

RIGHT PRAISE WORSHIP: CONFESSION OF PRAISE AND CONFESSION OF SIN

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this final Sunday of Advent,

Redemption He sent to His people.

He has commanded (in)to eternity, His Covenant.

Holy and terrible (is) His Name.¹

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

This morning, after God's Service to us began with His forgiveness of the sins that we had just confessed, God spoke to us from the first of three "Praise Songs." Each one begins in the Hebrew language with "Hallelu-Yah!" As you will recall, those words mean "Praise the Lord!" From that opening, it is our prayer that you will again hear and learn that right praise worship is composed of confession of praise and confession of sin. Today's readings have been declared, and for the spiritually discerning hearer – a gift of God the Holy Spirit – right praise worship is declared, learned, confessed, and practiced.

As this season of repentant joy, called for centuries "Advent," draws to a close, God's Word to us prepares the Way for the Church to celebrate the coming of our Lord with a right and proper "Praise Hymn." After about thirty years of confusion about the purpose of the Divine Service continually being introduced into the Lord's services in our circles, today's Word of praise declares just what a genuine, God-pleasing, "Praise Song" is; namely: repentant sinners confessing their praises as they, we, you, confess our sins. Hear again how the first of three united "Praise Psalms" contained in the Psalters of your Bibles begins:

Praise YH!

I will give thanks to YHWH in all my heart;

In (a) company of upright men and (in an) assembly.²

The opening words are a translation of six Hebrew letters. The verbal confession of those letters is arranged into two words in Hebrew, three in English. In

¹ Psalm 111:9.

² Psalm 111:1.

them, God's people offer right praise to Him. (Remember, whenever we, you, speak God's Word back to Him in the Faith, you are "getting it right," as the saying goes). Such praise is part of the New Testament sacrifices; offerings to be presented by the Lord's Royal Priesthood, (you the baptized).

From the offering of the "Hallelu - Yah!" flows the first of twenty-two lines, in the Hebrew language, of today's Praise Psalm. (Perhaps next year, either I, or one of our Church Musicians, as a teaching point, will remember to print the Psalm as it has been faithfully handed down, without error, for about three millennia). Each line of today's Psalm begins, following the "Hallelu-Yah!" with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

That information is helpful, because the manner in which the Word of God has been composed shows God's use of human agents. By using the forms in which we communicate, God shows His willingness to reach down to us in ways, forms and means that we sinful humans can understand, believe, and, ultimately, confess before others. After all, right worship, in which right praise is found, begins with God reaching down to sinners. Through means we can comprehend, God grants us undeserved grace, mercy, forgiveness and life. As we forgiven sinners receive God's benefits, right worship continues with forgiven sinners offering to God thanksgivings, prayers and praise. In particular, our public and private confession of our sins and sinfulness we may freely speak. That is because God has declared His forgiveness in sending His Son to die to cover over our sins – to atone for you; to buy us back – to redeem you; and to cut His unilateral covenant for us, for you, in the shed blood and death of Jesus. That has been done that we, you, might even now inherit the Kingdom of God. In God's Word, in the assembly He gathers, human confession is an important response to all of that.

In fact, human auricular confession – from the mouth to the ear – is a major theme of this day's texts. From our, your, oral confession of praise and confession of sin in the Praise Psalm, to the Evangelist's record of the testimony of John, *Then he confessed,*

and he denied not, and he confessed, "I I AM not the Christ,"³ human confession of the Faith regarding every believer's unworthiness before God is coupled with the proclamation of God's grace and mercy for repentant sinners. That is proper for this "Love Sunday."

(God's love for us sinners, while we were yet in sin, is declared visually. The four candles and banners witness to God's revealed truths. Candle four, named "Love," has added its glow to the Advent wreath. The fourth candle banner, "The Lord is Near" in His resurrection, has been hung. We behold that God freely gives hope, peace, joy and love to those who hear and believe the Good News of Jesus' death for our sins. Our King comes; we are free to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand; that Good News gives forgiven sinners reasons for joy; because we know that in Word and Sacraments, our Lord is near). All of that brings us back to today's confession of praise and sin. Hear again the \aleph and \beth (first and second) lines of that praise Psalm:

I will give thanks to YHWH in all my heart;

In (a) company of upright men and (in an) assembly.⁴

Those words declare praise in thanksgiving. Such can only truly flow from a heart – the center of one's being – that has been cleansed from sin. Praise is meant to be declared out loud, in the presence of those who have been declared right with God, "the upright." Today's Psalm was given to be used in an assembly of those who are right with God. That means that the Psalm is not primarily intended to be used by the individual in private. Throughout the generations of the Church which came into being with God's New Covenant cut in the blood of Jesus, this Psalm of Christ's Advent has been a song of the Church at the celebrations of the Sacrament of the Altar. Such leads us to the \aleph and \beth (third and fourth) lines of today's Praise Psalm:

Great (are the) works of YHWH;

being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.⁵

³ John 1:20.

⁴ Psalm 111:1b,c.

⁵ Psalm 111:2.

Since those words follow the confession of the first two lines, they tell of the works of the Lord for which you have already given praise. Namely those are: God's declaring you right with Him; and His placing you in the assembly we call the Church. Yes, all of God's works – in creation, in giving us our daily bread, house, home and all whom we love – are great. Yet, in the praise song of the Church it is the work of God of re-creating in His image those who had been conceived and born dead in trespasses and sin which is declared as His great work. Your praise Psalm calls you to study God's great works of declaring you right with Him and moving you to walk in a new holy life on earth. That God does in you through His Word which moves you to the confession of praise for His forgiveness and the confession of your sins. That shows that you know and believe you need our Savior. He is foreshadowed in the ̅ and ̅ (fifth and sixth) lines of today's chant of praise:

*Majesty and honor (is) His work;
and His Righteousness enduring (in)to forever.⁶*

That, dearly beloved of the Lord, is the first clear declaration of the Christ in this text. God's majesty and honor are shown in this fallen creation through the entrance of the Son Who is "Christ our Righteousness." It is His Advent, His coming, for which the Church of old waited from God's forgiveness of Eve and Adam.

It is His Advent we remember this day. With the lines of today's Psalm the speakers, chanters, singers of this God's words of praise declare that the greatest work of the faithful man, woman, or child before God is to believe in Him Whom God has sent, namely, His Son, Jesus, the Christ. The Lord's Praise Psalm continues as we declare how the Christ comes to His people in the ̅ and ̅ (seventh and eighth) lines:

*Memorial He made to His wonderful works;
Gracious and merciful (is) YHWH.⁷*

⁶ Psalm 111:3.

⁷ Psalm 111:4.

The memorial of God which is sung by those who are right with Him in His congregation is a remembrance. That is, it speaks of the saving act of God, found for those who first heard it in the assembly's celebration of the Passover feast. In the New Covenant era, connected as it is to the other confession texts of today, it speaks of the memorial of the saving act of God, found for you who are willing to hear, in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

In fact, since at least the time of St. Theodoret (circa AD 362) and Augustine (circa AD 430) the Christian Church when she still spoke with one voice, held that the memorial of which our Psalm speaks, that which shows His grace and mercy is the Sacrament of the Altar. That means that the praise of the Church which sings of God's grace is displayed in sins forgiven; God's mercifulness is shown in His justifying grace.

All of that is summed up in the Christ. In Jesus alone, through His death in our sins, are our sins taken away. Christ's death brings us, grants you, forgiveness before the eternal Father. In that grace which declares you right with God, God's mercy is poured out upon you. That leads us to the ו and ך (ninth and tenth) lines of today's Psalm of praise:

*Food He provides for those fearing Him;
for He is mindful to forever of His Covenant.⁸*

In those words of the Praise Psalm, God calls to His people's remembrance His gifts that accompany His Covenants. In both, God provides the forgiveness of sins by grace through Faith. To those of the Old Covenant, His gifts of grace and mercy were given in view of the coming of the Christ. To those who are of the Faith after God cut His New Covenant, God's gifts of grace and mercy are given in view of the Christ Who has come.

⁸ Psalm 111:5.

God is faithful. He remembers the covenants He establishes. He puts them in place. He fulfills them even when those who have agreed to keep them fall away from their promises. To help His people recall His promises before He came in the flesh, God gave them the Covenant meal called the Passover. There, God's people ate and drank as they remembered God's mercy in coming to release them from human bondage, while freeing them from sin's bondage.

In His New Covenant, God has helped His people recall His promises in the meal called the Lord's Supper. Here, God's people eat and drink as they remember God's mercy in releasing them from bondage to the fallen human will, while freeing them from sin's bondage. Those truths lead us to a summary statement in lines 𐤒 and 𐤓 (eleven and twelve) of our day's praise Psalm:

*Thus His works He has caused to show to His people;
to giving to them (the) inheritance of nations.⁹*

Out of the confession of praise and confession of sin of the Old Covenant, God has drawn from His works of forgiveness people from all nations. In this New Covenant era, God has joined Gentiles to a remnant in each generation of the Jews who have been completed in the Faith. Gentiles, the nations, who had once been sparingly drawn into God's covenant, now come freely into His New Meal. He has now, through the gifts He continues to give, shown that He has, in Christ Jesus, completed His promises for all people, namely to give them, to give you, an eternal inheritance.

Our Praise song declares again, in lines 𐤓, 𐤔, 𐤕, and 𐤖 (thirteen through sixteen) God's faithful works and the trustworthiness of His precepts. They declare that which God means to work through His grace lasts forever. They proclaim that His work of creating for Himself repentant people from sinners is how He shows His faithfulness and His uprightness. The Psalm continues with lines 𐤖 and 𐤗 (seventeen and eighteen):

⁹ Psalm 111:6

Redemption He sent to His people.

*He has commanded (in)to eternity, His Covenant.*¹⁰

Christ is the One Whom the Father sent to buy His people back from sin, death, and hell. Christ is the One in Whom the Father established His eternal Covenant. Christ Jesus is the One Who John and all the Old Covenant prophets confessed and did not deny was coming. Jesus is the Savior, the Author of God's New Covenant of grace, forgiveness and mercy for you.

As you can tell by now, we are not going to hear every line of this day's praise psalm proclaimed here. The lines that have been left out are yours to read, reflect and do in the coming days as you anticipate the remembrance of our Lord's coming in the flesh to die in our sins. Lines ק, ר, ש, and ט (21-24) sum up the Hebrew alphabet and declare that which you who are free under God's eternal Covenant, you who truly "fear, love, and trust" in God for all and in all, to do as you bear in yourselves His Holy and Terrible Name. That you have learned comes out of you as you offer back to God right praise worship: namely, your confession of praise and your confession of sin.

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

Advent IV Sermon (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 111; Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Philippians 4:4-7; John 1:19-28

December 22, 2013

Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁰ Psalm 111:9a, b.