

**GOD, KEEP ME FROM BEING COUNTED AMONG THE UNWISE**

Hear again the Word of the Lord,

*(There is a) generation (of those) who curse their fathers, and their mothers they do not bless.*

*For the one cursing his father or his mother shall be put to death.*

*(There is a) generation (of those) who (are) pure in their own eyes, but of their excrement they are not cleansed.*

*(There is a) generation (of those) – how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up.*

*(There is a) generation (of those who have) swords as their teeth, and knives are their fangs, to eat up poor men from (the) earth, and (the) needy from mankind.*

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

This is the week to “rejoice” in the midst of repentance. In the contemporary interpretation of the historic Introit chant, we heard the call to rejoice with God’s Holy City, the New Jerusalem, who, as we heard in the reading from the Revelation, is continually coming down from heaven. We are free to have joy in the reality that the Lord, through His Word, has been faithfully, for centuries, building up the New Jerusalem of living stones. As we have proceeded through these Wednesday Vespers services of our Lord, we are all being built up into a greater knowledge of the Truth – of our part in that Holy City, in which God rules in our midst. All of that was foreshadowed in the words from the Proverbs for this evening. Hear them again:

*Three things in their marching well march; four in marching well, walk.  
(The) lion, mighty among beasts, and does not turn back from the face of all;*

*(The) strutting cock;  
and the he-goat;*

Tonight’s section of the Proverbs stands in stark contrast to the requests of believers in this place last week. This evening the Proverbs are descriptive of those who

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<sup>1</sup> Proverbs 30:11-14.

are secure in themselves before God. They are those who see no need to ask of God from His grace. That is because they are so focused on who they are and that which they have in themselves. Such are people who lack true wisdom.

This week, then, is given to move us to repentance for all the times we each and all have been unwise in the things of God. The Proverbs for tonight describe anyone who does not confess as we did at the beginning of this Lenten series:

*"Says the mighty man, 'I have troubled myself, O God! I have troubled myself, O God! And I have withdrawn...'"<sup>2</sup>*

That confession declares that the faithful person, no matter how much worldly wisdom, might or riches he or she may have, no one in himself or herself has the wisdom, insight, riches or power to be right with God. No one, even those who seem most blessed in worldly goods, is clean before God. All things in anyone apart from God's Word, even for those in the Church, will ultimately prove futile.

We have worked backward from tonight's text to the beginning of chapter 30. Let us now peer more deeply into tonight's verses. They describe those who neither approach God in humbleness, nor ask rightly of God to keep them from denying our Lord or profaning His Name. According to the Jewish oral Law, called the *Mishna*, (Sola ix 14), today's four verses describe the generation in which Messiah appears, beginning with these words:

*(There is a) generation (of those) who curse their fathers, and their mothers they do not bless.<sup>3</sup>*

There is not one person here who is not guilty of breaking the Fourth Commandment with regard to our parents or other authorities. While it may have been some time since you have done so, this Proverb condemns you. Now, you may wish to pass that trespass off as a long-forgotten, overlooked, or passed over event. You may never have confessed it as the humans you offended seemed to have ignored your sin.

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<sup>2</sup> Proverbs 30:1b.

<sup>3</sup> Proverbs 30:11.

This is what, under the Old Covenant, you would be facing for such an unrepented, unforgiven, sin:

*For the one cursing his father or his mother shall be put to death.*<sup>4</sup>

That is the punishment that is to be meted out to those who wish to live by the Law of God and break it in the least part. That is what you deserve for every time you want to go it on your own with regard to covering over your own sins. Is that what you really want to do?

There is better news than that for the faithful. You who have actually been absolved of breaking the Fourth Commandment may hold onto that forgiveness. That is because you are one with Christ. The Son of God never broke that Commandment against His mother Mary, His moral step-father Joseph, nor His immortal True Father, God in Heaven.

Jesus, in fact, kept all the Commandments and all they mean perfectly. His perfection is given to believers with the water and the Word of Holy Baptism. His obedience is granted to those, to you, who return to your baptisms daily, as you confess your sins and receive His blood-bought forgiveness. Yet, for the unrepentant, the Proverb goes on to describe another attribute of those who are unwise before Him, who fail to see the Truth about themselves:

*(There is a) generation (of those) who (are) pure in their own eyes, but of their excrement they are not cleansed.*<sup>5</sup>

Those words describe those who, in the community of the Faith, are unrepentant inside themselves. Such people have the outward appearance of the faithful – they pray, fast, attend the Lord’s services, tithe and the like. Yet, they do so with the understanding that they are right with God because of who they are, what they have, and that which they do. These include the “works-saints” about which the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers often spoke. They are anyone, you at times, who thinks and acts like

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<sup>4</sup> *Exodus 21:17; cf. Leviticus 20:9.*

<sup>5</sup> *Proverbs 30:12.*

God responds to your gifts as if He were some sort of a “gift-in, gift-out” kind of god. The Proverbs are very blunt in describing such thinking, declaring of such folks that that which comes out of them sticks to them as unwashed excrement – thus making them unclean before God. (I have a story to illustrate this – about an Iraqi and a porta-potty... But, if I tell it to you, you will remember it and not today’s text)! Suffice it to say that the words about the unwise ones in the Church being visibly clean on the outside while remaining polluted in the things coming out of them are summed up in truths such as this uttered by Jesus:

*Woe to all of you, O scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because all of you continue to resemble the graves having been whitewashed, who outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but within they are full of bones of dead men and of all uncleanness.<sup>6</sup>*

If that describes you, now or at some point in your life, turn and live. Believe the Good News that Jesus, while His lifeless corpse occupied a tomb for a while during the Triduum, His bones did not remain there. His tomb became an empty image of life. It may be seen as a declaration that we are right with the Father by those who believe that He was truly raised from the dead. While He died in your sins, He did not remain in them, but cast them eternally into the grave. The truly wise cling to those truths. The unwise, however, continue to live as if Christ did not die and rise for them. They live to themselves as these words declare:

*(There is a) generation (of those) – how lofty are their eyes, and their eyelids are lifted up.<sup>7</sup>*

Those words describe those who are, as we say, “full of themselves.” They may be the ones who are puffed up in their own understanding, such as the makers of the film, “Noah,” who have attempted to make their own midrash.<sup>8</sup> Ari Handel and Darren Aronofsky are presenting a scriptural commentary in rabbinic style. Theirs is a narration of events from the Genesis record which is in tune with their own

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 23:27.

<sup>7</sup> Proverbs 30:13.

<sup>8</sup> Internet. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/noah-the-movie\\_b\\_5022132.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-raushenbush/noah-the-movie_b_5022132.html), accessed March 26, 2014.

understandings. When they may be questioned on their intents in producing such an epic tale, one can almost see them lift their eyes in a condescending manner at the “uncultured” Bible believers, while shaking their heads and raising their eyebrows in disdain for such “unenlightened” people.

(The Fundies, Mormons, Glen Beck and Islamists will be there with their uniformed comments to bolster such attitudes. Why, one of the complaints already to hit the mainstream is that the Name of God is not mentioned in the movie. Well, it is not mentioned in the Book of Esther. You who will be wise: re-read the Genesis Flood account and see the movie if you want to, or not, it is a film, meant to be entertainment after all. “Noah” is not a first-person historically recorded event shot from someone’s iPhone and posted to YouTube)!

God is calling us, you, to be wise, not unwise; humble, not haughty in His Presence, and in the things He is doing for you in this world. The last line which, in Proverbs 30 describes the generation of Messiah declares:

*(There is a) generation (of those who have) swords as their teeth, and knives are their fangs, to eat up poor men from (the) earth, and (the) needy from mankind.<sup>9</sup>*

Those words describe the unwise before God, those who show what they truly are in their hearts by their covetousness. Such are the ones, in the Church, for that is about whom this Proverb is speaking, those who are unrepentant violators of the eighth, ninth and tenth commandments and their meanings. They are not satisfied with that which God has given them in this life – in the context, all the good they have – they desire to take any good the poor and needy have! They are you and I when we see our neighbor – any person who is related to us or not by virtue of Holy Baptism – having something we desire and our willing to try to wrest it from him or her, by theft or legal maneuverings. They are also we when we see “poor” sinners in the Lord’s Services, simply receiving His gifts in repentance, and wonder why they not are happy and have all the good things we do. We may say, “Look at how I act when I come to Church. See

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<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 30:14.

how good I am having pleased God by confessing my sins, hearing His Word, trying to pay attention to one of those sermons. I really like it when the sermon nails those sinners!”

But, you don't like it when you are called one of those sinners, do you! (Another story could go here, but the same truth stated earlier applies). Think of such thoughts when they cross your mind – and they do. Mentally place yourself in Jerusalem, in the first Holy Week. See yourself standing among those who were there to be “in Church,” and crying out, “Crucify! Crucify Him!” because Jesus is not the Messiah you want. Behold the sharp teeth and knife-like fangs of those who persecuted that poor Man, and drove the needy One onto the cross and into death. It has been said, “every time you sin, you drive in the nails.” Oh how deep the wounds our sins make.

Thank God He took the biting, tearing torture our sins demand. Lift up your eyes from yourself and see, really behold, your Savior. Then, when the time comes, open your mouths and receive the Body and Blood of the once poor Man into your mouth. Receive that which you need from Him Who really knows your true human needs – forgiveness, life and salvation. Take the instrument which brings forth so much evil from out of you, and use it to receive the Good. Then, in the Name of Jesus pray: God, keep me from being counted among the unwise, for you have made me wise again in Jesus. Amen.

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

Lent IV Wednesday

Proverbs 30:29-31; Revelation 21:1-7; Luke 10:19-20

April 2, 2014

*Pastor Michael A. Merhouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***