

YHWH PRESERVES THE SOULS OF HIS SAINTS

Our sermon for the fourth Sunday of the Epiphany season is taken from our inspired readings. Hear again the Word of the Lord,

*All of you who love YHWH, hate evil;
(He is) preserving (the) souls of His holy ones;
from (the) hand (of) wicked men He causes to deliver them.¹*

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

This is the first Epiphany IV Sunday in this place, perhaps ever, where the Christ is being proclaimed to His people from the ninety-seventh Psalm. Part of that is because there are not always four Sundays in the Epiphany Season. (In 2008, this season jumped immediately from the Feast of the Epiphany to Transfiguration Sunday. Last year, we leapt from Epiphany to the Baptism of our Lord, and into Transfiguration). Another reason for not hearing of the Christ preached from this Psalm on this particular Sunday of the Church Year is because the Psalm series of sermons only comes up here every four years. In addition, Psalm 97 is only heard in the Lord's Sunday services, all or in part, in the Epiphany season.² Why might that be?

One reason is that this Psalm speaks of our Lord's appearances in the elements of His creation. For example, today in the Gospel reading, Jesus manifests His divine power to bring order out of chaos in stilling the storm. This dynamic work shows to you who will hear, that Jesus is the God, the Great I AM (YHWH), the Lord (Adonai), who is described in today's Psalm with words such as these:

*Clouds and thick darkness (are) round about Him;
righteousness and justice are (the) foundations of His throne.*

¹ Psalm 97:10.

² In the One-Year Series, Psalm 97 may be read in total on Epiphany IV and/or V, and in the Verse of the Day before the Gospel Reading on Epiphany III, IV, V, and Transfiguration Sunday. At CLC, we are not yet chanting the Propers' Verse each Sunday as part of the Alleluia, but with the choir now this is a possibility for the future.

*His lightnings cause to lighten all (the) world;
the earth sees and causes to tremble.³*

Now, perhaps that does not describe the Jesus you like to imagine in your mind's eye. Yet, those words depict the Jesus of Scriptures. He is comfortable in the presence of the roiling clouds, flashing lightning, rolling thunder, waves stirred up by the "tremoring" of the earth beneath the seas. In many of the Old Testament Theophanies – appearances of God – the Presence of the Lord is veiled in storm-like weather. As Jesus is God, and part of the Trinity, in His pre-incarnate form, the Son would have been in the clouds, thick darkness, lightning, and earth shaking manifestations of the Divine. (From that you have a very reasonable explanation how Jesus, in today's Gospel reading, could be found sleeping in the midst of such great commotion on the sea).

God's Word for this Sunday, proclaimed in your hearing, declares the God of the Scriptures as He appears to those, to us, to you, who are still living in this body of sin and death. This is not God your Buddy, nor Jesus your simple gentle Friend. He is the Creator God veiling His holiness in the elemental forces of that which we call, "Nature." He does so under, behind, and in such forms of the creation so that you, and the disciples of old, and this fallen world, are not consumed by His purifying fire of holiness. Hear His mercy revealed in veiling Himself for you who believe in Him before the Last Day:

*Clouds and thick darkness (are) round about Him...
His lightnings cause to lighten all (the) world;
the earth sees and causes to tremble.⁴*

That prophecy was fulfilled, multiple times, in the ministry of Jesus before, and during, His death in our, your, sins. From those eye-witness-reported historical events we declare the coming revelation of our Lord. Clouds and thick darkness,

³ Psalm 97:2, 4.

⁴ Psalm 97:2a, 4.

lightning, and earthquakes are all going to accompany Jesus when He makes His final appearance in His glorified, risen, and ascended flesh on the Last Day, when the storm of His unbridled wrath at sin and unrepentant sinners finally breaks into this fallen creation.

If you are one who is agnostic (someone who holds to this type of thinking, “Well I don’t know if there is a God, or if Jesus is God, but I will believe in Him when I see Him.”), you need to behold Him in the Word now. Believe in Him now as He is revealed by God’s Word. For, if you wait for the seeing, it will be too late for you to sorrow over your sin of rejecting God in the Icon of our flesh. If you behold God in Christ coming on the clouds in dynamic power and might and then want to believe, you will be lost.

That is because that glory, the true glory of God in Christ which is even now coming upon this earth brings cleansing fire. Then, unrepentant sinners who did not believe before the instant of His coming on the clouds will be burned away. They will be cast into the Lake of Fire to suffer eternally for their rejection of the Christ. They will no longer appear before the face of all His holy ones (before us who are the saints in Christ).

God, in His unveiled glory is not for those who do not believe in the revealed glory of the crucified Christ. The Last Day is too late a date to believe for those who are waiting for it that they might believe. They, you perhaps, in delaying and rejecting the Faith, are guilty of worshipping idols such as human wisdom, knowledge, sight and sound. In doing so, you perhaps, and they, are guilty of rejecting the Image of God in true power and might – hanging lifeless, bridging the gap between heaven and earth, suspended above Hell and all its fires. God showed His power for you in dying for you in your sins. Hear and believe, for the first time, or anew if you have fallen to the temptation to wait for a Jesus of your own imagining, these words:

*All of you who love YHWH, hate evil;
(He is) preserving (the) souls of His holy ones;
from (the) hand (of) wicked men He causes to deliver them.⁵*

It is true evil to reject the Christ, the God, the Spirit of the Holy Scriptures. Unrepentant wicked men and women have rejected God since Cain killed his brother. On the right hand, you who do love the One True God, the Creator God, do hate such evil. In the atoning death of Jesus, you are free to turn from the human and satanic gods of rationalism, emotionalism, human wisdom and insight about spiritual things. In the Faith you may return to the reason, love, divine wisdom and genuine spiritual insight given by God the Holy Spirit through God's Word and Sacraments. In Christ, you hear of your Christian freedom. God still says:

⁵ Psalm 97:10.

*(He is) preserving (the) souls of His holy ones;
from (the) hand (of) wicked men He causes to deliver them.⁶*

In those words, you discover the Jesus of the Scriptures preserving your souls, naming you His saints, through His chosen means. In that Jesus of the Word, you learn anew how God is delivering you from the hand of the wicked. How are the immortal souls of the faithful; how is your soul being preserved by the God who comes in clouds and darkness, fire, lightning?

The answer to that question is: God preserves and delivers His saints through simple earthly means connected to His Word. The first means by which the God of lightning preserves and delivers people is through the Word which declares them, you, holy. His is the Word that flashes forth into this fallen creation, declaring sinners forgiven. This is His means of grace heard in the Word of Holy Absolution. That is God's forgiveness of all your sins, of declaring you "not sin" in His presence through the audible proclamation of His grace.

The second means by which the God Who is revealed by the fire that goes before Him is the Word of Holy Baptism. With God's Word spoken over water, His purifying fire goes forth, as water washes over the sinner, purifying him or her -- infant, child, or adult - in the Face of God's holiness. Only the Holy One can take an unholy one - you, me, and all those whose names He has joined to His Name with the Water and the Word - only the God of creation can re-create any person into His own pure, glorious, eternal image. When God baptizes with His Word and plain water, souls are preserved, and unholy ones are declared saints, sin is washed away.

The third means through which the God Who is revealed through clouds and thick darkness preserves the lives of His saints is by the Word combined in, with, and under bread and wine. This Word of the Sacrament of the Altar is efficacious when spoken by a man who has been placed by God, through His Word, into the Office of the

⁶ Psalm 97:10b.c.

Holy Ministry. There, repentant sinners, receive God's preservation from the evils of this fallen creation. Those are we whom God moves through His Word to confess with one voice the mysteries of the ages – "I Am a sinner; I am sorry for my sins and will to turn from them; I believe Jesus is sacramentally present in the elements of Bread and Wine when they are combined with Jesus' Words of Institution; I am one in confession with all those with whom I am joined at a particular altar – in Christ's teachings contained in the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer."

Here, with Jesus' Words, the faithful and unfaithful alike receive the Body and Blood of Jesus. For the faithful, that means we are given by God, through the hand of His minister, His forgiveness and strengthening to life everlasting. For those who do not so believe, and come forth in a lie, in sin against the common union called for at the Lord's Table, God, through the hand of His minister brings condemnation and judgment.

It is at the Table of the Lord, before His coming in power and might in clouds and thick darkness, in fire, lightning and earthquake that God's judgment between repentant and discerning saint and unrepentant, undiscerning sinner is most clearly revealed. For those who have communed wrongly: turn from your sins, and believe the Word of the Lord. For we who have communed in the Faith, come again, and receive the Christ of the Holy Scriptures. Here is your defense against all who would work – spiritual and earthly, to turn you away from these revealed truths:

*Zion hears and is glad;
and (the) daughters of Judah rejoice
because of Your judgments, O YHWH.⁷
For You, O YHWH, are Most High above all the earth;
for You are exalted above all elohim.⁸*

You who are in Christ, in His revealed confession of the Faith; who daily remember His baptism of you; who hear and believe His Word of forgiveness; who

⁷ Psalm 97:8.

⁸ Psalm 97:9.

taste and see His goodness in His Supper: you are those who are of Zion. You are the ones who are to rejoice in His judgments as His dear children. You declare Him, even as you will sing forth the “Holy, Holy, Holy” of the angel hosts to be the Most High God, the eternal Ruler over all the heavens and the earth. You, through His Word, confess Him – as we soon will with the confession which is nearing its seventeen hundredth birthday – to be the God above all gods. Nothing, no one, without His grace and mercy will stand before Him on the Last Day. Many will fall this day on account of unbelief in the whole revelation of His Word. For you who believe, these words are true even now:

*Light (is) sown for (the) righteous,
and for (the) upright in heart, joy.⁹
All of You rejoice, O righteous ones, in YHWH;
and all of you cause to give thanks to His Holy Name.¹⁰*

Here, in the Word, is the Light of God which washes over you declaring you right with Him. In the resurrection of Jesus, believers are proclaimed to be right with our heavenly Father. In Christ, your hearts, the very centers of your beings which include your immortal souls, is lifted up in true joy before God. In that truth, you are free to actually rejoice. You, in Christ, are the righteous ones in YHWH. That belief and knowledge frees you to continue to give thanks to His Holy Name. That is so, because you already bear your eternal family name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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

Epiphany IV

Psalm 97; Jonah 1:1-17; Romans 13:8-10; Matthew 8:23-27

February 2, 2014

Paster Michael S. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

⁹ Psalm 97:11.

¹⁰ Psalm 97:12.

*YHWH reigns (as King),
let rejoice the earth, let be glad many coastlands!¹¹*

*Clouds and thick darkness round about Him;
righteousness and justice (are) foundation of His throne.¹²*

*Fire before His Face goes,
and burns up round about, His adversaries.¹³*

*They all cause to lighten, His lightnings (the) world;
(it) sees, and causes to tremble, the earth.¹⁴*

*Mountains, as wax, they melt from before YHWH's Face;
from before His Face, Adonai (of) all the earth.¹⁵*

*Cause to declare, O heavens, His righteousness;
and they see, all the peoples, His glory.¹⁶*

*They are put to shame, all ones worshipping images,
who cause to boast in worthless idols;
they bow down to Him, all elohim.¹⁷*

*Hears and is glad, Zion;
and rejoice, daughters of Judah;
because of Your judgments, O YHWH.¹⁸*

*For You, O YHWH are Most High upon all the earth;
for You are exalted upon all elohim.¹⁹*

*All of you who love YHWH, hate evil;
be preserving souls of His saints,
from hand (of) wicked men He causes to deliver them.²⁰*

*Light (is) sown for righteous,
and for (the) upright in heart, joy.²¹
You all rejoice, O righteous ones, in YHWH;
and you all cause to give thanks to Name, His Holy.²²*

¹¹ *Psalm 97:1*

¹² *Psalm 97:2.*

¹³ *Psalm 97:3.*

¹⁴ *Psalm 97:4.*

¹⁵ *Psalm 97:5.*

¹⁶ *Psalm 97:6.*

¹⁷ *Psalm 97:7.*

¹⁸ *Psalm 97:8.*

¹⁹ *Psalm 97:9.*

²⁰ *Psalm 97:10.*

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and all of you cause to give thanks to His Holy Name.*³⁴

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²⁴ Psalm 97:2.

²⁵ Psalm 97:3.

²⁶ Psalm 97:4.

²⁷ Psalm 97:5.

²⁸ Psalm 97:6.

²⁹ Psalm 97:7.

³⁰ Psalm 97:8.

³¹ Psalm 97:9.

³² Psalm 97:10.

³³ Psalm 97:11.

³⁴ Psalm 97:12.