father is working still, and I am working." In the same sense St. Paul says in

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<sup>12</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1961. *Vol. 37: Luther's works, vol. 37 : Word and Sacrament III* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>13</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1971. *Vol. 38: Luther's works, vol. 38 : Word and Sacrament IV* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>14</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1960. *Vol. 9: Luther's works, vol. 9 : Lectures on Deuteronomy* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis

Ephesians 3:20: "He is able to do more than all that we ask"; that is, He always does more than we ask; that is His way, and thus His power works. That is why I said Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing, God does all. We ought to call upon her, that for her sake God may grant and do what we request. Thus also all other saints are to be invoked, so that the work may be every way God's alone.<sup>15</sup>

3:20 - It follows from this that he who prays aright never doubts that his prayer is surely acceptable and is heard, although the very thing for which he prays may not be granted him. For we are to lay our need before God in prayer, but not prescribe to him the measure or the manner, the limits or the place. If he wills to give us something better or something other than we think, we are to leave it to him; for frequently we do not know what we pray, as St. Paul says in Romans 8[:26]. "God works and gives above and beyond all that we understand," as he also says in Ephesians 3[:20]. So there can be no doubt that the prayer is acceptable and heard, and yet we leave the time and place, the measure and the limit up to God: he will surely do it as it should be. "They are the true worshipers who worship him in spirit and in truth" [John 4:24]. For those who do not believe that they will be heard sin against this commandment on the left side, and go far astray with their unbelief. But those who prescribe a limit to him sin on the right side and come too close to tempting God. He has forbidden us to stray from his commandment either to the left or to the right, that is, neither with unbelief nor with tempting. He has commanded us to remain on the right path with simple faith, believing in him but at the same time setting him no limits.<sup>16</sup>

3:20 - Second, because the mother is a believing Christian it is to be hoped that her heartfelt cry and deep longing to bring her child to be baptized will be accepted by God as an effective prayer. It is true that a Christian in deepest despair does not dare to name, wish, or hope for the help (as it seems to him) which he would wholeheartedly and gladly purchase with his own life were that possible, and in doing so thus find comfort. However, the words of Paul, Romans 8 [:26-27], properly apply here: "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought (that is, as was said above, we dare not express our wishes), rather the Spirit himself intercedes for us mightily with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the heart knows what is the mind of the Spirit," etc. Also Ephesians 3 [:20], "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think."<sup>17</sup>

3:20 - Isaiah did the same against King Sennacherib<sup>4</sup> and so did many other kings and prophets who accomplished inconceivable and impossible things by prayer, to their astonishment afterward. But before that they would not have dared to expect or wish so much of God. This means to receive things far

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<sup>15</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1956. Vol. 21: *Luther's works, vol. 21 : The Sermon on the Mount and the Magnificat* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Concordia Publishing House: Saint Louis

<sup>16</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1966. Vol. 44: *Luther's works, vol. 44 : The Christian in Society I* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>17</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1968. Vol. 43: *Luther's works, vol. 43 : Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

4 Cf. Isa. 37:4.

higher and greater than we can understand or pray for, as St. Paul says, Ephesians 3 [:20], etc. Again, St. Augustine declared that his mother was praying, sighing, and weeping for him, but did not desire anything more than that he might be converted from the errors of the Manicheans<sup>5</sup> and become a Christian.<sup>6</sup> Thereupon God gave her not only what she desired but, as St. Augustine puts it, her "chiefest desire" (*cardinem desiderii eius*), that is, what she longed for with unutterable sighs—that Augustine become not only a Christian but also a teacher above all others in Christendom.<sup>7</sup> Next to the apostles Christendom has none that is his equal.<sup>18</sup>

3:20 - For that reason we must pray and then await whatever God wills. If at the time God should not grant our desire we can still be sure that God has heard our prayer and is pleased by it and that in the times to come he will do something far greater than we have prayed for, as St. Paul says, Ephesians 3 [:20], "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think..." We would be blessed indeed if, although our prayer against the Turk were not answered, we would yet have brought the Day of Judgment upon us. That day cannot be far distant. The Turk, as well as the pope, must doubtless be close to the end of his rope.<sup>19</sup>

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5 As a young man Augustine (354-480) adhered to the philosophy of the Persian teacher Manes (ca. 215-275), which was based on a dualism of light and darkness.

6 *Confessions*, 5, 8; of. F. J. She, d (trans.), *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), p. 931.

7 Augustine subsequently became bishop of Hippo. His thinking has played a significant role in Christian theology and had considerable influence upon Luther, who frequently quoted from his writings.

<sup>18</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1968. *Vol. 43: Luther's works, vol. 43 : Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia

<sup>19</sup>Luther, M. 1999, c1968. *Vol. 43: Luther's works, vol. 43 : Devotional Writings II* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works. Fortress Press: Philadelphia