

GOD'S STEWARDSHIP OF THOSE WHO ARE TO REMAIN HIS PEOPLE

Hear again the Word of God for this third Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity:

Who is God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for (the) remnant (of) His inheritance? His anger does not remain forever; for He delights in mercy.¹

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

This day marks the third Sunday of this part of the Church Year in which the Holy Spirit emphasizes godly stewardship through the ancient readings. This is a Sunday, every year, in which the living Church is free to remember God's stewardship of those who are to remain His people. Annually, on this particular green Sunday, the Life of Christ in the Church is recalled through texts that declare how important, to God, is each person who is being saved. The Lord declares His concern for all those who are to be in His flock, in His household. He shows that it is His desire that not one be lost.

From that, we may learn that we are free to participate in His in-gathering of lost ones. As today's readings declare, you are those would be counted among the 99 sheep left under the care of God's shepherds, or among the nine coins stored safely in the Householder's purse. You continue to hear that God's found people benefit from remaining in His flock, in His house. You are free to be wise managers of the gifts God continues to give you – in terms of time, of possessions and income, and in the skills, wisdom, knowledge and understanding of God's Word – for the benefit of your neighbors.

That means that you consider, in your sharing God's gifts, those whom God places in your lives who need to hear His Word, and become part of His flock, His household. In doing that, you may remember that there are many such things needful for this body and life that you may consider as part of your Christian household management. This day, the Old Covenant reading makes it clear that, chief among them, is your

¹ *Micah 7:18*

stewardship of God's Word of forgiveness for sinners, and forgetfulness of sins for those who will to turn from them in sorrow. That message begins in the 37 Hebrew words that declare God's promises to the fathers of the Faith, that which is yours to share. The Word for the day begins,

Who is God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for (the) remnant (of) His inheritance? His anger does not remain forever; for He delights in mercy.²

God's incomparable grace and steadfast love for sinners rings out from that proclamation. Since 725 B.C., the prophet Micah's words have been declared, in multitudes of languages, to people who are living under the consequences of unrepentant sin in this world. The Wednesday evening Minor Prophets' students in this congregation have learned that Micah was proclaiming the Word that empowers sinners to turn from their sins and walk in newness of life at about the same time that the prophet Hosea was calling Israel, the northern kingdom of David and Solomon's empire then divided, to repentance. The words you hear today went out into that which was supposed to be God's Promised Land gift to the people who were named with His Name. This Word was first proclaimed during a time of plenty. God's people were living in the midst of economic growth and stability, in a once-united nation, that had been divided by worldly, and other-worldly, concerns. They had forgotten that all the good that they had was from God.

The Israelites had rather come to think of themselves as masters of their own destinies. They had opened themselves to pluralistic worship of other gods. They would have been comfortable with sayings like, "well, that is true for you, but this is true for me," or, "all religions really worship the same god." They were shown to be adamant in their pluralism and false worship. Have you ever failed, as they did, in stewardship of God's Word of forgiveness, perhaps holding thoughts that others' beliefs were fine for

² Micah 7:18

them, even though they were not fine for you? The more things change, the more they remain the same....

In addition, in that eighth century B.C. context, those who were to be God's people considered that their worldly security was grounded in national might and international alliances. That is, many of them thought that way. Does that all sound as if it were actually a statement of the way things are today, in the Church, and in this land?

God's Word still stands with its warning – the Law that shows how we sin and fall into the dangers that come to those who wander from God's flock, who fall from His household. As these words were spoken, only three years remained before Israel would fall to foreign invaders on account of the unrepentant sins of those who were to be in the household of God:

Who is God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for (the) remnant (of) His inheritance? His anger does not remain forever; for He delights in mercy.³

Divine words such as those are God's chosen means to grant to His wandering, His lost, people, Good News that they might turn from their sins and be saved. They show God's revealed nature: namely, that He wills no one who is called to be in His Church, His flock, His House, to be lost and fall short of His glory. For those who recognize their lost-ness through the proclamation of God's Law, God's Gospel, His Good News sounds out with a call to turn from sin and be saved, by asking a foundational return to the faith question, *Who is God like You?*

Those who are in the household of the Faith, even those who may be wandering from the Faith they once received, may hear in that question the implied answer: "There is no god like the One True God." For that God alone is the One continuing in, "forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for (the) remnant (of) His inheritance." That is further reinforced by the following declaration, "His anger does not remain forever; for He delights in mercy."

³ *Micah* 7:18

So, since you are here, as you believe in God's mercy, you might think that text can also be taken to indicate that you are free to wander from the rest of God's sheep, to fall out of His purse. After all, you may reason thus, "Since God will search for me, I am free to do as I will, as the rest of the fallen world." Since God delights in mercy, you ought to give Him great joy in willfully violating His Word, His Commandments, sinning so that He can continue to forgive you, right?

As we would translate St. Paul's Spirit-guided words concerning that type of thinking, "Let it not be!" Yes, God wills, and desires, to forgive sinners and pass-over transgressions. That does not mean that we are free to remain unrepentant sinners.

To turn us from such thinking, to call us from remaining in sin, God gives witness throughout Scripture. This day, He has given the reminder that, about three years after today's Word was first proclaimed, Israel fell, the 10 tribes were deported. That nation never rose again. Then, a bit more than a century and a half later, Judah fell, and its people also were deported. They had failed to heed the clear lessons given in the conquest of their northern brothers. They followed the same path of pluralism in worship, in union with false gods, and in trust in the rulers of this world for salvation—unto their utter end. Even so, in the midst of all those who willed to continue in their sins, there were those who still echoed with their mouths the thoughts of their hearts, the words of today's Introit Psalm:

*Turn to me, and grace me,
For lonely and afflicted I (am).
Consider my affliction and my trouble,
And forgive (me) for all my sins⁴*

For you who meant the confession you gave earlier, you have proof God's Word is at work in you. That is, you actually believed the words coming out of your mouths, and received God's grace in the forgiveness He declared through His human messenger's mouth! In daily confession and forgiveness, you are living the life of the Faith. In hearing

⁴ Psalm 25:16,18

the Word of God, in sorrowing over your sins, in willing to turn from them, you are in the same flock and household as that of the faithful in the days of old. When Micah declared the Word we are hearing today there was a remnant of faithful in the Church amidst all those who were clamoring for their peace and security through other gods and worldly rulers. It is to those who continue to turn from such thoughts, to the faithful, to you, that these words again ring out: [God's] *anger does not remain forever; for He delights in mercy.* That we might grasp firmly onto that promise we are given this following confession of the Faith:

*He will turn. He will cause to have compassion. He will subdue our iniquities. Then You will cast in (the) depths of (the) sea all their sins.*⁵

The Agent of all that work in none other than the Living God. The Word of grace declares that He will turn from His anger – for the benefit of those lost ones whom He continues to find. He did so for you, even as He poured out His wrath at sin onto Jesus on the Cross. God's Word declares hope, so that, even when the faithful suffer on account of poor stewardship of God's Law and His Grace in the Church, they may be sustained by His promises. The prophecy proclaims that it is the compassionate God who will subdue our transgressions against Him, His Word, and, even one another. (Would that some of our confessional Lutheran brothers who are fighting publicly on the Internet would take such to heart! If you don't know that to which that comment points, you are blessed! If you do, we continue to pray: Lord, have mercy)!

In His stewardship, His management of His household, God declares that He will cast all His repentant people's sins into the depths of the sea. Remember, our ancient forefathers in the Faith believed the sea to be the haunt of demons, and all sorts of evil. God's promised to throw down our iniquities into the deepest reaches of the sea means that He will place them apart from us, where they belong.

This casting away sins into the depths God effected about eight centuries after Micah's prophecy. Throughout that time the faithful lived and died in the Faith through

⁵ Micah 7:19.

the fall of their nations, the rise of a remnant, their being vanquished, subdued and minimalized over the centuries. God's Word of promise was ever before them – in Temple, in Synagogues, in the homes of the faithful, in the Second Temple – until it entered into their midst in the Presence of the One Who would fulfill the promise.

Jesus, the Son of God, took all His people's sins onto His sinless flesh. Jesus, the Son of Man, carried the sins of all His people, for all times, into the depths of the earth. He bore sin, and sins, into death and the grave, that His people, that you, would be eternally free from them. Jesus, to Whom the writings, the prophets and the books of Moses testify as the Truth was, is, and remains the living embodiment of this promise:

You will give Truth to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, which You swore to our fathers from days of ancient time.⁶

That promise was spoken to those who were living in the midst of sin, who were to be oppressed on account of unrepentant sinners in their nations. They are named, Jacob, whom the prophet names in order to represent the Covenant people of God living under the Old Covenant Law and Gospel. They were promised Truth.

That the faithful received in time, for Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, without Whom no one ever stands declared right with the Father. The Truth walked among the faithful descendants of those who first heard today's promises. In Him, the Father's forgiveness is poured out. In Him, the lost are found and returned to the flock, to the Father's eternal household. The first among those recovered were of the line of Jacob – Israel – the Jews by blood and birth who heard and believed the Son.

Even so, God's promise did not stop there. He included all those who would become children of God through the Faith. For, just as Father Abraham believed, and the Faith was reckoned to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3), so it is for all us Gentiles. To us, born not children of the Old Covenant, but reborn as children of God's New Covenant, God promised, promises, and continually delivers, *mercy!*

⁶ *Micah* 7:20

It is that promise, fulfilled in the death of Christ, that enables you to sing, and believe, as you did, and will do, today. Already you have declared that God's mercy was given to you in holy baptism. In that baptism, you sang your confession of sins. (That summarizes today's first two hymns). Soon, you will sing of God's sacrifice for you as you give of your first-fruit tithes and offerings accompanied by your sacrifice of prayerful praise and thanksgiving. As the fruits of Christ's sacrifice for your sins are administered into mouths hungry for God's forgiveness, the congregation will sing of the ancient truths, fulfilled promises, of sin and salvation...

It is time in the Church Year, to ask again, "What is the primary purpose of the hymns of the Church?" It is to support the proclamation of God's Word. Quality hymns declare God's call to repentance, His will to turn from His wrath, His compassion and merciful steadfast love for sinners. The sung Word supports the proclaimed Word – that sinners might turn from their sins and live.

This too, is Christian stewardship, that is, management of the household of God. True praise of God is found in the repeated confession of sins and reception of His blood-bought forgiveness. Genuine worship is God reaching down to sinners to raise us up in Christ. Through hymnody, the catholic public services of God's Church, the Word read into the ears of sinners who are moved to turn from their sins by that Word, God exercises divine household management (stewardship) over those, in every generation, who are to remain His people.

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

Trinity III (LSB One-year series)

Introit Psalm 25:26, 18, 1-2a; Micah 7:18-20; I Peter 5:6-11; Luke 15:1-10; Psalm 103:1-13

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Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

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⁷ Micah 7:18.

⁸ Micah 7:19.

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