

THE EYES OF BELIEVERS SEE THE LORD BECAUSE OF HIS STEADFAST LOVE

Hear the Word of God for this, “Oculi – I see,” Sunday as the Church once again breaks her fast during the 40-day countdown to the Resurrection of our Lord:

His steadfast love (endures) into eternity.¹

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

This is the “I see” week in the Church Year. It is given to the Church that we might be again reminded, in the season which wraps a deeper repentance theme around its Sundays. In a way, we might think of that which will come forth to us this week from the Word of God as creating, “Ah Ha! Or, I see!” moments. Such breakthroughs come forth, for example when this coming Wednesday, the Church in this place, in Lord’s Service to us in Vespers, will hear these words set to a Lutheran chant:

*Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord: for He shall pluck out of the net my feet.
Turn Thee unto me and have mercy upon me: for desolate and afflicted am I.²*

That which the Church is given to “see” from those words is that when each of us, in our moments of truly acknowledging our needs, our sinfulness, our apartness and afflictions from the Lord, will learn to keep our eyes on Jesus, the Perfector of the Faith. In Him, above all, is today’s congregational refrain from the Psalm fulfilled:

His steadfast love (endures) into eternity.³

The Word in that response to God’s rule, creative power, and redemptive work in the 136th Psalm is one that the students at the Thursday evening Bible study at the Campus Christian Center just learned. It is a single Hebrew word, **חסד**. In translation, it may be thought of as being similar to the common Greek many of you have come to know and cherish, *αγαπη*. As it is with that word, the little three-letter word, **חסד** is so full of rich meaning that it cannot be translated well or fully with a single English word or phrase.

¹ Psalm 136:1b, etc..

² Daenzer, Sean. “Oculi Introit” 2009.

³ Psalm 136:1b, etc..

This means that, when you responded to God's revealed rule, dominion, authority, His creative power, His rescuing His people with, *His steadfast love (endures) into eternity*, you meant so much more than you were saying. You were declaring God's mercy in His rule over all things. You were proclaiming God's loving-kindness toward His creation. You were speaking of God's sacrificial love in rescuing His people from captivity due to sin. All of those realities, and so much more, is sounded forth when you say, chant, or sing words such as these: *His steadfast love (endures) forever*.

That phrase pronounces God's enduring loyalty to His community – those people whom He has named with His Name. For today, it separates three attributes, or qualities, or workings of God. Hear them now without the refrain, and see what God's Word is communicating as we dig a bit deeper into the Word:

All of you cause to give thanks to YHWH, for good (He is)!
All of you cause to give thanks to El of the elohim!
All of you cause to give thanks to Adonai of the Adonae! ⁴

To Him doing great wonders, He alone!
To Him doing the heavens in understanding!
To Him Who spread out the Earth upon the waters!⁵

To Him doing great lights!
The sun for ruling in (the) day!
The moon and stars for ruling in (the) night!⁶

To Him Who caused to smite Egypt in their first-born sons!
And He caused to bring out Israel from away from them!
In (a) strong Hand, and in (a) mighty Arm outstretched!⁷

To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds asunder!
And caused to make pass Israel in (the) midst of it!
But overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in (the) Sea of Reeds!⁸

To Him Who caused to be leading His people in (the) wilderness!⁹

⁴ Psalm 136:1-3.
⁵ Psalm 136:4-6.
⁶ Psalm 136:7-9.
⁷ Psalm 136:10-12.
⁸ Psalm 136:13-15.

While it was deemed too long to proclaim the rest of the Psalm in today's readings, the words go on from there to state God's faithfulness in giving lands, kingdoms, and even their daily bread to His people. The Psalm declares that God's enduring loyalty to His Old and New Covenant people, is shown forth in His loving-kindness toward them, us, you. That He does, as you learn and know the biblio-historical backgrounds to each section of the Psalm, even when you are afflicted by sin, and fall prey to temptation. When you recognize that such things come upon you – which is part of the reason for the season of Lent – you are moved by the Holy Spirit to actually believe the words you spoke this morning are for you, "his steadfast love endures forever."¹⁰ So, let us take that which you publicly proclaimed as a sacrifice of the Word of God back to Him this day, and reflect a bit on each section. (If you did not do this good work as you were hearing and responding, confess your sins of inattentiveness to the Word and receive His steadfast love, mercy and grace in the death of Jesus). The first section begins:

All of you cause to give thanks to YHWH, for good (He is)!
All of you cause to give thanks to El of the elohim!
All of you cause to give thanks to Adonai of the Adonae! ¹¹

We may "see" several revealed truths in that threefold declaration of thanks. First, it is the thanksgiving that is to be given to God by, "all of you." That is, it is a call to the whole community of God to give Him thanks. Second, such thanks are to be given to the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of His people in a threefold naming.

The first Name of God revealed is His personal Name, YHWH. This is the Name by which He revealed Himself to Moses. It means, "I Am Who I Am," or, as many of us have learned, "I Am Who Causes to Be!" The second call to thanksgiving is to the El of elohim, that is, to the "God of gods." That title declares His power, might, dominion and rule over all of creation. From that, then, the third naming of the One to Whom His

⁹ *Psalm 136:16.*

¹⁰ *Psalm 136:1b, etc, ESV.*

¹¹ *Psalm 136:1-3.*

people give thanks is translated, “Lord of lords.” This shows the Master’s rule, dominion and work over all human rulers, whether they are found in and among His people or not.

The Church, then, is called to “give thanks,” to the God who bears a triune naming in this Old Testament text. He is the “Great I Am,” “God” and “Lord.” In that titling, you are free to “see” Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is the Creator, by Whose Word all things came to be and are sustained. The Son is the God of gods, even the demons who take residence and rule in humans must obey Him. The Spirit is the Lord of lords, Who rules through the Word to make all things, in God’s good time, work to the good of the people who bear His Name. It is to this YHWH, El, and Adonai that you were called to give thanks. What is the reason with which the Psalm begins, the reason why you are called to give thanks?

The Word declares, “for He is good.” As Jesus once and forever declares, only God is good. Further, the Psalm refrain tells those who will hear how God manifests His goodness, *for His steadfast love (endures) into eternity*. Then, from declaring the reality that God alone is truly good, in His three Persons, the Psalm moves into showing how God manifested His goodness with its next division:

*To Him doing great wonders, He alone!
To Him doing the heavens in understanding!
To Him Who spread out the Earth upon the waters!¹²*

*To Him doing great lights!
The sun for ruling in (the) day!
The moon and stars for ruling in (the) night!¹³*

For consistency’s sake, that you might understand that the same word describes that which God is doing out of His goodness and enduring love, the three lines which hold another word with several translations are translated the same. (Your bulletin copy, to make more sense in English, translates the same word with “does” and “made.”) God’s grace and enduring love, the congregation is told, is displayed in Him

¹² Psalm 136:4-6.

¹³ Psalm 136:7-9.

alone, “doing great wonders.” These wonders you may see plainly with your naked eye and in beautiful detail if you simply drive to one of the observatories you can see from our parking lots. That is, for His people to see His steadfast love, God has been “doing,” more than making, but also creating and continuing, the heavens and earth, the sun and the stars.

When you are troubled by your sins, look to the creation and behold that you do have a loving God. When you doubt God’s Word of forgiveness, confess your sins, and behold the expanse of the heavens and the earth beneath your feet and know that God still is keeping them in His care for you. When you fear that your repentance is not enough, see the sun and stars, and know that God has put them there that you might know that He, in His loving mercy, is still watching over you by the Word incarnate.

Our Psalm moves on:

*To Him Who caused to smite Egypt in their first-born sons!
And He caused to bring out Israel from away from them!
In (a) strong Hand, and in (a) mighty Arm outstretched!¹⁴
To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds asunder!
And caused to make pass Israel in (the) midst of it!
But overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in (the) Sea of Reeds!¹⁵
To Him Who caused to be leading His people in (the) wilderness!¹⁶*

God, on account of His steadfast love, redeemed His people by bringing His rule, dominion and might over the land which once oppressed them. This He did on account of nothing in them. Rather, God rescued ancient Israel from Egypt on account of His steadfast love for the people who, on account of His promise, had been named with His Name.

God, in the Psalm, moves from declaring Himself in the creation which may be seen, to the miracles by which He worked His creation to the good of His people. God’s work of drawing His people forth from physical slavery in Egypt is used to declare

¹⁴ Psalm 136:10-12.
¹⁵ Psalm 136:13-15.
¹⁶ Psalm 136:16.

His loving-kindness. His will is that you might “see” in the Exodus God’s will to deliver you from all sin and its effects.

God delivers his Old Covenant people through, and then by, the water. Just so, you are to see that God has delivered you through, and then, by the water – as in the water of that baptismal font. As the ancients who would be named with God’s name passed through the waters of the Yam Suph, “Reed Sea,” or “Red Sea,” so too do you pass through that which could drown you in your sins through the water and Word of Holy Baptism. God’s steadfast love for the ancient Israelites is declared to you, so that you might see His loving-kindness for you, and rejoice in His loyalty to those who bear His Name – the Church of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Today, again, the eyes of believers see the Lord because of His steadfast love. They know it is for them, because they, you, have seen that love and mercy in the death of Jesus. You have seen His grace in having you die to sin in Jesus, and to rise to new life in Him. Today, you may truly say in the confidence of one who knows your prayer will be answered, as some of you will hear it chanted this coming Wednesday:

*Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord: for He shall pluck out of the net my feet.
Turn Thee unto me and have mercy upon me: for desolate and afflicted am I.¹⁷*

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

Lent III, *Oculi* (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 136:1-16; Jeremiah 26:1-15; Ephesians 5:1-9; Luke 11:14-28

March 23, 2014

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

¹⁷ Daenzer, Sean. “Oculi Introit” 2009.

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All of you cause to give thanks to El of the Elohim! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.¹⁹

All of you cause to give thanks to Adonai of the Adonae! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁰

To Him doing great wonders, He alone! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²¹

To Him doing the heavens in understanding! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²²

To Him Who spread out the Earth upon the waters! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²³

To Him doing great lights! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁴

The sun for ruling in (the) day! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁵

The moon and stars for ruling in (the) night! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁶

To Him Who caused to smite Egypt in their first-born sons! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁷

And He caused to bring out Israel from away from them! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁸

In (a) strong Hand, and in (a) mighty Arm outstretched! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.²⁹

To Him Who divided the Sea of Reeds asunder! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.³⁰

And caused to make pass Israel in (the) midst of it! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.³¹

But overthrew Pharaoh and his hosts in (the) Sea of Reeds! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.³²

To Him Who caused to be leading His people in (the) wilderness! For unto forever (is) His steadfast love.³³

¹⁸ Psalm 136:1.

¹⁹ Psalm 136:2.

²⁰ Psalm 136:3.

²¹ Psalm 136:4.

²² Psalm 136:5.

²³ Psalm 136:6.

²⁴ Psalm 136:7.

²⁵ Psalm 136:8.

²⁶ Psalm 136:9.

²⁷ Psalm 136:10.

²⁸ Psalm 136:11.

²⁹ Psalm 136:12.

³⁰ Psalm 136:13.

³¹ Psalm 136:14.

³² Psalm 136:15.

³³ Psalm 136:16.