

THE MIGHTY MAN WHO IS HUMBLE

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

*Who has ascended to (the) heavens and come down?
Who has gathered (the) wind in His closed hands?
Who has wrapped up (the) waters in (a) garment?
Who has caused to establish all (the) ends of the earth?*

*What is His Name?
And what (is the) Name of His Son? For, you know!¹*

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

For the next five weeks, our readings for this year's Lent Wednesdays will proclaim our sin and our Savior from Proverbs, chapter 30. It is our prayer that the readings that began today, from which will be drawn the sermons, when coupled with the weekly hymns and psalmody, will lead each of you and all of us into a greater appreciation of just how well the Scriptures are tied together in the declaration of Christ-crucified for the sins of the whole world. When it comes to the question of, "Why Proverbs, chapter 30?" to proclaim that, the answer is shrouded in the mists of this year's Epiphanytide conversations during our Wednesday Bible studies and Sunday afternoon Divine Services. Suffice it to say, the idea stuck, and two weeks before Ash Wednesday the parallel texts and hymns were selected. Our bulletin covers were prepared with a complete translation of the text of Proverbs, chapter 30 for you to reflect upon each week. So, here we are, finding Christ in the Word which began after the Psalmody with words like these:

(The) words of Agur, son of Jakeh of the Massa: "Says the mighty man to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal, 'So without reason I am to be (a) man, and not in understanding of man is it for me. And, I have not learned wisdom and knowledge; nor of (the) Holy Ones have I knowledge.'"²

¹ Proverbs 30: 4.

² Proverbs30:1-3.

Now, Christ is not in that section, except as a Person of the Holy Trinity giving inspiration and humility to the human author of the words. Before we get to Jesus in the text, we are going to hear a study of the opening words of the 30th Proverb. This is being done to teach what may be done, well or not, with a given text.

After the name of Agur, son of Jakeh in the opening, that translation departs a bit from that which is on your bulletin cover. The reason for that is simple: this text begins with several nouns which can either describe people's names or they can indicate places or properties of something. Hebrew proper names often have meanings, and nouns with meanings at times are used to name people. (On the other hand, sometimes a "hoe is a hoe," and not a name given to a "man who turns over dirt in the garden.")

Having said that, the introductory sentence of tonight's Proverb has moved theologians to lengthy suppositions about who or what all these words may mean: *Agur; Jakeh; Massa; Ithiel; and Uchal*. Literally, they could be rendered: *the Gatherer; The Obedient One; to raise the voice; I have troubled myself, O God; and, withdrawn*. So, our text could begin like you heard earlier:

(The) words of Agur, son of Jakeh of the Massa: "Says the mighty man to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Uchal..."

Or, they could be read like this:

(The) words of "(the) Gatherer," son of "(the) Obedient One," "to raise the voice" to say, "Says the mighty man, 'I have troubled myself, O God! I have troubled myself, O God! And I have withdrawn...'"

Confusing, right? Well, the words and their translations could be combined to make some sense to our ears like this:

(The) words of Agur, son of Jakeh, to raise the voice to say, "Says the mighty man, 'I have troubled myself, O God! I have troubled myself, O God! And I have withdrawn...'"

That makes more sense. All of that was done to pour into your ears an abbreviated proclamation of that which a least one Bible expositor needed six pages,

single-spaced, small font, to come to and conclude. Despite all that, we may still come to the conclusion as it is given in the *Lutheran Study Bible*, “We do not know who Agur son of Jakeh was...”³

So, what is the point? Simply to indicate, that from now on, we are going to hear that which is proclaimed clearly from the Word of the thirtieth chapter of Proverbs. We are hoping to be found faithful to the intent of the ending of the section of the proverbs for today,

*Add not to His words, lest let He cause to rebuke you, and you be found (a) liar.*⁴

That means that we are not going to spend any more time on trying to determine the meaning of things that are unclear, and not important to a good understanding of the Word of God which shows our sin and our Savior. Therefore, we now properly turn to that which troubled the strong man who wrote the Proverb.

The writer of this chapter uses a word which we have translated, “mighty man.” That title means that he saw himself as the protector of women, children and non-combatants. That he then goes on to describe his state with regard to God after having declared himself such a protector show his true humility before the mighty God. Here is what the “hero” says about himself:

*So without reason am I to be (considered a) man, and it is not for me in (the) understanding of (a) man. And, I have not learned wisdom and knowledge; nor of (the) Holy Ones have I knowledge.*⁵

His is a confession of the truth of any believer, no matter how much worldly strength he or she may have. It means that when you look at yourself in terms of the revealed reason of God, when you hope to peer into the understanding of the things of God, you will, at times, find yourself coming up short. The confession of the mighty man is your confession, my confession, the confession of all who have come to know God, to

³ Engelbrecht, Edward A. Gen. Ed. *The Lutheran Study Bible*, Concordia Publishing House: St. Louis, 2009, 1044.

⁴ *Proverbs* 30:6.

⁵ *Proverbs*30:1-3.

partake in His mysteries, and who look at just who we are apart from Him. Really, what do you know of the wisdom of God? Do you know why He created Lucifer when He knew that he would become the Accuser and Deceiver of mankind? Can you really understand, beyond mere surface confession of the Faith, why God moved Himself to create Man who would fall from grace? Can you imagine why, before that happened, other than our sketchy concept of God's love, why before all time, God determined in Himself to send the Son into our flesh to die to buy us back from the sin, death and hell that Adam's fall brings to us? Simply put, the answer to the last from today's text is that Jesus is the Mighty Man Who humbles Himself for us.

The questions of the faithful fly; when the "whys," and "what ifs" of the faithful come forth. Yet, in the end, we end up confessing that we in ourselves have no wisdom and knowledge, nor any of our own insight into the Holy Ones – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We may spend pages of text, minutes of proclamation, and come to the conclusion, "we do not really know all about this" of God. That is where the Faith takes over. Consider the four "who" and two "what" questions of Agur, son of Jakeh and answer them as they come forth from that which you know:

*Who has ascended to (the) heavens and come down?
Who has gathered (the) wind in His closed hands?
Who has wrapped up (the) waters in (a) garment?
Who has caused to establish all (the) ends of the earth?*

*What is His Name?
And what (is the) Name of His Son? For, you know!⁶*

The reality is that, any of the answers you just gave (the morning service attendees spoke their answers) is not that you have the wisdom to know them in yourself. Your answers to the text – God, Jesus, the Christ, the Trinity – all came from the revealed knowledge you have been given from the faithful inspired records written almost two thousand years ago. The fact that Agur spoke his questions and came to this

⁶ Proverbs 30: 4.

conclusion, *all the sayings of Elohe are proving true, He is (a) shield to (the) ones taking refuge in Him*, is that he had the gift of the Faith. That anyone knows and believes in the Name of God, and His Son, His creative work, His restraining the waters, His stilling wind and wave, His descending and ascending into heaven all gifts of the Faith. That you believe that Jesus is the One, with the Father and the Holy Spirit Who is the answer to all those questions of Agur, that he believed that such a One was coming, is all a gift of the Faith. It is that which all the faithful have believed from the moment of the Promise God gave to Adam and Eve in His cursing of the serpent in the Garden of Eden – Sunday’s Old Testament reading.

For you and I, and all who have come to the Faith after the Second Person of the Holy Trinity came into this world, lived, died, rose from the dead and ascended into the heavens, we have so much more of the revealed wisdom and knowledge of God to cling to in the Faith than did Adam and Eve and Agur, the composer of Proverbs, chapter 30. Today, to answer the “who” and “what” questions of the mighty man, we have the words of Jesus, who applied them to Himself. He, when answering Nicodemus who came to Him in secret to try to determine who Jesus was by his own reason and understanding, quoted this day’s Proverb of Himself:

And no one has ascended into the heavens except He Who from the heaven came down, the Son of Man. And, just as Moses exalted the serpent in the wilderness, thus also it is necessary (for) the Son of Man to be exalted, that everyone, each one continually believing in Him may have life eternal.⁷

Over the years here, more than once, I have challenged highly educated people who were questioning the Faith, and whether they want to believe in Jesus, to read only the narratives concerning Nicodemus. That man was a leader of the Jews. He was fully catechized in the Old Testament truths. And, it took him a while – about three years – to come to the knowledge and wisdom of the Faith as it was then revealed at his

⁷ John 3:13.

first meeting with Jesus. Jesus determines to show the faithful that the questions about Who ascended and descended are answered in Him.

Later, St. Paul, taking the words of Agur and the words of Jesus, applies them to being right with the heavenly Father through the Faith. He declares how they are lived out in the life of the Church. Hear again how the words of the Proverbs apply in the Church, even today:

Not you may say in your heart, "Who will ascend into the heavens?" (That is, Christ to bring down). Or, "Who will descend into the abyss?" (That is, Christ from the dead to raise). But what does it say, "Near to you the saying remains, in your mouth and in your heart," (that is, the saying of the faith which we proclaim).⁸

St. Paul is using the questions of the mighty man from the Proverbs to teach of the confession of the Faith in the Church! His teaching from this text is borne out in the words of the Office Hymn from tonight's Vespers. Hear them again, and think of that which you might have missed while you were singing them:

All are alike before the Highest,: 'Tis easy for our God, we know, To raise thee up, though low thou liest, To make the rich man poor and low. True wonders still by Him are wrought Who setteth up and brings to naught.⁹

Could you hear how those words speak as Agur was speaking? You sang them, and confessed not only our humility before God, but His will to exalt the one who is humble, low. You declare His wonders of setting up the Christ, exalting Him and bringing the evil to nothing. From that, after the Lord's service to us ends, we will sing:

Your sinless death has brought us Life eternal, peace, and rest; Only what Your grace has taught us Calms the sinner's deep distress.¹⁰

From the Word proclaimed in texts, to the Word preached in sermon, to the Word declared in hymnody tonight you have been given that which Agur in the Proverb declared to be true for the faithful:

All the sayings of Elohe are proving true, He is (a) shield to (the) ones taking refuge in Him.¹¹

⁸ Romans 10:6-8.

⁹ LSB 750, stz 6.

¹⁰ LSB 423, stz. 2.

Those words are true for you as you remain in Christ, humble before the sayings of God which are revealed in His Word. This you are free to do because Christ, the Son of God, is the Man Who humbled Himself for you.

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

Lent I Wednesday

Proverbs 30:1-6; Romans 10:6-11; John 3:11-15

March 12, 2014

Pastor Michael H. Merhouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹¹ Proverbs 30:5.