

IN NOMINE JESU

THE GIVER OF GOOD GIFTS

He is Risen!

Hear again the Word of God for this seventh Sunday in the season of the Resurrection of our Lord, as God says through the prophet Ezekiel:

Then I will gift to all of you (a) new heart, and the new Spirit I will gift in all of you; and I will take out the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will gift to all of you (an) heart of flesh.¹

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

The readings' emphasis for this week are on the gifts of God while His people watch and wait for the Promises of God in Christ Jesus. Chief among those promises recalled this week is the coming of the Holy Spirit. Next week's readings will recall coming of the One our language names, "Counselor," "Helper," "Consoler," among others, all which attempt to describe the "Paraclete." For the faithful of our day, the Promise of the outpouring of the Holy Ghost has been fulfilled.

Today, though, we have heard the Word that the ancients were to cling to by faith until the day we now know as Pentecost. Hear God's gracious promise again:

Then I will gift to all of you (a) new heart, and the new Spirit I will gift in all of you; and I will take out the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will gift to all of you (an) heart of flesh.²

That text, and the day's readings that parallel it, direct our hearts and minds to the time of the ancient faithful waiting days (New Testament), and centuries (Old Testament), for the fulfillment of the Promise of the Holy Spirit. The Third Person of God, who in times before Pentecost, in the year we date AD 33, had been poured out in

limited quantity, and at limited times, had been promised to come to all the faithful in God's good time. That Spirit is the primary thread which connects all our day's readings. It is solely out of God's pure grace, mercy, justice and glory that the Spirit comes upon those who have not earned Him, nor deserved Him by any of their thoughts, words and deeds.

So that we who are influenced in our culture by the American spirit and the false spirit of decision theology – the “I decided to follow Jesus” crowd - grasp just Who is at work in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the inspired Biblical writers used very specific terms. The first of those we translate “I,” or “My.” Those personal words confirm the emphasis that God alone is the One doing all the work in sending His Spirit to bring repentance and forgiveness. In them we hear God's declaration of salvation. From them the faithful are given scriptural discernment and understanding. All these gifts lead the hearer to One object – Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

Some of you have already counted the words such as those in the Old Testament passage for today. Twenty-two times from the inspired Hebrew the words “I,” and “My” ring out. In addition, twice God through the prophet names Himself, “The Lord I AM” in this passage. And, at the end of the pericope, YHWH declares that He will be to His called people - in the Day of His New Spirit and their new hearts - their Elohim (God). The action word in this passage leads the hearer to the Name of God in all

¹ *Ezekiel 36:26.*

² *Ezekiel 36:26.*

the forms used. God is the Actor, His people are the actees. Hear again the theme passage selected for this week:

Then I will gift to all of you (a) new heart, and the new Spirit I will gift in all of you; and I will take out the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will gift to all of you (an) heart of flesh.³

In that text which you have heard repeated, there is another Word that leaps from the text. It is connected to the “I” of God. In the entire passage from Ezekiel it shows up three times in the verse just proclaimed, five times in all in the last three verses. Have you figured out what that word is that God says He does?

It is “gift.” In our text, to the faithful of old waiting through sin –their own and others’- wars, exile, and degradation on account of the Faith, God says:

I will gift to all of you (a) new heart;

the New Spirit I will gift in all of you;

I will gift to all of you (an) heart of flesh;

I will gift My Spirit in all of you;

and all of you will dwell in the land which I gifted to your fathers...

The significance of those passages is that God speaks of Himself as being the Giver of good gifts to His people. From this passage, and most of the thirty-five chapters that precede it, it is clear that God’s people have not earned His gifts. In fact, they have despised them more often than not.

³ Ezekiel 36:26.

Yet God still desires to work His gifts upon His people. If His people had to earn God's gifts, the writers would have called them "wages." Wages are earned and received. Gifts are given and received. Even we fallen humans know that to be true in the basest sense. Lest we desire and try to reject this gift-giving as all God's work, with no merit or worthiness on the part of His gift recipients, the text for this week begins, literally:

*Therefore says YHWH to (the) house of Israel, "thus says Adonai YHWH: 'it is not for your sakes I am about to act, O house of Israel, but for My Holy Name which you caused to profane in (the) nations, to which (you) there came.'"*⁴

God's compassion for His guilt-laden people (remember the chapters of Law that precede this passage of grace) is shown in His mercy for those who do not deserve it nor can earn it in any way. It is God's revealed nature to be unconditionally and sacrificially loving toward humans. This is especially true for those whom He has chosen, called out, of the world by grace through faith. He even wills to forgive and renew those who have brought disgrace on Him, who have profaned His Name among the unbelievers! This He does through the proclamation of His Law that shows our sin, and His Gospel that shows our Savior.

That means there is hope for all who continue to call upon the Lord for forgiveness out of the midst of their sins. God will act, He declares, for the sake of His Holy Name. That is how His gift is displayed, how He hallows His Name for His sake, even as you have learned to confess that God's Name is held holy,

⁴ Ezekiel 36:22.

*when the Word of God is taught clearly and purely and we, as children of God, lead holy lives in accordance with it.*⁵

Drive this deep into the heart – you who are marked with the Name of God are the Ones whom He will act on behalf of, and to whom He will grant His gifts! This He does through the proclamation of His Word. Then, from that I ask, what part of the reading from Ezekiel indicates how God marks His people?

It is the middle verse, just over half way through the passage.

*And I will sprinkle upon all of you clean waters, and all of you will be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse all of you.*⁶

Dear Christians, what means of grace comes to your minds made holy in Christ when you hear passages such as that?

There is a pretty big hint standing there at the entrance to the Table of the Lord. Holy Baptism is the means that is called for in those words. It is the sprinkling with water connected to the Word of God, no matter what the quantity, nor the locale for that matter, that brings clean hearts to those which are conceived unclean. Again, this is all God's work, as He has declared: *I will sprinkle upon all of you clean waters...*

There are those whose theology of Baptism is not in agreement with Holy Scripture. They would take passages such as this and say that the words have only metaphorical meanings. However, the parallel passages in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) use phrases related to the Lord's sprinkling His people with clean water for liturgical actions that show to the people His naming them clean, pure and

⁵Tappert, T. G. 2000, c1959. *The book of concord : The confessions of the evangelical Lutheran*

whole in His sight. In the Passover, clean water mixed with the blood of the sacrificial lamb placed on the doorposts marked the homes where the Angel of Death would not strike. The Word connected with the Water brought salvation from mortal death. In the cleansing rite for former lepers, clean water was mixed with the blood of sacrificial birds to mark one whom God had cleansed. The Word connected with the water brought the declaration of rightness with God and the ability to live again amongst His holy people. In the cleansing of the tabernacle it was clean water mixed with blood of the sacrificial heifer that was sprinkled upon the entrance to indicate its ceremonial purity before God. It was the Word of God connected with the water that God used to cleanse the tabernacle and priests for religious service before the Real Presence of God.

So, when the people of Ezekiel's day, whose ancestors had witnessed the sprinkling with clean waters to mark out and set aside the once profane for holy purposes, when they heard the prophet declare that God was saying, *I will sprinkle upon all of you clean waters...* they were to grasp the reality that this meant that God was acting as the Priest. He is declaring that He, through the means of clean water and the Word, would mark His sinful people with His cleansing power. The water combined with the Word would do as God declared.

The faithful waited for generations for that Day when God would bring His promise to completion. They even had to wait after Jesus died, rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens to sit at the Right Hand of God. You heard that promise

spoken during the time of waiting in today's Gospel reading. Do you know when in history these words of today's Gospel were first spoken?

When He may come, the Comforter, Whom I send to all of you from the Father, the Spirit of the Truth, the One going out from the Father, that One will witness about me.⁷

Those words were spoken on the night in which Jesus was betrayed. He spoke them just after Judas Iscariot left the Last Supper in order to hand Jesus over into trial and ultimately, death. God speaks His words of promise to those who are about to suffer on account of Christ, even though they cannot suffer as Christ – for the payment of sins' penalty, or for even their own forgiveness.

It is difficult for us Christians to imagine the thoughts and emotions of the disciples who had to wait through Jesus' suffering and death, who rejoiced in His resurrection, who would gape at His ascension, and who waited in the city of Jerusalem for the Paraclete to come. All those things took 53 days.

How much more difficult would it be to have been one to hear these words of God through Ezekiel and keep them in the Faith?

Then I will gift to all of you (a) new heart, and the new Spirit I will gift in all of you; and I will take out the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will gift to all of you (an) heart of flesh.⁸

The faithful of the Old Covenant waited in the promises of those words for generations. The first hearers all died in the Promise of the coming Spirit. Their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, throughout centuries waited for the Promise. The

⁶ Ezekiel 36:25.

⁷ John 15:26.

⁸ Ezekiel 36:26.

remnant waited in the Promise through the remaining years of the prophets, and then through four centuries of silence from God. They waited while God's Presence left the Temple. They held fast while the Temple was razed to the ground. They clung to the Promise while Herod worked to build His Temple for their sacrifices. And they waited after they heard the Great Prophet of the New Covenant promised that the time was at hand for today's theme words to be fulfilled.

Then, when the Promised Spirit of God came, He pointed them back to the Christ! The prophet declares that God's Christ is for all, when he proclaims:

"Then the nations will know, that I I AM (YHWH), "says YHWH Adonai, "in My holiness in all of you before their eyes."⁹

There dear ones in Christ, is the promise for you. The Holy Spirit works His holiness in the Father's people by showing, and then uniting them, you, with Christ. God has given His Gift. You are freed to receive a clean heart within you through the forgiveness of all your iniquities. The Joy of His salvation is yours! You are to Him a people, and He to you is God.¹⁰

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

Resurrection VII (LSB One-year series)

Ezekiel 36:22-28; I Peter 4:7-11; John 15:26-16:4

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Pastor Michael H. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁹ Ezekiel 36:23b.

¹⁰ cf. Ezekiel 36:28.