

*In Nomine Jesu*

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

Hear again our theme for this Wednesday in Lent:

*Through His Word, God continues to grant comfort to believers during times of tribulation.*

The readings this day, in particular the center one, declare hope to believers. They also provide consternation to our enemies. The reading received last into the canon of Scripture, was written to a Church who had been born and weaned in persecution (you might take some time to review the reigns of Roman Emperors Nero and Domitian if you really think we are living in tough times for the faithful). That young Church would soon face a couple of centuries of intense pressure designed to move her members to deny their Savior. External trials would come from government laws and their enforcement against Christianity. For example, in the year 250, Roman Emperor Decius declared *supplication* which called imperial residents to sacrifice to the pagan gods. Among them was the Greek deity Zeus (the Roman Jupiter), who had been worshipped for centuries as, “Zeus who was; Zeus who is; and Zeus who will be.” Can you understand how this confession about Jesus, by one who had seen Jesus, might cause offense and bring trouble?

*John, to the seven congregations, the ones in the Asia;  
Grace to all of you, and peace from the One (Who) is; and the  
One (Who) was; and the Coming One, and from the seven spirits  
which are before the Throne of Him...*

Christians who believed that about Jesus would certainly not be moved, even under punishment of all sorts of horrible manners of death, to

renounce Him for Zeus/Jupiter. The Roman martyrology for March alone holds records of four Christians officially executed on March 3 for refusing to sacrifice to the gods during the times foretold in the Revelation. Four doesn't sound like many deaths for the faith, until you add in one on the 4<sup>th</sup>; two on the 5<sup>th</sup>; 5 or more on the 6<sup>th</sup>; 3 on the 8<sup>th</sup>; more than 40 on the 10<sup>th</sup>; 2 on the 12<sup>th</sup>; 1 on the 15<sup>th</sup>; 1 each on the 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>; 2 on the 29<sup>th</sup>; and finally one on the 31<sup>st</sup>. The mid-200s to early 300s of the Christian era were bloody. Remember, they did not have the media we have to report and preserve their stories. Many more were killed for the faith whose names were written in the Book of Life, and who you who remain in the Faith until your last day will meet again. Their accounts are given that you might know of the faithful who endured the trials because, *through His Word, God continues to grant comfort to believers during times of tribulation.*

Other pressures would come from the plague, brought into the Roman empire by soldiers fighting in Mesopotamia (think "fertile crescent," Iran, Iraq, Syria today) during the time of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161-180). Still other trials would come from within the Faith – through men whose names are associated with teaching of a Christ other than the One of the Scriptures. Marcion developed a theory of two gods, one higher and transcendent, the other lower and creator of the world, and that Jesus' teachings were incompatible with the actions of the Old Testament God. Paul of Samosata taught that Jesus was a man become divine (a doctrine illumined by a man named Smith, perhaps). There were many others who attempted to infect the nascent Church with false teachings to entice believers to some other Jesus.

Against all that, the Church Fathers gave and maintained the Passiontide of the true Christ. They were careful to ensure that through the Word of hope we hear in these final days of remembering Jesus' Passion and death we would receive comfort and hope in the midst of any tribulations that press in upon us. It is a time to remember Jesus' cross-bearing for us, that we might bear our crosses – specifically the ones laid upon us for the “beautiful confession of the Faith,” as our Deacon so eloquently described it yesterday. As you contemplate the Word of God in the public services over the next four days, you are free to hold this beautiful (but somewhat long, so I beg your attention) public testimony before you:

It will be taught that God the Son became (an) individual male human being, born of the pure virgin Mary, and that the two natures, divine and human, in one person are so inseparably united that there is one Christ, Who is true God and true human, Who was truly born, suffered, crucified, died, and was buried that He would be an offering, not only for original sin but also for all other sins and to propitiate God's wrath.

The same Christ descended into hell, truly on the third day rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits to the right of God, that He eternally rules and has dominion over all creatures, that all who believe in Him, through the Holy Spirit, He may sanctify, purify, strengthen, and comfort, that on them He may bestow life and every grace and blessing, and that against the devil and against sin He may protect and defend them.

The same Lord Christ finally will come openly to judge the living and the dead....<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Translation, mine. Cf. Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (pp. 29–30). “Augsburg Confession, Article III,” Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

Now, where might you have heard three sentences like those before? They are not the explanation to the Apostles' Creed, which you may find in your hymnals on page 322. The words that speak of the Christ Jesus of the Scripture were written and received much later than the ancient Creed. Even so, they still speak of Jesus' incarnation as true man, His virgin birth, along with His divinity and godhead. They confess Jesus' blood-work for sinners, that which truly saves now from the wrath of God, sin, death and Hell itself. They speak of His victory on the Cross, His triumph displayed before all creation. They declare the fruits of His death – resurrection, ascension and eternal rule. They promise His return on the clouds to grant His everlasting kingdom to all believers.

Yes, we are truly in the midst of a "Second Article" week, as indicated by the Third Article of the Augsburg Confession which was just quoted. You may have also noted that in all the images that are about you this evening. The symbols of Jesus' triumph, are veiled – all but two (which are?) The black veils on the walls remind us of Jesus' Way of Suffering, the biblically accurate records of His Passion on account of our sins. The scarlet of the paraments and vestments depicts the deep richness of royalty, and invokes thoughts of Jesus' atoning blood for sinners.

Then, through and above all that confession and imagery, the Word rings out! The Christ Jesus of the Scriptures, the Son of God and Son of Man is declared to be Him,

*Who sacrificially loves us and has loosed us from our sins by His blood... (Revelation 1:5).*

The Christ of the Word loved you enough to loose sins tight constricting bands from you. He loosed sins' hold on you to set you free from all that troubles

you – by that I mean the vain pleasures of this life which hold no eternal joy. Behold the scarlet, remember the price God paid to name you His child and to grant you His kingdom. Then, fulfill that which He calls you to participate in, namely:

*He made us kingdom priests to the God and Father of Him!*  
(Revelation 1:6a).

That, dear ones, is a literal translation of a text which has been rendered with conjunctions which do not exist in the original language! God has made you into kingdom priests, that is, those who serve the King of kings and Lord of lords by offering priestly sacrifices. Those you know to be prayer, praise and thanksgiving. You offer to God that which you have, as tonight's order of service indicates, as you lift empty hands as your evening sacrifice. You have nothing He needs; He has everything to give. It is to the giving God, that you give your priestly offerings – confession of your sins. The Creator of the Universe, Who, as True God and True Man, offered Himself into death for you that you might receive His atoning blood for forgiveness.

Oh, it is for that true God Who was, Who is and Who is to come that you wait. You hear and receive comfort from the inerrant Word in times of trials, and by the grace of God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, you own these Old Covenant promises as fulfilled for you in Christ Jesus:

*Behold! He comes with the clouds  
and they will see Him – all eyes –  
even the ones who Him they pierced,  
and they will smite in sorrow their chests,  
all the tribes of the earth! Yes! Amen!*

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

Holy Week Wednesday (LSB One Year Series)

Psalm 22:1ab (Antiphon, 22:19, 21); Isaiah 62:11-63:7; Revelation 1:5b-7; Luke 22:1-23:56

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*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Soli Deo Gloria***