

RIGHT WORSHIP BY LIVING IN AND SHARING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Hear again the Word of God for this twenty-second Sunday after the Feast of the Holy Trinity.

He has caused to declare to you, O man, what is good, and what YHWH is seeking from you: except you do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with your Elhoe.¹

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

Again, this year, the Lord has brought us into the last sub-section of the Church Year. As another year crashes to its end, with wars and rumors of war, with evil running rampant, most recently bringing untimely death into another small Texas church (one that is added to about 147 other church shootings in the past decade)², we remember that we are involved in the Church's Struggle Against Satan. Even in this congregation, the Old Evil Foe has continued to bring attacks upon our families.

Yet, through all that and more, we know that our struggle against Satan will end. That is the beauty that is declared to us through the readings that come to into our ears as each Church Year ends. The final two weeks hold the same themes and readings each year. It is this Sunday that may have different readings each year depending upon the length of the Trinity season. As we enter into these final three weeks this year, we are today called to right worship displayed by living in and sharing God's forgiveness as part of our continuing to receive His grace and mercy. Our Old Covenant reading summed that up for the faithful of old when the prophet declared: *you – do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with your Elhoe.*

In the Body of Christ's struggle against the Satan, the Accuser, we are to be always aware that he, he has lost the war. Even so, he continues fighting skirmishes as he attempts deceive and destroy members of Christ's Body. In a much larger way, he is like Private Hiroo Onda in 1974, and Captain Fumio Nakahira in 1980, Japanese

¹ *Micah 6:8.*

² Internet. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/11/06/us/church-shootings-truth/index.html>. Accessed November 10, 2017.

soldiers who gave up fighting WWII in the Philippines decades after the U.S. and her allies had defeated Japan! In their cases, they did not know the war was over. In Satan's case, he knows of His defeat, for Christ, in His descent into the realm of the dead, declared His victory and led the faithful captives free.

It is commonly said that misery loves company. For the defeated foe of all humans, it can be said of him that his evil lusts for company. His proper name is Lucifer. He masquerades as an angel of light, even, as his other title, devil, implies, he works to deceive those who would be in the Church into falling into unrepentant sin. He does so, that in their fall, they might bring pain – to the Body of Christ – and thus to Christ Himself.

Lucifer, and the third of the company of heaven who fell with him, tempt Christians to sin by getting them to turn away from God's revealed Word. Every Christian here who falls to the temptation to put the worst construction on their fellow believers' words and actions; every Christian spouse who departs from his or her marital bed for union with another; each family that, under pressure exerted by the powers of this world, falls to the temptation to reject God's grace and forgiveness; all who, assailed by the Accuser of Man, the Deceiver of Man, the Angel of Light who fall into unrepentant sin are in danger of being eternally lost in the skirmishes that continue long after God won the war. If those situations describe you – Repent! Turn. Believe that Christ paid the price that was demanded for those sins. Live a new life. God knows that. And that is why, this year, with all the horrible realities the Church is facing right now, He continues to declare to you what is good and what the Lord is seeking from you.

*"Except you do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God."*³

With those words, through the prophet Micah, 28 and a half centuries ago, God called His people to return to Him. For almost three centuries, the Israelites in the

³ Micah 6:8.

kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been keeping the Temple rites going. Daily they could witness the sights, smell the smells, and taste their portions of the sacrifices – for sin, for thanksgiving, for obligation, for uncleanness and so on. All that is what Micah was reminding God’s people, who had just heard His call to repentance in the verses that precede this text, about in the first three questions you have heard today:

*With what shall I come before YHWH? Shall I bow myself to Elohe Highest?
Shall I come before Him with whole burnt offerings, with calves, sons year old?
Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams, in ten thousands of rivers of
oil? ⁴*

When those words were first spoken, they would have been known to have been borrowed from the Temple liturgy. They reflected questions that worshippers would consider before entering into God’s Presence in the Temple.⁵ That means that the Temple sacrifices continued in Judah. In the Northern Kingdom, Israel, they also were taking place at altars that were constructed according to their kings’ commands and not the word of God. On account of their unrepentant sins, the enemy was at the gates. God had given them more than 250 years to repent, and the majority kept in the evil ways of the Deceiver of Man. Even as their end approached, God had sent them a prophet too, Hosea. As our Wednesday evening Bible class will freely tell you, his Word was a clear call to repentance. It does not hold much grace, for the people had remained unrepentant in their sins. Even so, it declares some Good News, so that those who heard it and believed it could turn from their sins and be saved from the final judgement’s eternal fires.

Even so, when Israel fell into captivity, it was to serve a warning to their brothers in the South, in Judah. While Hosea was calling for repentance in those doomed by their own idol worship in the North, Micah was calling the South to turn from her sins.

⁴ *Micah 6:6-7a.*

⁵ cf. *Psalms 16, 24 and Isaiah 33:114-16*

Despite that, though they would witness the complete loss of the lands and identity of the Ten Tribes, the people of Judah kept on sinning.

Now, we must maintain that they kept up ordinances of God in offering the sacrifices and feasts in the Jerusalem Temple. They continued to bow down before the King of Heaven and Earth. They offered their whole burnt offerings to Him in accord with His Word. That was quite an expense for them, for they would receive no material return, for such left nothing for the worshipper to consume. They sacrificed calves and rams, and poured out libations of oil as the Word required, and that in great quantity. These, they believed, would appease, without offering to all that they were. As we heard, that is what the first three questions for the day refer to. (It seems that they were the guide for the construction of the documents that preceded the *Small Catechism*). But there is a third,

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, fruit of my womb for the sin of my soul? ⁶

Time and again, the Judahites hedged their bets concerning eternal life and earthly blessings by worshipping false gods. In the sight of the Temple, in the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna, whose fires burned day and night) they offered up their children to vicious and insatiable pagan gods such as Molech.⁷ The Israelites, even their kings, passed their own children through the fire. Some roasted their little ones to death. This they did by encasing them in bronze statues which were human in form with an ox heads. They set fires underneath those child-encasing images, and offered the fruit of their wombs in order to appease false gods. This they did to redeem their souls, while satisfying their earthly desires.

How horrible is that?! Even so, among those who would be called part of the Christian Church in our day, there are worship practices being developed that bow to the gods of this world – and, thus, ultimately, to Lucifer, the Satan and Devil. One need

⁶ Micah 6:7b.

⁷ cf. Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; II Kings 17:17; 21:6; II Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 7:31.

not look far from this place of worship to find images of a female “Jesus” crucified on a cross. You only need to drive a few miles to find congregations whose Church bodies’ insurance plans paid medical costs that allowed their Church workers who desired to kill their children in the womb to do so. Nowhere does God call for those who would be named with His Name to sacrifice their children for their own happiness, lusts, and desires. And if you’ve done so, know that Christ died to bring you forgiveness and you don’t have to live under the burden of that. God does not demand of them, of you, your firstborn to pay the price the Law demands in order to cover over your sins. Consider how God answers the prophet’s last question for this day:

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, fruit of my womb for the sin of my soul? ⁸

To those tempted to give from their own flesh to atone for their sins, God gives His own firstborn Son. He Who was God for all eternity, in time, took on human flesh, our flesh, from the womb of the Virgin Mary. He came forth, born in the manner of all humans, though without sin, to become the transgression-bearer for all. He took your sins upon himself – including those of continually violating the Eighth, Sixth, and Fifth Commandments all of which have been alluded to as problems in our midst. In bringing to mind that God did that, it is declared to you that He, in His mercy, continues to call His people, you, to repentance.

He has caused to declare to you, O man, what is good, and what YHWH is seeking from you: except you do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with your Elhoe.⁹

This, for its first hearers, represented a shift that was called for in their thinking, from the form of worship to its substance. We need those words about right worship. The Church in every era has been involved in the struggle against Satan and his forces. Battles take place – even now, in the national sphere, against Christian business people

⁸ Micah 6:7b.

⁹ Micah 6:8.

and artists – but, they are waged most clearly in the individual congregations in which Christ is being clearly proclaimed as crucified for the sins of the whole world. Never forget, dear ones in Christ, who the ultimate enemy is – Lucifer, the Satan, and Devil – and the hosts that fell with him.

Our enemy is repeatedly named here. That is due to the reality that some of our number actually seem to believe that their greatest enemies are – the government; their spouses, co-workers, fellow students, family members; false teachers in other churches and congregations; false religions; and the list goes on. There have been some who have expressed concern, that we are tempting the devil when we speak the Greater and Lesser exorcisms in the ancient and full Rite of Holy Baptism.

We are not tempting him – he is the Tempter. He knows who his enemies are – for they are marked with the sign of the Cross. We casting him away from those to whom Christ has come to rescue them from the flood of sin through the washing of regeneration and renewal. The more clearly we who are in the congregations of Christ articulate His saving means of grace – His Word and His chosen Sacraments – the more the Satan and his followers will attack.

Even so, they cannot, in the End, win, for their eternal destiny was sealed when Christ destroyed death's strong bands. He who was once, for a time, held by nails to the cross and reclined in death's dread sleep, did not remain bound. That frees us to stand firm, together, as one with the Body of Christ in this place. Christ's victory assures us that we receive His touch from this Altar Table, at that Font. Christ's triumph, lifted high to ever remind the devil and his forces that our King has conquered Him, resounds in our ears each time we hear His blood-bought forgiveness declared into our ears.

As this Church Year crashes to its end – with readings declare the events of God's final judgment, and calls to watchfulness in the Gospel for His return – let us continue to be found in right worship before Him. That is:

what is good, and what YHWH is seeking from you. It is to be do[ing] justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with your Elhoe.

That is done as we continue to receive Him Who comes to His people through simple means, to grant us unmerited justice. Doing justice is not only keeping God's commandments in order to honor Him, it is shown in giving mercy to one another – to call to repentance, and to forgive the repentant. It is to walk humbly with our God, with hands and hearts open to receive His gifts. It is to share those gifts, namely, forgiveness, life and salvation, with our neighbors. In Christ, God continues to give you all you need for the struggle with Satan: His Word, and His means of grace.

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

Trinity XXII (LSB One-year series)

Psalm 130:1-2 a, 3-4; Micah 6:6-8; Philippians 1:3-11; Matthew 18:21-35

November 12, 2017

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

TRANSLATION, SECOND DRAFT

*With what shall I come before YHWH? Shall I bow myself to Elohe Highest?
Shall I come before Him with whole burnt offerings, with calves, sons year old?¹⁰*

*Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams, in ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, fruit of my womb for the sin of my soul?¹¹*

*He has caused to declare to you, O man, what is good, and what YHWH is seeking
from you: except you do justice and love mercy, and walk humbly with your Elhoe.¹²*

¹⁰ Micah 6:6.

¹¹ Micah 6:7.

¹² Micah 6:8.