

## CHURCH MILITANT AND CHURCH TRIUMPHANT UNITED IN CHRIST

Hear this theme passage drawn from the Word of God for this sixteenth Sunday after Trinity:

*The Christ has dwelt through the Faith in the hearts of all of you – in sacrificial love having become firmly rooted and having foundation – that all of you might be strengthened to mentally grasp with all the holy ones what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) continually surpassing knowledge, that all of you might have been filled into all the fullness of God.<sup>1</sup>*

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

You may recall this is the division of the Trinity season given to declare to God's holy ones – you who have been bought with the price of His blood and have received His cleansing bath of regeneration – your, their, our, sanctification. That is, we hear, from the readings over these seven weeks which are drawing to a close, of God repeatedly working through His proclaimed Word to declare His people holy. We learn then, of those who are declared holy then saying and doing holy things.

This year, this Sunday of God's Word "holifying" the unholy – declared most clearly by His raising the dead – falls on a day of national remembrance. On a date reportedly chosen for its symbolic numbers, tragedy struck in New York, Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. Its impact was felt around the world. It still lingers, for this nation, through what some in the media are calling, "The Longest War." That 9-1-1 brought death to multitudes. It still does.

The Church represented by our confession of the Faith that year, on Pentecost XIV, the Sunday previous to the Tuesday acts of terror, had heard it asked of Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25-37, *LW* One-year series), or, "Lord, are there few who are saved?" (Luke 13:22-30, *LW* Three-year series C). (In this place, it was the latter). Though those questions were posed in the Church, it is not at all likely that the murderous Islamist terrorists would have known them. Through the readings of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Ephesians* 3:17-19.

Church, God had prepared His people with the answer to those questions: The gate is narrow, yet those who, in the Faith, cling to the mercy of God in Christ will inherit eternal life. Today, the teaching about who is saved and how eternal life is inherited is fittingly expressed to those who are being saved with these words:

*The Christ has dwelt through the Faith in the hearts of all of you – in sacrificial love having become firmly rooted and having foundation – that all of you might be strengthened to mentally grasp with all the holy ones what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) continually surpassing knowledge, that all of you might have been filled into all the fullness of God. <sup>2</sup>*

Fifteen years ago, those whom God gathered here heard words of comfort. They were delivered after the assembly had offered up the sacrifice of prayer for those who were hurt and grieving from the attacks. Hear again in part, what God called us to:

*In Christ, we are conducting ourselves as those who have been declared innocent of sin's ultimate punishment. That is because Christ Jesus died to forgive you of your sins. We can but imagine the reality that Jesus truly saw this day of death and terror as He hung on the cross. And yet, He died to bring forgiveness to even the evil ones who perpetrated these terrible acts of violence. How great is God's love! (Morehouse <sup>3</sup>)*

The sermon went on to declare the agent behind the evil that day was none other than the deceiver of man. The devil, Satan, had long before that fateful day unleashed terror into a world declared by God to be very good. We were reminded to pray even for the surviving evil-workers that day. We were called to do so in the hope that they might hear and believe the Good News of Jesus the Christ, and thereby be saved from Hell's eternal fires. We remembered that it is only on account of *God's mercy and love that anyone still lives to hear and believe the Promise of the Gospel.* (Ibid).

Brothers and sisters in Christ, there are living among us members of a new generation. They are those for whom 9-11 is history. They, who have been born from the year A.D. 2002 along, will never live with the real-time images of Terror Tuesday burned

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<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 3:17-19.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon delivered by Pastor Michael Morehouse, Catalina Lutheran Church, September 1, 2001.

into their brains. (“What were you doing on 9-11-01?” is not a question they can answer). This generation, “the Plurals,” or, as they also are being called, “the Swipers,” are learning of that day from the records of historians.

This is much the same as the case for those of us who were born from A.D. 1942 onward. We cannot remember what we were doing on that Sunday. We can only recall, “a date which will live in infamy,” from the stories, reports and newsreels of those who were there living through that day.

Even so, to all the generations present this day, it is the Good News of God’s power over death that is again declared this day. For those who died in the Faith of Christ on Dec. 7, 1941 and Sept. 11, 2001, there remains the promise of the coming resurrection of the blessed dead. A powerful image of the loving hands of God receiving the souls of those slain at the Twin Towers was *true for those who lived and died in Jesus*.

For those without the Faith, those who died apart from Christ, their reception into the hands of the living God brings horrific eternal realities. We confess the biblical truth that all who die will rise again in their bodies (this we do in the Creeds, most powerfully in the Athanasian Creed, for sure). Many will receive in themselves the wages of their sins and rejection of God’s mercy in Christ.

Some will receive in themselves eternally the victory of Jesus. He delivered them from their sins. He caused them to walk in new life until their last hour. He through the Holy Spirit and the Word, sanctified them and produced good works through them. It is to the minority of each generation of mankind that today’s Word of promise in the resurrection of the blessed dead is given.

You already heard of God’s raising, generations ago, the dead son of the widow of Zarephath. He did so through the cries and mediation of Elijah. As the prophet took the dead man’s uncleanness upon Himself, the Trinity was at work in giving the son cleansed of death back to his mother.

You heard of Jesus, true God and true Man, raising the dead son of the widow of Nain. The Second Person of the Trinity worked through no mediated means. The Son of

God spoke His Word after having taken the uncleanness of death upon Himself in touching the bier. Jesus cleansed the young man from death. He lived and was given back to his mother.

God, Who is the Author of life, has the power to give life, both to those spiritually dead and to those physically dead. He is the true God, *the One (Who) continues to have power to do all things superabundantly*.<sup>4</sup> He has raised you from death to all that is good as you died and rose with Christ in the water and Word of Holy Baptism. He has spared you from the “second death<sup>5</sup>.”

That one is coming to those who reject God in Christ to the end of their days. They will be, with Death and Hades, cast into God’s purifying fires to live there throughout eternity. They will ever know in their bodies, spirits and minds, what the meaning of this Word: “Fearful (it is) to fall into the hands of (the) living God<sup>6</sup>.” They who, by rejecting God, trampled the blood of His Son under foot, will receive in their bodies the payment due for their sins.

What about you who believe in Christ yet suffer on account of the good confession of the Faith? What about our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world who are being killed all the day for the Faith? What have we to hold onto?

We have the promises of God, sealed in the blood of Jesus. We have the witness of the Faith. Such is given to us today through the words of St. Paul. He writes first to a congregation aching over his imprisonment on account of his preaching Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of sins.

His words have been declared to all congregations of the Church throughout the generations as they witness the earthly suffering of the faithful in this fallen world. Just as the Plurals generation learns of 9-11 through our witness, and the Boomers, Gen-Xers, and Millennials learned of December 7 through the witness of the Builders generation, so too does the Church in each generation learn of God’s faithfulness and promises for those

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<sup>4</sup> *Ephesians* 3:20a.

<sup>5</sup> *Revelation* 20:6, 14

<sup>6</sup> *Hebrews* 10:31.

who believe in God in the Faith of Jesus. St. Paul writes to those who were once imprisoned in sin, in their sins, who had been freed by hearing and believing His Good News,

*Therefore, I ask continually that you all not become cowards in my tribulations concerning you, which (pressures) remain your glory.<sup>7</sup>*

Paul, in faithfulness to his calling given by God, encourages the Church to behold, in the pressures he is then facing, the glory of the Cross. That which was just rendered, “become cowards,” more closely fits the thrust of the word than the rendering of other translations, “lose heart.” The word brings forth an image of a congregation giving into evil.

We think of Church members growing weary when the assembly’s founder, or pastor, or leaders are brought under pressure through this fallen creation, the devil, or human sinful desires. This congregation in this place had to face the reality that her pastor would be taken from her to face the evil-workers who supported the terror that day. Through alerts and stand-downs, for three years, we anticipated with concern what might happen. We were often wondering what would happen should our pastor be called to minister to those engaged in mortal combat.

When the call finally came, God moved us to call another pastor. We had no idea what both men would do should both be there at the end of deployment. We did not conceive of the work God has done and continues to do among us since that time. Yet, in the Faith, in His promises, we followed the example of the Apostle, who still declares across the centuries, that which is called for when we may be tempted to succumb to evil:

*For this reason, I bow my knees alongside the Father, from Whom all (the) family in heaven and upon earth is continually being named, that He might have given to all of you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man, the Christ having dwelt through the Faith in the heart of all of you ...<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 3:13.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3:14-17a.

Pastors, following Paul's example, continue in prayer in the fight against spiritual cowardice in the congregation. The Church in the local place continues to be reminded that she is part of the family of the heavenly Father. In hearing that the entire family of God in heaven and earth is named with His Name, she, you, all, hear that we are one as the Church Militant with the Church Triumphant, united in Christ. We, in Him, through His suffering, death, resurrection and ascension, have and continue to receive the riches of His glory. That is none other than the glory of the Cross.

In His faithfulness, the Church recalls, He dwells within us. This He does through the simple means of His Word and Sacraments. Through them, we are,

*– in sacrificial love becoming firmly rooted and having foundation – that you all might be strengthened enough to grasp mentally with all the saints what (is) the breadth and length and height and depth, certainly to know the sacrificial love of Christ (that is) surpassing knowledge, that you all might be filled into all the fullness of God.<sup>9</sup>*

The love of God is displayed most clearly in the death of the Son on the Tree that becomes the Tree of Life. The sacrificial love of God established the foundation upon which the perfect cube of the New Covenant Church is built. Upon that solid foundation, in each succeeding generation of the Church sealed in the blood of Christ, living stones are added. The Temple extends from earth to heaven. The Church Militant is joined in Christ to the Church Triumphant.

This is God's work that surpasses all human knowledge. It is revealed to you, that you might know that you are one with all the holy ones from all the ages. That leads you to add your voices to the unending hymn of the fullness of the Church:

*To Him (be) the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus into all the generations of the ages of the ages, Amen!<sup>10</sup>*

Our Epistle reading ends with a Trinitarian doxology, which is literally, a "right word, or worship," proclamation. The "Him," that receives the glory of the Cross is the

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<sup>9</sup> *Ephesians* 3:17-19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ephesians* 3:21.

Father. The Church in which the glory of the Cross is proclaimed is the eternal Church which the Holy Spirit builds. Christ Jesus is the One Who bears the glory of the Church. He did so not just for the first generation of the New Covenant faithful, but for all generations since. This we have learned from the generations before. This shall the generations to come, unto the Last Day, shall receive.

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

Trinity XVI (*LSB* One-year series)

Psalm 30; Introit Psalm 86:1 (3,5); I Kings 17:17-24; Ephesians 3:13-21; Luke 7:11-17

September 11, 2016

*Pastor Michael A. Morehouse*

***Solī Deo Glōria***

*Now to the One (Who) continues to have power to do all things  
superabundantly above all that we continue to ask or continue to understand,  
according to the power, the one effectually working in all of us: to Him (be) the glory  
in the Church and in Christ Jesus into all the generations of the aeons of the aeons,  
Amen! <sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> *Ephesians 3:20-21.*