

GOD'S LAW BRINGS DISTRESS, GOD'S GOOD NEWS BRINGS PEACE

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church:

“Gather to Me My faithful ones who have been making My covenant under sacrifice, and cause to declare, O heavens, His righteousness.” For Elohim Judge He is. (selah).¹

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

This is another purple Sunday of joyful repentance in the New Church Year of our Lord. It begins a week historically given for calling the people of God to watching. This day's ancient title, “Populus Zion,” which is literally rendered, “People of Zion” is taken from an ancient Introit antiphon (the verse which goes before and after the body of the Psalmody). It is given as a reminder that the people of God's Holy Mountain are actually the Church which proclaims the coming of the Anointed One of God. That means that the faithful of the Old and New Covenants of God were and are to remain under watchful repentance until the Great and Terrible Day of the Lord.

(Modern lectionaries have tried to make this the first of two Sundays which remember John the Baptizer's call to repentance. Even so, the Reformers long ago kept this as the Sunday for the Church to hear Jesus' calls to repentant, sober watchfulness. The second banner and the Hymn of the Day can fit either theme. It is a reality though, that the Sunday readings are given primarily to give you Jesus, and then from hearing of Him, to learn of the work of others in the Faith). So, hear of Jesus the Light of Life again,

From Sion, (the) perfection of beauty, Elohim causes to shine forth.²

¹ Psalm 50:5-6.

² Psalm 50:2.

Then from Him Who is declared from the Psalms, hear of His enlightening call to you who continue to be the People of Sion:

“Gather to Me My faithful ones who have been making My covenant under sacrifice, and cause to declare, O heavens, His righteousness.” For Elohim Judge He is. (selah).³

Therefore, you who God has in Christ Jesus named Faithful, you who have kept to His New Covenant through His Means of Grace, you are freed in Christ Jesus to proclaim that, in His first coming in the flesh to die in your sins, He was raised from the dead to declare you right with the Father. You know that to be true, for you have the eye-witness record of those events given to you, without any teaching error in the texts, for almost twenty centuries. You who are faithful in observing the Word of the Lord -- through preaching, teaching, reading, reception of the Sacraments, confessing your sins and receiving Jesus' blood-bought forgiveness -- you are the ones who remain under His New Covenant: you are the people of God to whom this week's Word calls to be gathered to Him. So, then, I ask you: as you were watching and giving attention to the Word of the Lord today in the primary readings, did you hear most about “Hope and Peace,” or of “Hopelessness and Distress?”

Your Old Nature, the sinner you are in Adam, surely heard the latter. Your New Nature, the saint you are in Christ Jesus, surely heard the former! That being said, it might have struck you that the “Hope and Peace” candles now lit do not seem to line up with phrases such as:

³ Psalm 50:5-6.

He comes, our Elohim, and not He keeps silent, fire before His Face devours, and round about Him (it is) exceedingly tempestuous.⁴

And, "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."⁵

And, "All of you must continue to be awake in all seasons, continuing to request that all of you might be able to flee all these things about to become, and to be stood before the Son of Man."⁶

Those, with other verses for today, are Law texts. They are proclaimed in the world to warn those who are without the Faith. Their words ring out in the Church to correct those whose Old Adams, with all their sins and evil lusts, are rising up to try to squelch your New Adams. They are phrases of conviction, condemnation, and killing for all that is in you that is opposed to God, His Word, His Christ in your life. God's Law brings distress – and it must be declared to keep you, me, and all who hear it from becoming complacent in our sins and sinfulness.

On the other hand, God's Good News brings peace. As you were attentive to the proclamation of His Word – the preaching of the Readings of the Day – you certainly heard God's Word of peace to those who sorrow over their sins and will to turn from them and walk in the light of new life in Christ. Hear again some phrases from this Sunday's Word of God that do line up with the messages of the illumined "Hope and Peace" candles today:

Call upon Me in Day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.⁷

⁴ *Psalm 50:3.*

⁵ *Malachi 4:1 (3:19 MT).*

⁶ *Luke 21:36.*

⁷ *Psalm 50:15.*

And, 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.⁸

And, these things beginning to become, all of you must have stood erect, all of you must have lifted up your heads, because the Redemption of all of you draws near.⁹

Those verses declare that God hears His people who call upon Him in the Faith. They remind you who are the faithful people of the Nation of God on earth – formed by the Covenant written in His blood – that you have peace through the healing of and from your sins. The words of God’s grace lift up your New Adam’s and moves them to yearn for His coming – today in the Word and Sacraments, and on the Last Day, for His visible, bodily return on the clouds to lift you forever from this body of sin and death.

This is quite the week in the life of the Church, dear fellow-citizens of Zion! Out of the distressing news of God’s Law, we have heard, and in the hearing, been given God’s peace through His Gospel. When all has been said and done, God’s redemption is His people’s peace! Peace with God comes from the knowledge, and occasional feeling (Lutherans are allowed to feel good once in a while), that we have been and continue to be declared right with God. With that in mind, turn again to the opening words of today’s Word of God. This phrase has been used for centuries as part of the sung or chanted Services of God to His people. (As it was last week, so it is planned this week. Wednesday will give those who attend the Lord’s Service to us through the order of

⁸ *Malachi 4:3 (3:21 MT).*

⁹ *Luke 21:28*

Vespers the opportunity to chant this day's Psalm). Asaph's "Mitzmor" מִצְמוֹר (musical Psalm) begins (I will explain the first three names read now in the Hebrew):

El, Elohim, YHWH speaks and calls (to the) earth from (the) rising of the sun unto its setting, from Sion, perfection of beauty, Elohim causes to shine forth.¹⁰

The notes begin to sing forth with the Name of God with three words. We may render and hear them, "God, Gods, I Am Who Causes to Be." (English language translations are all over the map on those three words). What is to be heard clearly, no matter how the translation is rendered, is that this is the One True God, in Multiple Persons, the Creator God, Who is said to be speaking and calling out to the whole earth. This is the universal call of the Word of God – through the revealed and written Word first handed down through Moses, then the Prophets, the Writings, and, later, the New Testament received texts. God speaks through His revealed Word. That Word is a light that shines forth in the darkness of this fallen creation. That is further proclaimed in the Word which follows the opening chant:

Comes, our Elohim, and not He keeps silent, fire before His Face devours, and round about Him (it is) exceedingly tempestuous.¹¹

That is not a description of an absent, or remote, or uncaring god. The song declares the God who speaks. In His speaking, His holy, purifying, cleansing fire goes forth. That Word devours all sin and sinfulness from around and in those who are called to be His people. Your week's text describes the active, powerful God who comes to call you out of the darkness and into the Light. That causes a tempest, a war within you as

¹⁰ Psalm 50:1-2.

¹¹ Psalm 50:3.

your Old Adam seeks to flee God's wrath at his sins, at your sins, and your New Adam rises up to live, forgiven, redeemed, and pure before the glorious Face of the Living God. O, New Adams in all the sinner/saints in the place, hear God's Word to you:

*He calls to the heavens above, and to the earth, to judge His people.*¹²

Your Old Nature shrinks back from that reality. It is burned by the thought and actuality of the judgment placed upon it. Yet, your New Nature strives forward; it leans in to hear the judgment of God, which proclaims:

*"Gather to Me My faithful ones who have been making My covenant under sacrifice, and cause to declare, O heavens, His righteousness." For Elohim Judge He is. (selah).*¹³

The Eternal Judge of Creation has called out. His judgment is to gather His elect, His chosen people, His holy nation, from all over the world. He declares faithful those who have been, literally, "cutting" His Covenant by blood-sacrifice. For those who are of the New Eternal Covenant by sacrifice, that has been cut in the death of Jesus, the Messiah, who shed His blood to cover over all our sins. For the faithful of the Old Covenant era, that which God was calling forth to come was foreshadowed by the killing of the best of the flocks and herds of His people in the appointed feasts and daily offerings.

For both eras of salvation history, any and all sacrifice which is not offered in the Faith is condemned. That is to say, right sacrifice comes from the confession of the Messiah Who bears God's peoples' sins into death and the grave. God's Word continues

¹² Psalm 50:4.

¹³ Psalm 50:5-6.

to proclaim and bring down the full Hammer of God's wrath upon those who look to their own works and gifts to bring them peace with God and hope of salvation. God says,

"Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will cause to testify against you. Elohim, your Elohim I AM!"¹⁴

That beginning of this part of the fiftieth Psalm is God's call to repentance for His people who desire to remain in sin. The Judge is giving testimony in His own courtroom. Who can deny His charges? His Word stands above the Prosecutor/Accuser of mankind, and above all defense His sinning people may offer. Here is God's witness against any human who claims to be a partaker of God's Holy Covenant by his or her own offerings, gifts, or bargaining:

Not upon your sacrifices are you caused to be reproached, and your burnt offerings (are) before Me continually.¹⁵

God declares that the gifts of His people back to Him, both in Old and New Covenant eras, are always before Him. The worship of the Church goes on, He acknowledges, even when the worshippers offer their tithes and offerings without thanksgiving, without faith. To those who are just "going through the motions" of His services, God says: *I will not accept from your house, (a) bull; from your folds, he-goats,¹⁶* and He even tells His worshippers why:

For to Me (is every) beast of (the) forest, (the) cattle on thousand hills. I know all (the) birds of the mountains and (all that) moves in (the) field (is) Mine. If I were hungry, not I would say to you. For to Me (is) the world and all in it. Do I eat flesh of bulls or blood of goats do I drink?¹⁷

¹⁴ Psalm 50:7.

¹⁵ Psalm 50:8.

¹⁶ Psalm 50:9.

¹⁷ Psalm 50:10-13.

The God of Gods declares that the entire creation is His. He proclaims that it is not His need that is to drive His people's sacrifices and offerings to Him. He speaks of the absurdity of His sinning people's thinking that somehow He needs their gifts. Then that they, that you might turn from thinking that your gifts are making God pleased with you, He describes the manner in which He expects those who are truly His Nation, His blood-covenant people are to respond to His gifts. God says,

Make sacrifice to Elohim of thanksgiving, and pay to Most High your vows.¹⁸

There, in the Psalm of Asaph, engraved and chanted or sung centuries before God made the complete and final sacrifice for sins, God declares the attitude He demands of those who would rightly offer worship to Him. The Word calls for thanksgiving in the heart, of offering one's Word in the Faith to Him Who is eternally faithful. This is a heart-attitude, thankfulness for all of God's gifts to you, giving because He has first given and you have then received. You know this worship-response of the New Covenant is summed up in the duties of the New Testament priesthood. You entered that office when God baptized you and named you with His three-fold name (evidenced in how today's song began). It is to you who continue to receive the benefits of God's sacrifice, His right-offering for your sins that God declares:

Call upon Me in Day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.¹⁹

In the receiving the offering of Christ Jesus, you are free to call upon God. He has delivered you – from your sins, this fallen creation, and from the Accuser. God has

¹⁸ Psalm 50:14.

¹⁹ Psalm 50:15.

granted you His glory in Christ, and you are free to give that back to Him. That shall bring you hope and peace as you soberly watch and wait in the Word for His coming.

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

Advent II (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 50:1-15; Malachi 4:1-6; Romans 15:4-13; Luke 21:25-36

December 8, 2013

Pastor Michael H. Merdison

Solī Deo Glōria

Psalm to Asaph:

El, Elohim, YHWH speaks and calls (to the) earth from (the) rising of the sun unto its setting,²⁰

from Sion, perfection of beauty, Elohim causes to shine forth.²¹

Comes, our Elohim, and not He keeps silent, fire before His Face devours, and round about Him (it is) exceedingly tempestuous.²²

He calls to the heavens above, and to the earth, to judge His people.²³

“Gather to Me My faithful ones who have been making My covenant under sacrifice,²⁴

and cause to declare, O heavens, His righteousness.” For Elohim Judge He is. (selah).²⁵

“Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will cause to testify against you. Elohim, your Elohim I AM!”²⁶

Not upon your sacrifices you are caused to be reproached, and your burnt offerings (are) before Me continually.²⁷

I will not accept from your house, bull; from your folds, he-goats.²⁸

For to Me all beast of forest, cattle on thousand hills.²⁹

I know all birds of the mountains and (all that) moves in field is Mine.³⁰

If I were hungry, not I would say to you. For to Me (is) the world and all in it.³¹

Do I eat flesh of bulls or blood of goats do I drink?³²

²⁰ Psalm 50:1.

²¹ Psalm 50:2.

²² Psalm 50:3.

²³ Psalm 50:4.

²⁴ Psalm 50:5.

²⁵ Psalm 50:6.

²⁶ Psalm 50:7.

²⁷ Psalm 50:8.

²⁸ Psalm 50:9.

²⁹ Psalm 50:10.

³⁰ Psalm 50:11.

³¹ Psalm 50:12.

³² Psalm 50:13.

Make sacrifice to Elohim of thanksgiving, and pay to Most High your vows.³³

Then, call upon Me in Day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you will glorify Me.³⁴

³³ *Psalm 50:14.*

³⁴ *Psalm 50:15.*