

GOD'S PEOPLE OFFERING THEMSELVES FREELY

Hear again the Word of the Lord to His Church on this third Sunday of the Epiphany season, and the Minor Feast of St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor:

*"Your people (will be) most willing in (the) day of Your power, in holy festal garments; from (the) womb of (the) morning, (as) dew, (will be) Your youth."*¹

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

From before today's Collect Prayers to the end of the Gospel Reading, God's Word has declared that He is the Only God: He is the Only One Who can restore His fallen creatures. The Propers of the Day – the Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle, Gradual and Gospel readings – proclaimed Him Who has shown forth His Power on earth. In particular today, that message was given and received through reports of the healing of some people who had been afflicted on account of sin's infection of the once good creation. In the proclaimed Word, God has revealed His Son to be the One Who works healing as He defends His People from our enemies. Now, from that Word, we preach that those enemies are sin, death, and the devil and all the maladies, afflictions, terrors, trials and unbelief which come from them. Out of the Word, we hear that the Son of God is Jesus. From that we learn afresh that Jesus is the One Who has won the Victory over all His enemies; that is, over all that might afflict His Body the Church and all her members. In God's Word, His people – you – have heard of your – their – response to Jesus' victory with these words:

*"Your people (will be) most willing in (the) day of Your power, in holy festal garments; from (the) womb of (the) morning, (as) dew, (will be) Your youth."*²

You, dear brothers and sisters of the Church Militant are part of the Church at War. Yours – ours – is a War which has been won, but whose battles continue in the Spirit with the spiritual powers of evil. Rulers, principalities and dominions of darkness attack you, the Body of Christ, day and night. Yet, in Christ, each day you rise up

¹ Psalm 110:3.

² Psalm 110:3.

spiritually in your baptismal garments. On account of the sacrifice God made to give you the white robes of the saints, you become, daily, in your new natures clothed in Christ, most willing to join in spiritual battles. Today, you again engaged in the conflict with evil, even as you collectively prayed:

Make all pastors diligent to preach your holy Word and minister your means of grace, and grant your people wisdom to follow in the way that leads to eternal life...³

Now, had we who plan the orders in which we receive God's gifts through His Divine Service to us known of today's other events in this congregation, we could not have picked more appropriate hymns, readings and prayers with which the Holy Spirit might work to guide us. Two particular events in the life of this congregation are coming upon us today. They are: the installation of Deacon-elect Thomas Honebrink and the special congregational Voters' Assembly. The first event will have a sure and certain beginning, conclusion, beginning in about 20 minutes. The second event, the gathering of CLC Voters to determine that which God is calling us to do regarding the changes developing in, to, for and out of this congregation, regarding whether or not and how or how not we are going to support Campus Ministry at the U of A is yet to be decided. It is our prayer that such decisions will be based solely in our faithful dependence upon the Word of God. We petition the Lord that those discussions and decisions will be made in accord with the revelation of the Spirit as declared from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans which we have heard today:

Each one of you continue to be minded with one another. Do not with the high things be minded, but for the empty ones all of you together sacrificially love. Do not all of you become minded (only) with yourselves.⁴

Those words are for any Christian congregation, at any time, though they were first written to the Church in Rome. For us today, they take on timely meaning as we discuss God's work in, among, through and out of us. According to the revealed Word, each of you is to be, in your discussions regarding God's work out of the Church

³ Collect for Pastors and Confessors, St. Titus, *Lutheran Worship*, St. Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1982.

⁴ *Romans* 12:16.

in this place, mindful of the other person. God is calling you – calling us – not to be simply concerned with the “we have it good, let us take care of ourselves first” type of thinking. Rather, He desires that His Body, this congregation which receives His Word, be concerned, in self-giving love, sacrificial love, unconditional love, for those who are empty in themselves. They are the lowly who have not, on their own, the things God has given to us. We are not, each of us and all of us, to be concerned only with ourselves. (That is the deeper meaning of the word “conceit” as the text is printed in the bulletins).

If we, as we each and all, find ourselves being unconcerned with our neighbor’s genuine biblical concerns about the mission and work of this congregation, we shall – you shall – repent! If in our discussions we look to the good that has been showered upon us over the past few years and find ourselves failing to share that good with others who cannot provide for themselves, we shall – you shall – repent! If we discover ourselves willing to turn back into ourselves, serving only our needs, our concerns, our desires, our congregation, we shall – you shall – repent! Know that this is God’s Church, God’s congregation, God’s mission and work. Believe that He has paid the price for you to be here today. Jesus did this to rescue you – us – from even our sinful desires about what His Church and her work should look like. This He did fully, on the Cross, when He, in His humiliation, won the victory over all our enemies – for you! Our Psalm declares:

Says YHWH to my Adonai, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies (a) stool for Your feet.”⁵

Christ Jesus is the One Whom David declares is His Lord in that text: Jesus declares that to be so.⁶ The Father, in Jesus’ ascension to His right Hand, has given Him that rule. As you are the Body of Christ in this place, and you have remained attached to our Head, Jesus, He is placing His enemies under our feet. Someday, on the Last Day, the

⁵ Psalm 110:1.

⁶ Luke 20:41-44.

image of a conquering king of old actually, physically, having his enemies placed under his feet, will be true for us – for you – when they will be as ashes under our feet.

To get us to that coming reality, Christ emptied Himself of His eternal rule, glory and dominion to become truly one with us. He did so to bear our sins, though being without sin in Himself. In Him, know that you, we, are free to make decisions regarding God's work in, through, and out of this congregation that will be pleasing to Him. In Christ, we shall remain guided by His Word, and participate joyfully in the Work which He continues to set before us.

That is evidenced by the reality that, at this time in her life, God has raised up this congregation to be a leader in the Church. That is made clear from the other churchly work in which our members have taken leadership roles (LWML Zone; English District Nominations Committee; Operation Barnabas; roles on two Concordia University Boards of Regents; Executive membership on the Campus Christian Center Board of Directors) and the list goes on (if anyone was missed it was not intentional, but, hey, we don't need a 10-minute recitation of all God has us doing outside these walls right now). As we follow Him, humbling ourselves before His Word, He will guide us. You know this to be true because you are about to, again, witness another member of this congregation fulfilling the prophecy of today's Psalm:

"Your people (will be) most willing in day of Your field, in holy festal garments, from womb of morning to You (as) dew (will be) Your youth."⁷

Today, another man, will kneel before the Lord at this Table. He will bow his head in humility before the Word of the Lord, after having pledged to you, the Bride of Christ, in this place to be your servant in the Gospel. He will stand in the line which now, from this place, includes those sainted and those who still bear the yoke which frees their right hand for service. The service of the Diaconate may be traced back to seven men who were voluntarily brought forward by the first congregation of the New Testament era after Christ's ascension. They were chosen to wait tables – to serve God's people – that

⁷ Psalm 110:3.

God's pastors may be attentive to the Word of God and the prayers. Not long after the seven volunteered for that service, Steven received the crown of life for his service to the Church. Our text declares the Word which foretold those events then, and the events of today, as it states:

Your people (will be) most willing in day of Your field, in holy festal garments...

Hear and imagine what that phrase is driven to depict. God's people, on the day of His taking the field (that is a military reference) will be willing to join the fight. Yet, the text makes it clear that theirs – yours, his – battles will be of a spiritual nature. That is made lucid by the words, *in holy festal garments*; that, dear ones who have been clothed in Christ, means priestly garments. That is to say, that those who are King David's Lord's people will be arrayed in the robes of those who offer sacrifices to God. This text speaks of God's Kingdom priests – all the baptized – participating in the fight by doing the work foreshadowed by the Levitical priesthood. Those duties include offering, participating in, eating and drinking from the offerings to God! In this work in the New Testament, the sacrifices of God's holy priests are offered, namely from the New Testament witness: prayer, praise and thanksgiving. Here, in this man and as in that man, that man and that man (Deacon Jacoby, Deacon Hawk, and Deacon Koosmann) you have visual evidence of roles of service in and for Christ's Church. In the women who have held, or are training to enter into, this office called the Diaconate, you have living (and even eternally living, sainted) testimony of the work of the New Testament fulfillment of God's Word in today's Psalm. These men and women embody the consummation of God's promise that His people will freely – no one here has been forced into the Diaconate against his or her will – at least by human agency. They serve as examples for you of repentant, forgiven sinners who give of themselves freely for the work of God in this place and in our community. God declares:

“(The) scepter of Your might will stretch forth from Zion. Rule in midst of Your enemies.”⁸

God’s Scepter is His Word. That Word goes from this congregation and God uses it to bring in those who will reign with Him, now in the Church Militant and forever in the Church triumphant. Here, from these servants, and from you in your everyday holy vocations – grandmother, father, student, Doctor, nurse, craftsman, retiree, son or daughter – you rule with Him as you remain under His Word.

This rule does not, in this Church Militant, the Church at war on earth against malevolent spiritual forces, have all pleasure and no struggles, no battles, no minor setbacks. We are far from that, but nearer than we were yesterday to the Day in which all our enemies, among whom we must live for a while, the Day when they will all be as ashes under our feet. Our enemies are about us, and as we confessed today that we might be forgiven, they are in each of us. We are in the fight against our very selves, our desires and hopes – even for the directions this congregation will be taking.

In that fight, as we remain centered and grounded in God’s Word, we have received the win of the final victory. That was declared centuries before it came into time in the year we date AD 33. In the Psalm, God through King David declares:

YHWH has sworn and will not repent:⁹

All the promises laid out before you are being brought to completion even now through Jesus Christ. His is the victory, ours the fruits. He stands before us, behind us, below us, above us, and in our midst as the battles in this war which He has won continue for a time. He will guide us to do His will, to build His Church in this place, in our communities, in our city, nation and beyond. God has promised that King David’s Lord would come, and He has. God has promised that He will reign until all His enemies are finally laid under His feet, and that is happening – even our old sinful natures cannot remain in the glory of His presence. God has declared that His people will offer

⁸ *Psalm 110:2.*

⁹ *Psalm 110:4a.*

themselves as freewill offerings in the Day of His battle, and they – you – are. God has declared that the youth of our Lord's life would be as the dew of the new morning covering the whole earth. In the Word, His eternal Youth goes forth and waters the earth.

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

Epiphany III (*Lutheran Service Book* one-year series)

Psalm 110:1-4a; II Kings 5:1-15a; Romans 12:16-21; Matthew 8:1-13

January 26, 2014

Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

To David, Psalm

Says YHWH to my Adonai, "Sit to My right hand until I make Your enemies (a) stool for Your feet."¹⁰

"Scepter of Your might will stretch forth from Zion. Rule in midst of Your enemies."¹¹

"Your people (will be) most willing in day of Your field, in holy festal garments, from womb of morning to You (as) dew (will be) Your youth."¹²

Has sworn, YHWH, and will not repent.¹³

"You shall be priest into forever upon (a) manner like Melchizedek."¹⁴

Translation, third draft

To David, Psalm

Says YHWH to my Adonai, "Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies (a) stool for Your feet."¹⁵

"(The) scepter of Your might will stretch forth from Zion. Rule in midst of Your enemies."¹⁶

"Your people (will be) most willing in (the) day of Your power, in holy festal garments; from (the) womb of (the) morning, (as) dew, (will be) Your youth."¹⁷

YHWH has sworn and will not repent.¹⁸

"You shall be Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."¹⁹

¹⁰ *Psalm 110:1.*

¹¹ *Psalm 110:2.*

¹² *Psalm 110:3.*

¹³ *Psalm 110:4a.*

¹⁴ *Psalm 110:4b.*

¹⁵ *Psalm 110:1.*

¹⁶ *Psalm 110:2.*

¹⁷ *Psalm 110:3.*

¹⁸ *Psalm 110:4a.*

¹⁹ *Psalm 110:4b; LXX used for "according to the order of"*