

GOD'S SANCTIFYING AND BLESSING OF HIS COVENANT OF MARRIAGE

Hear again the Word of the Lord for this second Sunday in Epiphany,

*Great (are the) works of YHWH;
being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.¹*

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

On the fourth Sunday of Advent of the year just past, many of you recited the words of today's Psalm in the Lord's Services in this place. Just four weeks have passed since you heard about the 22 lines, in the Hebrew language, of the first of three praise Psalms joined in the Psalter following the words, "Hallelu - Yah!" On that day, this comment was made: (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).

Well, it is next year since then, and you have available copies of the Psalm in its twenty-two lines available today. What you will not hear today though, is a reiteration of the proclamation from December 22! Part of that is because God has deemed you worthy to proclaim His Hallelujah Psalm connected to three different Propers of the Day (the Old Testament, Epistle, and Gospel readings) than on the Last Sunday in Advent. Part of why you are hearing a new sermon is because I think you are worth the extra effort of preparing and preaching a different sermon each Sunday a text appears. Finally, part of the reality that the Psalm sermon from the Sunday that closed Advent is not being repeated today is that this is a different season.

Beginning with the last reason first, the theme of Advent is to rejoice in penitential reflection on the Lord's coming. The theme of Epiphany is to rejoice in the reality that the Lord has come in the flesh, having been seen to have arrived to save his people, you, from your sins. On Advent 4, today's Hallelu- Yah! Psalm was tied to the witness of John, Jesus' cousin. Then you heard that John was neither the Christ, nor

¹ Psalm 111:2.

Elijah, nor the Prophet: that the Christ was coming to His people. On Epiphany II, the Hallelu-Yah! Psalm is tied to the witness of another John: the Evangelist. His testimony is that Jesus manifested His glory at Cana of Galilee, the first of the signs that show that He alone is the Christ of God.

So, then, does this mean that the sermon today will proclaim a different interpretation and meaning of the Psalm?

No, Christ Jesus, our Savior is still the heart and center of the Psalm. (As He testifies He is for all the Psalms). The 111th Psalm's words are true today, and hold the same interpretations and meanings that they did last year, and over 25 centuries ago. Yet, with the principle of "Scripture interprets Scripture," the parings with today's readings bring out different emphases from the pure meanings of the text than that of last month's repentance theme. That is why we have a different theme verse today drawn from the same Psalm that was preached four weeks ago. One point of all of that is to remember that, while the Word of God is unchanging, and reflects He Who is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow, that Word speaks the same truths, though with different touch-points for us, depending upon where God's people, you, His Church is, at any given season. Hear today's theme verse again:

*Great (are the) works of YHWH;
being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.²*

Those are the third and fourth (א and ט) lines of today's Praise Psalm. They have come forth from the text as part of the day's theme. That is because they are tied today to Jesus' great work of changing water into wine. That is God's great work which is being studied by you who have pleasure in God's Word.

Today, we have heard how the Psalm's encouragement to study God's great works has been laid out before us. Following our public reading of the Psalm, proclaimed as the Pastor officiates in the sacrificial position (Pastor facing the Table of the Lord,

² Psalm 111:2.

united with the people of God in this place in speaking back His Word to Him), we chanted our prayers to God for His mercy, and proclaimed His glory which comes to us at His Feast of victory (The Kyrie and Gloria). Then, the sacrifice of prayer was lifted up, as our hearts and minds were joined with one voice. There, we petitioned God, in part, that He would send His *blessing upon every husband and wife, that they may not provoke each other to anger and strife, but live peaceably together in love and godliness...*³ As you may recall, that prayer is given to collect our thoughts, and hearts, to the theme of the week. That means, as we look back from the Collect to the Psalm, and forward from the Collect to the Gospel reading, we discover that today's texts have been coupled with a purpose. That shows intent, in part, to proclaim the appearance of God in our flesh in the Person of Jesus as beheld in His great works.

That Epiphany revelation is that God, Who created marriage in the one-flesh union of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, is the same God Who still holds to blessing such unions on earth. In fact, in tying the Psalm to the narrative of the miracle at Cana, the Church has, for a long, long time, (until ancient and recent perversions of the truth), Christ's Bride has declared that marriage of one man and one woman for a lifetime is one of God's great works. His blessing of the marriage of man and woman makes it worthy of being studied by all who have pleasure in His deeds.

Now, some who claim to be "Church" today might wish to argue with God's Word regarding His establishing and blessing only heterosexual unions. At least one internet "author" argues from a horrible corruption of the Genesis account of creation and marriage that the gods created males with male and female characteristics at the same time a "strict and demanding" God, YHWH, created Adam in Eden.⁴ That author goes on to twist to his own desires the description of man – that which the Hebrew language clearly distinguishes as "male and female," which means: two persons of opposite sex joined as one flesh.

³ viet Dietrich *Collect of the Day*, Epiphany II.

⁴ Internet. <http://tobyjohnson.com/adamandsteve.html>, accessed 17 January 17, 2014.

Others who want to be in the Bride of Christ and still hold to other definitions of the marriages God blesses – namely, one man to one woman unions for a lifetime – may take issue with today’s account of God’s wonderful work at Cana. For example, in the Gospel of John for today, of all the people indicated in the text, there is no mention of a bride. Therefore, an argument from silence may declare that we cannot, for certain, declare that the marriage was between a male bridegroom and a female bride. Such reasoning could be maintained because there is no woman mentioned in the text other than Mary, the Mother of our Lord.

Well, you may answer an argument such as that in a manner like this. If one uses God’s revealed way of interpreting His Word, we would need something recorded from Jesus that would indicate that anything other than a heterosexual marriage was taking place. (Oh, you could make the first century Jewish cultural arguments. But, hey, you are Lutheran, or want to be, so you will lead with the Scripture first in refuting arguments such as presented above). So, because you care about erring souls in the Church, you go right to a call to repentance. To do that, why not use Jesus’ testimony, that which was recalled here a few weeks ago when another Hebrew text was handed out to the congregation. Jesus said,

For truly I say to all of you, “Until whenever may pass away the heaven and the earth, iota one or one tittle definitely not may pass away from the Law until whenever all things have become.”⁵

Jesus, the Son of God, the Word of God, He Who appeared in our flesh, declares to a whole multitude of people that the whole body of the Old Testament Law stands until all things are completed. That means that all the Law which prohibits and condemns all human unions except that of single male-to-single female humans is proscribed, condemned, and rejected by God until the Last Day. After that, Jesus

⁵ Matthew 5:18.

declares, *when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage...*⁶ If you hold any other position or thought regarding God's great work in marriage, God's design for and blessing of one-flesh man/woman marriages, repent! Know that Jesus died to take such sins from you. He shed His blood to wash away your sins, to present you clean, pure, to unite you to His eternal Bride on earth and into eternity. Turn from your sins, and return to the wonders God is revealing before us today, as we hear again:

*Great (are the) works of YHWH;
being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.*⁷

Hear and believe that one of God's great works, in fact, the greatest for you, me, and all sinners, is that He has taken the punishment our sinful thoughts, words, and actions have earned, and bore them into death and the grave. He did all that and more for us, for you.

Even if you have been one who professes himself to be wise, and therefore shows yourself to be a fool, if you are like those whom God has turned over to a reprobate mind (thinking of the author cited above) on account of unrepentant sin can be saved from eternal judgment.⁸ That is, as long as you hear of your sins; confess them to be sin; sorrow over and will to turn from them. Then, as you hear of Jesus' death to cover over and bring the forgiveness of your sins; you actually believe and, in the Faith of Christ, receive God's power to turn from sin and walk in newness of life. That gives you, gives us reason to reflect, again, on today's Psalm which flows from the "Hallelu-Yah! Praise the Lord" opening, as each line begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (A few weeks ago, we heard most about lines 1-12. Today, then, a bit more about lines 13-22), beginning with lines 13-16:

*ו (The) works of His hands (are) faithful and just;
י, being trustworthy (are) all His precepts;
ז Ones being establish to ever to eternity;*

⁶ *The Holy Bible: King James Version*. 1995 (electronic ed. of the 1769 edition of the 1611 Authorized Version.) (Mk 12:25). Bellingham WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

⁷ *Psalm 111:2.*

⁸ Cf. *Romans 1:20-32; 3:21-26.*

וְ to being done in faithfulness and uprightness.

Those phrases show forth God's great work that is to be studied. They declare His great work is shown in His faithfulness and justice. God's trueness to His Word – all of it – Law and Gospel is proclaimed. His justice, that He always does that which He says is will do, is declared. This is shown in the revealed, in the historical accounts of the inerrant Scriptures, where we discover the trustworthiness of His precepts. His Word establishes them forever, and fulfills them in Christ Jesus. The Psalm declares that which God means to work through His grace lasts forever. It proclaims that His work of creating for Himself repentant people from sinners is how He shows His faithfulness and His uprightness. From that, the Psalm continues with lines 17 and 18 (ח and ט):

*Redemption He sent to His people.
He has commanded (in)to eternity, His Covenant.⁹*

Those words declare the Christ. Jesus is the One who has appeared, in the flesh, to redeem, that is, buy-back, God's people. He alone has paid the price to rescue you from sin, death and hell. He has given you, His repentant people, the blood of His New Covenant, to eat and drink to the forgiveness of your sins and strengthening to life everlasting. There, Christ is declared in the text, and from that, lines 19 through 22 (י, יא, יב, and יג) sum up the Hebrew alphabet in the Psalm's proclamation:

*י (The) head of wisdom (is the) fear of YHWH;
יא good understanding to all (who are) doing it;
יב His praise endures forever!*

Those are the closing lines of the Psalm proclamation for this season. Yes, they declare that those whom Christ has bought back are to fear, love, and trust in God above all things. From that holy fear, reverence at His Holiness and terror at His wrath over sins, comes good. That is a comprehension of God's will for our lives, and the praise that comes forth from lives of repentance. That confession sends us off today with thanks

⁹ Psalm 111:9a, b.

to God for His great works, most especially today of sanctifying and blessing His covenant of marriage shown through His miracle at the wedding in Cana.

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

Epiphany II Sermon (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 111; Amos 9:11-15; Romans 12:6-16; John 2:1-11

January 19, 2014

Pastor Michael A. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

Psalm 111 MT: Praise YH!

⌘ I will give thanks to YHWH in all my heart;
⌚ In (a) company of upright men and (in an) assembly.

⌚ Great (are the) works of YHWH;
⌚ being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.

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

⌚ Memorial He made to His wonderful works;
⌚ Gracious and merciful (is) YHWH

⌚ Food He provides for those fearing Him;
⌚ He (is) mindful to forever of His Covenant.

⌚ Thus His works He has caused to show to His people;
⌚ to gift to them (the) inheritance of nations.

⌚ (The) works of His hands (are) faithful and just;
⌚ being trustworthy (are) all His precepts;

⌚ Ones being established to ever to eternity;
⌚ to being done in faithfulness and uprightness.

⌚ Redemption He sent to His people.
⌚ He has commanded (in)to eternity, His Covenant.
⌚ Holy and terrible (is) His Name.

⌚ (The) head of wisdom (is the) fear of YHWH;
⌚ good understanding to all (who are) doing it;
⌚ His praise endures forever!

Further notes:

The first and second (⌘and ⌚) lines of our praise Psalm begin:

*I will give thanks to YHWH in all my heart;
In (a) company of upright men and (in an) assembly.¹⁰*

¹⁰ Psalm 111:1b,c.

The third and fourth (א and ג) lines of today's Praise Psalm declare:

*Great (are the) works of YHWH;
being studied by all the ones having pleasure in them.¹¹*

The fifth and sixth (ה and ו) lines of today's declaration of praise read:

*Majesty and honor (is) His work;
and His Righteousness enduring (in)to forever.¹²*

The seventh and eighth (ז and ח) lines proclaim:

*Memorial He made to His wonderful works;
Gracious and merciful (is) YHWH.¹³*

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.

The ninth and tenth (ט and י) lines of today's Psalm of praise sing out:

*Food He provides for those fearing Him;
for He is mindful to forever of His Covenant.¹⁴*

The eleventh and twelfth lines (יא and יב) of our day's praise Psalm proclaim:

*Thus His works He has caused to show to His people;
to giving to them (the) inheritance of nations.¹⁵*

¹¹ Psalm 111:2.

¹² Psalm 111: 3.

¹³ Psalm 111:4.

¹⁴ Psalm 111:5.

¹⁵ Psalm 111:6