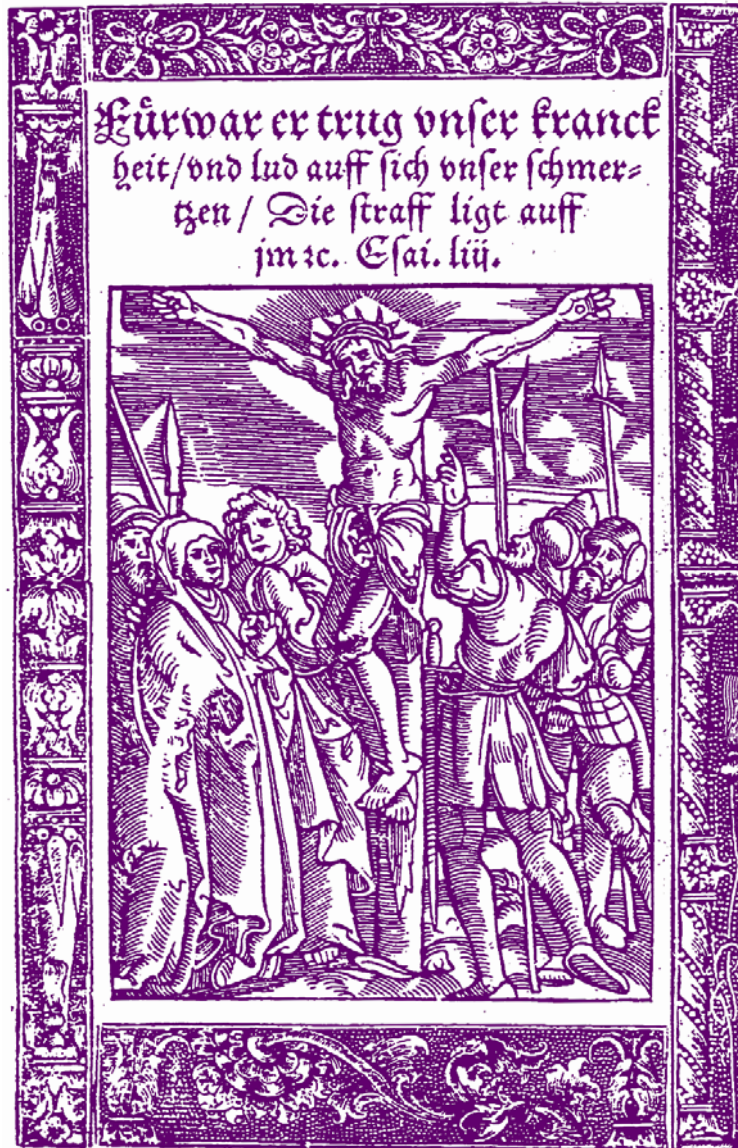


***“Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice”***



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**“DEAR CHRISTIANS ONE AND ALL REJOICE”\***  
**LENTEN PREACHING SEMINAR 2010**  
**CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
**FORT WAYNE, INDIANA**

**ASH WEDNESDAY**

“Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice” -556 LSB (Stanza 1)  
Sermon Theme: “Rejoicing in Repentance”  
Text: Psalm 51:12-15/Romans 1:16-17  
Lectionary for Ash Wednesday  
Psalm: Psalm 51  
Additional Hymns: “Baptismal Waters Cover Me”-616 LSB  
                          “From Depths of Woe”-607 LSB  
                          “O Lord, Throughout These Forty Days”-418 LSB  
                          “Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness”- 636 LSB

**MIDWEEK IN LENT I**

Stanzas 2-3  
Sermon Theme: “Possessed by Sin and Bound by Death”  
Lectionary: John 8:31-38/Romans 3:9-20  
Psalm: Psalm 130  
Additional Hymns: “When in the Hour of Deepest Need”-615 LSB  
                          “If Your Beloved Son, O God”-568 LSB  
                          “In Adam We Have All Been One”-569 LSB  
                          “In the Very Midst of Life”- 755 LSB  
                          “God Loved the World So That He Gave”-571 LSB  
                          “Lord, ‘Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee”-573 LSB  
                          “All Mankind Fell in Adam’s Fall”-562 LSB

**MIDWEEK IN LENT II**

Stanza 4  
Sermon Theme: “From the Father’s Heart”  
Lectionary: John 12:27-36/Romans 3:21-28  
Psalm: Psalm 6  
Additional Hymns: “Christ, the Life of All the Living”-420 LSB  
                          “My Song is Love Unknown”-430 LSB  
                          “Lamb of God, Pure and Holy”-434 LSB  
                          “Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing”-421 LSB  
                          “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness”-563 LSB

## **MIDWEEK IN LENT III**

Stanzas 5-6

Sermon Theme: “Jesus: God’s Son and Your Servant”

Lectionary: John 13:1-20/Romans 5:1-21

Psalm: Psalm 38

Additional Hymns: “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth”-438 LSB

“Jesus, I Will Ponder Now”-440 LSB

“Drawn to the Cross, Which Thou Hast Blessed”-560 LSB

“Oh, How Great Is Your Compassion”-559 LSB

## **MIDWEEK IN LENT IV**

Stanzas 7-8

Sermon Theme: “Your Ransom and Your Rescue”

Lectionary: John 14:15-27/Romans 8:1-11

Psalm: Psalm 32

Additional Hymns: “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded”-450 LSB

“If God Himself Be for Me”-724 LSB

“From God Can Nothing Move Me”-713 LSB

“When I Behold Jesus Christ”-542 LSB

## **MIDWEEK IN LENT V**

Stanzas 9-10

Sermon Theme: “In Trouble He Will Comfort You”

Lectionary: John 16:1-33/Romans 8:31-39

Psalm: Psalm 143

Additional Hymns: “Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted”-451 LSB

“Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow”-428 LSB

“All Depends on Our Possessing”-732 LSB

“Evening and Morning”-726 LSB

\*It is suggested that “Dear Christians One and All, Rejoice” (556 LSB) be sung in its entirety at each of the midweek services. The alternative would be to sing stanza 1 and then the stanzas appropriate for the week and conclude with stanza 10.

JTP+

## Notes on “Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice” -556 LSB

- Heading of an early printing of the hymn, “Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice”: “A hymn of thanks for the highest deeds of benefactions that God has shown us in Christ” ( Bayer, “The Being of Christ in Faith” 137)
- Luther draws on the Psalter’s pattern: Report of disaster, report of salvation (Bayer,137)
- Bayer observes how the hymn narrates and praises the Gospel. Bayer connects the hymn to Luther’s Preface to the NT written just a few months earlier in 1522. See AE 35:358-359. Here Luther speaks of the Gospel as a “good message” that tells us of “A true David who strove with sin, death and the devil, and overcame them...” This gospel is also called a New Testament for in it a dying man bequeaths his possessions. These possessions are life in which death is swallowed up, righteousness by which sin is blotted out and salvation which overcomes everlasting damnation. This is comfort for a poor man, dead in sin and consigned to hell...” he must laugh and be glad over it, if he believes it true” (Bayer, 137-138)
- Bayer compares the two-part cry/answer to Romans 7:24-25a and Psalm 22 (Bayer, 138)
- This hymn is a confession of faith that stands alongside of Luther’s great Reformation writings that deal with justification and law/gospel. It is a hymnic expression and commentary on Romans 1-8 ( Leaver, *Luther’s Liturgical Music*, 163)

Stanzas	Romans
Stanza 1	1:16-17
Stanzas 2-3	1:18-3:20
Stanzas 4-6	3:21-6:23
Stanzas 7-10	8

- The hymn expresses Trinitarian theology but in a way different from Luther’s “We All Believe in One True God” (Leaver,163)
- Luther contrasts the synergy of the Godhead in our salvation with any suggestions of the synergy of the saved (Leaver, 164)
- Trinitarian structure: God the Father loved and planned our salvation, God the Son accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit applies it (Leaver, 164)
- Johann Olearius: “Luther’s beautiful hymn, *Nun freut euch lieben Christen gemein*, is an excellent and comforting summary of the totality of the evangelical (= Lutheran) foundation of faith, and within which is thus found the whole of Theology, Christology, and Anthropology, or what we should know from the word of God about God, about Christ and our wretchedness and its solution in the kingdom of grace through the merit of Christ, as well as the certainty of the eternal joyful kingdom” (Leaver, 164).

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Stanza 1 Psalm 32:11; I Cor. 6:20; I Peter 1:18-21

Stanzas 2-3 Romans 7:13-24; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 20:10; Psalm 38:4

Stanza 4 John 3:16; Luke 15:20-22; Luke 1:54; I Tim. 2:4

Stanza 5 Galatians 4:4-5; Hebrews 2:7; Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18; II Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14-15

Stanza 6 Philippians 2:6-8; Isaiah 7:14; Hebrews 2:17; Ephesians 4:8 (Psalm 68:19)

Stanza 7 Galatians 2:20; Luke 22:44; John 17:23; Romans 8:38-39

Stanza 8 Luke 22:20 (Blood in Lord's Supper); I Corinthians 15:53; Hosea 13:14; John 1:29; I Peter 1:19; Ephesians 2:8

Stanza 9 -10 "Trinitarian soteriology" (p. 102); John 20:17; Matthew 23:10; John 16:5-13, 20; Matthew 28:20



## Rejoicing in Repentance

Ash Wednesday

“Dear Christians One and All Rejoice” (556 LSB; stanza 1)

Psalm 51:12-15

Introduction:

It may seem a bit strange and out of place on the first day of this somber Lenten time, on this ashen and gray winter Wednesday, to call the church to “rejoice with exultation springing.” Now is the season for lamentation and weeping over sin. Is it not the case that we have buried our Alleluias? Six weeks down the road, we can take them up with gladness. Then our songs of praise will be unbounded as proclaim that Christ is risen, victorious over death and the grave. Then the unbroken light of Easter morning will shine as fresh sunlight after a dismal storm. But if this is the case, why such an exuberant hymn that bubbles joy right here in the shadows of the Savior’s suffering, right here in the bleakness of Lent’s first day?

No, “Dear Christians One and All Rejoice” is right at home in Lent for the kind of joy which Dr. Luther has us sing is not to be found apart from repentance and where repentance is going on there is joy. Jesus says that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (see Luke 15:7). It is the joy of which David speaks when He makes supplication to the Almighty: “Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit” (Ps. 51: 12). It is this genre of joy that causes the sweet singer of Israel then to confess “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness” (Ps. 51:14). Where there is repentance, there is joy. Where there is repentance, there is the declaration of what God done.

### I. Rejoicing Comes When and Where the Law Does its Proper Work

#### A. There are only two outcomes where the law is at work

1. By the holy law of God sinners will die **in** their sins.
2. By the holy law of God sinners die **to** their sins
3. To die in sin is hell; to die to sin is heaven. There are no other options.

#### B. David dies to his sin

1. Recall to story of David’s evasive attempt to live with his sin (see Samuel 11:1-12:15)
2. David confesses his sin, that is, he declares that God’s verdict is right (see Psalm 51:4)
3. His bones, broken by God Himself, rejoice in the Lord’s mercy which restores to the joy of salvation. The Lord takes away David’s sin and his mouth is opened to declare His praise.

### II. Rejoicing Comes Through the Gospel

A. Heart and voice are united to proclaim the wonders God has done

1. Christ Jesus does for us what He did for David. He takes away our sin.
2. The whole focus of Lent is not on our piety, not even on the quality or magnitude of our contrition, but on the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
3. Jesus is proclaimed so that sinners might believe with the heart and confess with the lips (see Romans 10:9-11)

B. The Gospel declares that the price of His ransom is for you.

1. Lent reminds us that Jesus did not choose the easy part. See Lenten Gradual from Hebrews 12:2....for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.
2. His death that purchases and won you from sin, death and the devil. See I Peter 1:18-21; Luther's Explanation to the Second Article.
3. His Gospel is the power of God for your salvation. See Romans 1:16-17

## Conclusion

Dear Christians one and all rejoice for in giving you Jesus, God bestowed on you His "dearest treasure." In repentance and faith return to this treasure on this Ash Wednesday for God does not leave us in dust and ashes. His right arm stretched out on the cross has won for the victory for us. Your sins are forgiven. As often as you eat His body and drink His blood, you proclaim His death until He comes. In that death you have life in His name.

**Possessed by Sin and Bound by Death**  
**Midweek in Lent I**  
**“Dear Christians One and All Rejoice” (556 LSB; stanza 2-3)**  
**John 8:31-38**

Introduction:

Do you think that you are free? After all you live in “the land of the free and the home of the brave.” Our age champions personal liberty, interpreted to mean, you can do or become anything you please-perhaps with proviso that you don’t hurt anybody or interfere with their freedom. Autonomy (literally, a law to oneself) has become one of the watchwords of our public vocabulary, especially in the area of ethics. So sexual permissiveness, abortion and euthanasia are claimed as options in the increasingly unbounded arena of personal freedoms.

Are you free? Not really. Werner Elert, a Lutheran theologian of the last century spoken of autonomy as an unfulfilled illusion.

- I. Autonomy: An Assertion Without Substance
  - A. The Jews asserted: “We are descendants of Abraham, and we have never been in bondage to anyone”
    1. Really? What about those years down in Egypt?
    2. Really? What about the enforced exile in Babylon?
    3. Really? What about the Romans who even that day patrol the streets of Jerusalem keeping
  - B. If you start with the assumption that you are free, you will only end in bondage (Forde)
    1. The assumption that we are free ends in bondage, a servitude from which you cannot liberate yourself.
    2. It is the blindness of denial. We claim to be alive yet we are captive to death and you cannot set yourself free.
  - C. Luther sought freedom in the monastery but instead discovered bondage.
    1. It was not so much bondage to the rules and regulations of the Augustinian order that bothered Luther.
    2. It was the bondage to his own sin, his inability to be free from the curse of the law, the torment of a conscience that accused and terrified.
    3. The law left Luther with a God he could not but hate.

4. Here the preacher may note how Luther later came to sing of it in stanzas 2-3

## II. There is Only One who is Free: The Lord of Heaven and Earth

A. Jean Paul Satre: Even if the biblical God did exist, we would have to deny His existence in order to be free in the way we think we want to be free

1. So we see the illusion of freedom pompously strutted out on the stage of history.
2. But the costumes cannot hide our sin and the death that it brings.
3. We are not free. You try breaking the boundaries God has set in place they will finally break you. It is not so much that we break the law, but the law breaks us.

B. “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed”

1. In the freedom of His will to be your Savior, God sent His Son into the flesh to fulfill the law by His life of perfect obedience and to suffer and die in your place.
2. He has redeemed you a lost and condemned creature, purchasing and winning you from all sins, from death, and the power of the devil.

### Conclusion:

You are free for the Son of God Himself has freed you from the curse of the law, the darkness of death, and condemnation of Satan. You are free-you need no longer live in enslavement to self. An old hymn has us sing “Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free.” And that is the wonder of our freedom in Christ. Freedom is not to be found in living as though God did not exist so that we can be who and what we will to be. Freedom is found only in Christ. Shortly before his death, Luther scribbled a few words on a scrap of paper found in his vest pocket after he died. The note read, in part: “We are beggars. It is true.” The tired, worn-out old man knew the truth that before God we can stand only as beggars, but beggars set free to live by faith in the gracious promises of a merciful God. Freedom is found only in Jesus’ words. “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” Amen.

## **From the Father's Heart**

### **Midweek in Lent II**

#### **"Dear Christians One and All Rejoice" (556 LSB; stanza 4)**

#### **John 12:27-36**

Jesus moves ever closer to the cross. He had entered the holy city on Palm Sunday; now he speaks of His impending glorification. Glory will come to Jesus not in the way that princes are elevated to their thrones but by a cross which will lift up the Son of Man as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus speaks of His crucifixion as the purpose for which He came to this hour.

This hour was in the mind of the Father from all eternity. So Luther's hymn shows us the Father who beholds the misery and wretchedness of our sin "before the world's foundation" and so there in mercy plans for my salvation.

#### **I. The Cross is Not an Afterthought with God**

A. The God whose mercy is from everlasting to everlasting is the Lord who even from eternity wills to be the Savior

1. The story of salvation of which our hymn sings does not begin in Eden with the fall into sin but in eternity from the heart of God
2. God's love is such that He is always seeking to bestow blessing, to give of Himself

B. The cross is not an "emergency measure" or a "plan B" with the Triune God.

1. Even before the creation of time, even before the reality of sin came into the creation, God purposed to be Redeemer. See Ephesians 1:3-14
2. On the cross, we see the fatherly heart of God revealed (Luther)

#### **II. He Turned to Me a Father's Heart**

A. The question raised by the terrified and therefore skeptical conscience is "How is God toward me?"

1. The question invites speculation. Taken apart from the Gospel, the question of predestination or election, for example creates either despair or carnal security. It becomes as Martin Franzmann once put it, a teaching that has broken many a heart and mind.
2. Our sins accuse us and our hearts condemn us. We conclude, therefore, that God must be our enemy.

B. We do not look to our own troubled and chaotic hearts, but to the Father's heart.

1. Luther: “For in all three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart and his pure, unutterable love. For this very purpose he created us, so that he might redeem us and make us holy, and moreover, having granted and bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has also given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. For, as explained above, we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge” (LC II:64-66, Kolb/Wengert, 439-440)
2. This is the heart laid open, broken and bleeding for your salvation
3. “It is the office of Christ to make God certain” (Bayer).

Conclusion:

God “did not choose the easy part but gave His dearest treasure.” That treasure was and is His own Son, begotten of the Father from all eternity and born of the virgin Mary.” When God turned to you a Father’s heart, He gave you Jesus. He gave you His Son to be His Brother. When our hearts condemn us, we indeed have One who is greater than our hearts. We have God’s own heart. We have His Son crucified and raised. Amen.

## **Jesus: God's Son and Your Servant**

### **Midweek in Lent III**

#### **"Dear Christians One and All Rejoice" (556 LSB; stanzas 5-6)**

#### **John 13:1-20**

##### **Introduction:**

From the beginning, God's Son is your servant. Jesus was born under the law to redeem those under the law says the Apostle (see Galatians 4:4-5). The previous stanzas of our hymn have confessed our human plight: fast bound in Satan's chains, brooded over by death, tormented by sin with life itself becoming a living hell. Good works are no help. The freedom of the will is worst than powerless for it fights against God's judgment. If we are to be saved, it will not come from ourselves. It will take a Savior who does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

#### **I. God's Beloved Son: Bright Jewel of His Crown**

##### **A. From heaven to earth, He comes**

1. Religions built ladders to God: moralism, rationalism, mysticism (see Köberele)
2. God gives us His Son on the cross, not ladders. God comes to us when we could not come to Him
3. "If they bore their way into heaven with their heads and look around they will find no one, because Christ lies in a crib and in a woman's lap. So let them fall back down again and break their necks" (Luther, quoted by Bayer, 46)

##### **B. Jesus is declared God's beloved Son in His Baptism**

1. Baptized in a sinner's baptism not for Himself but for us
2. He comes to do His Father's will. He comes to die a sinner's death that sinners might have His righteousness and live.
3. Isaiah 42:1-4 is echoed in Jesus' Baptism. Jesus is the Servant in whom the Father delights and who is given the Spirit.

#### **II. The Father to the Son: It's Time to Have Compassion**

##### **A. Baptized in the Jordan, Jesus' life is lived in perfect obedience to the Father**

1. His is a perfect life of love...."love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be."
2. His life demonstrates divine compassion for those who are lost like sheep without a shepherd.

3. In that compassion, He heals the sick, restores sight to the blind, causes the lame to walk, and gives life to the dead

B. But Jesus is more than the embodiment of divine love

1. He loves His own to the end: "...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1)
2. In love, He is our servant even to death on the cross

III. Out of His love, God's Son Becomes Our Brother

A. "A servant's form, like mine, he wore"

1. He comes in the garb of flesh and blood
2. His power is hidden in the weakness of the baby of Bethlehem and the man of Calvary

B. He gets the job done

1. From sin and sorrow we are set free for Jesus has put death to death by dying
2. He leads the devil captive that your conscience is free in the forgiveness of sins

Conclusion:

Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life as a ransom (see Mark 10:45). The old Adam is ever the activist, always devising some scheme for serving God. Jesus puts an end to it all as He comes to give what we could never achieve. Righteousness is received not achieved. Behold God's and your Servant; He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.



## **Your Ransom and Your Rescue**

### **Midweek in Lent IV**

#### **“Dear Christians One and All Rejoice” (556 LSB; stanzas 7-8)**

#### **John 14:15-27**

##### **Introduction:**

In stanzas 7-8 of our hymn, Luther has Jesus preaching to us. He pledges Himself to you as “your rock and castle.” You are the one for whom He strives and wrestles.” He promises that where He is, you will remain and that the old evil foe will not divide you from Him. He shed His blood to make it so. He suffers scorn and reject, bearing the wrath of God in your place. He suffers it all for your benefit, for your good. And to you He says be steadfast and believing for His victory snatches life out of death, His innocence bears your sin “and you are blest forever.”

##### **I. Jesus is Your Ransom**

###### **A. Slaves cannot free themselves**

1. In the Scriptures, sin is not just accumulated misdeeds, things done or left undone. Sin is a power that holds its victims captive.
2. Old Testament background for the language of ransom/redeem as to do with slavery. Slaves are under the procession of another. They belong to their owner. The law diagnoses your captivity (i.e, who or what “owns” you?)

###### **B. Jesus comes to redeem those in sin’s captivity**

1. He redeems not with gold or silver but His own holy and precious blood and His innocent suffering and death to paraphrase the Small Catechism
2. Note language of I Peter 1:18-19. You are redeemed by a Lamb without spot or blemish, but by the precious blood of Christ.
3. The redemption is in the blood. This is the blood that cleanses us from all sin (see I John 1:7). This is the blood that we receive in the cup of the New Testament.
4. Redemption won at Calvary in Jesus blood is now delivered and bestowed to us in Jesus’ blood given us to drink in the Sacrament. There we are one with Him and He with us. There we have the promise that nothing will separate us from His love.

##### **II. Jesus is your Rescue**

- ###### **A. The Lord who gives Himself for us in His sacrificial death is the Christ who wins us from our enemies: sin, death, and hell.**

1. Jesus is both the Victim who suffers vicariously for us and the Victor who wins the battle on our behalf.
2. Listen to how Luther sings of it in his Easter hymn: “It was a strange and dreadful strife/When life and death contended/The victory remained with life/The reign of death was ended/Holy Scripture plainly saith/That death is swallowed up by death/Its sting is lost forever” (LSB 458:4)
3. In the weakness of His passion and death, He wins!

B. His innocence has borne your sin and you are His forever

1. You have a new and different Lord. Not sin, death or the devil but Jesus crucified and raised from the grave.
2. You are relocated from slavery to freedom. Hence the Catechism says that Jesus has redeemed us that “I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness, just as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.”

Conclusion:

Jesus goes to the Father, that is He goes to the cross, that you may be His forever. By His atoning death He has purchased and won you to be His own. You are not left as orphans but heirs of God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus. You are His and He is Yours. His blood says so. Amen.

**In Trouble He Will Comfort You**  
**Midweek in Lent V**  
**“Dear Christians One and All Rejoice” (556 LSB; stanzas 9-10)**  
**John 16:1-33**

Introduction:

Martin Luther noted that “holy Christian people are externally recognized by the holy possession of the sacred cross. They must endure every kind of misfortune and persecution, all kinds of trials and evil from the devil, the world, and the flesh (as the Lord’s Prayer indicates) by inward sadness, timidity, fear, outward poverty, contempt, illness, and weakness, in order to become like their head, Christ. And the only reason they must suffer is that they steadfastly adhere to Christ and God’s word, enduring this for the sake of Christ” (AE 41:164-165). Jesus speaks of this suffering ahead of time. On the eve of His death, He tells His disciples that they will be put out of the synagogue on account of Him and whoever kills them will imagine that they are offering God a service.

Yet in the midst of this dire prediction, the Lord Christ makes a promise. It is to their advantage that He goes to the Father by way of the cross. For by His going, He will send them the Helper, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. So Luther summarizes our Lord’s farewell discourse in the final two stanzas of our hymn.

I. Jesus’ Departure is for Your Good

A. Jesus’ going to the Father is His crucifixion

1. It was for this purpose that Jesus came into the world. He came to die as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.
2. His death is not His defeat but His glorification.
3. By His death on the cross sin is atoned for, death is robbed of its power, and Satan is judged as the liar that he is.

B. Jesus’ going to the Father results in the sending of the Holy Spirit

1. The Spirit preaches Jesus: Luther writes “Here Christ makes the Holy Spirit a Preacher. He does so to prevent one from gaping toward heaven in search of Him, as the fluttering spirits and enthusiasts do, and from divorcing Him from the oral Word of the ministry. One should know and learn that He will be in and with the Word, and that it will guide us into all truth, in order that we may believe it, use it as a weapon, be preserved by it against all the lies and deceptions of the devil, and prevail in all trials and temptations....The Holy Spirit wants this truth which He is to impress into our hearts to be so firmly fixed that reason and all one’s own thoughts and feelings are relegated to the

background. He wants us to adhere solely to the Word and to regard it as the only truth. And through this Word alone He governs the Christian Church to the end” (AE 24:362).

2. The Spirit is “the shy member of the Holy Trinity” (Hordern) for He does not call attention to Himself but Christ crucified. This is the “heavenly wisdom” that Luther has us sing in stanza 9.

## II. We are Not Left Alone

### A. The Spirit is no mere stand in for the absent Christ

1. The Spirit takes what belongs to Christ and declares it to us. He gives us Jesus’ words of spirit and life in the preaching of the Gospel. Christ remains with His church in sermon and sacrament.
2. He turns our sorrow into joy for He gives us consolation rather than condemnation in the absolution.

### B. Christ’s kingdom comes through the preaching of the cross

1. Second Petition: “God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.”
2. It is through this preaching rather than the “base alloy” of false gospels of human actions, feelings, or understanding that God gives us the certainty of salvation in the forgiveness of sins.

## Conclusion:

Jesus says “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” The hymn and this Lenten Season then draws to a close where it began: “Dear Christians, one and all rejoice/With exultation springing/And with united heart and voice/And holy rapture singing/Proclaim the wonders God has done/How His right arm the vict’ry won/What price our ransom cost Him.” Amen.

# MERCY FROM THE HEART

by Prof. Dr. Oswald Bayer<sup>1</sup>

- translated by Jonathan Mumme -

## 1. *Trinitarian*

“A ‘god’ is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with you whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.”<sup>2</sup>

These well known lines from Luther have led Neo-Protestantism to think and speak starting from point of the believing individual and moving outward from there; they have shaped the whole character of dogmatics, now understood as a doctrine of believing (*Glaubenslehre*). But in all this something gets obscured, namely the fact that faith has an antecedent – that something precedes faith. This antecedent entity, often relegated to the shadows, cannot, however, be understood as something implied or set forth by the immediate religious self-consciousness. This something is God’s promise, which comes to me – and all creatures – from outside of me. We encounter this promise in the principal pledge by which God introduces himself, that is, in his name: “I am the Lord, your God.” (Ex. 20:2). In Luther’s case this unsearchable name, this promise of a dependability that accompanies its recipient in free, unindebted presence (Ex. 3,14), interprets itself as follows: “I, yes, I will give you enough and help you out of every need.”<sup>3</sup> According to this explication God’s name manifests the divine attributes of goodness and mercy; God’s name, his being and his essence is unfounded, unprovoked goodness and mercy. In his goodness the Creator gives and grants all good things to his creatures. In his mercy, he delivers them out of all danger and helps them in every need.<sup>4</sup> Luther’s pointed explication is Scriptural. With Scripture he takes seriously the weight of God’s self-predication, as is expressed, for example in Ex. 34:5f. (cf. 33:19): “Then the LORD descended in the cloud and came up to him,” to Moses, “and he called out the Name of the LORD. And the Lord passed before him and called out, ‘The LORD, the LORD, God, merciful and gracious and patient, and abounding in grace and faithfulness!’”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from his *Zugesagte Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 54-60.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 386 [hereafter cited as *BoC*] (explanation to the First Commandment in the Large Catechism).

<sup>3</sup> *Concordia Triglotta*, ed F. Bente (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 581 [hereafter cited as *Triglotta*] (explanation to the First Commandment in the Large Catechism).

<sup>4</sup> *BoC*, 386-392.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hermann Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr . . .,” *Zeitschrift für alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 102 (1990): 1-18. In regard to the following cf. Bayer, *Zugesagte Gegenwart*, 191f.

Luther is just as pointed in his explanation for the article on creation in the Small Catechism as he is with his explanation of the first commandment in the Large Catechism. “I believe that God has made me and all creatures . . . and all this out of pure fatherly, divine goodness and mercy.”<sup>6</sup> So also Psalm 145:9: “The Lord is good to all and he has mercy on all his works.” (cf. Ps. 25:6f. and 2 Chron. 5:13: mercy and goodness). In that God affords existence, is he good and benevolent; in that he defends against nothingness, he is he merciful. As far as Luther is concerned these are the two key points when it comes to believing in God the Creator: his “goodness,” which gives, and his “mercy,” which rescues from all evil and from the power of death. Redemption is not the first work of the Trinitarian God’s mercy, but rather that he created in the first place.

If the mercy of the Trinitarian God in his creation is external to that, from which and out of which it saves, so his mercy in his work of redemption carries in itself that, from which and out of which it saves: In his very own heart God sets himself in opposition to his own wrath against man, who contradicts God’s creating word of promise, and is thus sinner and the object of God’s wrath. According to Hosea 11:7-11 (cf. Jer. 31:20) something happens with God that is unthinkable for ancient metaphysics and that would be rejected for proper mythology – an “overturning,” a change in God himself. God is not he, who is identical with himself, who is consistent with himself. On the contrary, God contradicts himself insofar as he bears out a contradiction in himself – the contradiction between wrath and mercy: “. . . my heart has changed within me; my remorse breaks out with might. I cannot execute my burning anger, cannot ruin Ephraim again, for I am God, and not man . . .”

It is this God, the God of mercy, to whom Luther intently listened. He experienced, preached, pondered and sang this overturning that takes place in God himself. We find his most concentrated presentation in his hymn “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice,”<sup>7</sup> which sings of rescue from sin, death, hell, separation from God and from God’s hatred. This rescue happens in a dramatic conversation that takes place within God, an exchange of words between the Father and the Son (vs. 5f.) – an internal exchange of words, that manifests itself to me from outside of me, that gets spoken in God’s external word of promise, his *promissio*. In this word of promise the substitution that has taken place (“All this I suffer for your good . . . And you are blest forever.” vs. 8) comes to me: “I am yours” (vs. 7).

This hymn, a song of the church’s praise (vs. 1), speaks of God’s giving of himself in his Son as an answer that anticipates the lamentation of lost man (vs. 2f.), an answer that took place “before the world’s foundation” (vs. 4). And as it sings of God’s self-giving it simultaneously tells of the rescue of man, sinking as he is into the very depths of hell; from the very beginning man is incorporated into God’s internal conversation as one who receives. His lamentation, not yet even voiced to God, is heard in eternity. Indeed, it is heard in such a way that the hearing and the rescue takes place in history through the incarnation and the death of God, which again is conveyed and communicated historically in the corporal Word of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The conversation between Father and Son, Son and Father is not some speculative notion of Trinitarian theology, rather this conversation narrates itself from the very beginning as an event pertaining to the sinner, as

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<sup>6</sup> *Triglotta*, 543 (explanation to the First Article in the Small Catechism).

<sup>7</sup> *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 566 [hereafter cited as *LSB*].

“mercy” (cf. vs. 4f.). The whole of God’s being is understood as a giving of himself in the word of promise, which the Son gives to the person lost in death: “Stay close to Me . . . Your ransom I myself will be!”<sup>8</sup> (Vs.7-10)

The Triune God’s entire being is merciful. God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as Creator, Re-creator and Cosumator of the world is a merciful *deus humilis* (humble God). By virtue of his omnipotence his humility is proud; he who looks mercifully on the lowly is exalted (cf. Isa. 57:15; Ps. 102:19f.; 113; 138:6; Luke 1:46-55). However, he does not reign from on high as some monarch turned in on himself, who only thinks on himself, caring nothing for the misery of the world, as one would expect according to Aristotle’s metaphysics. Rather he opens himself to that which is below him and shares himself in his mercy. He offers himself. In his merciful humility, his condescension, God proves, “how he has given himself completely to us, withholding nothing.” God’s merciful humility, his heartbeat, characterizes not only his incarnation and his death on the cross, but also his actions as Creator and Holy Spirit:

“How God the Father humbled himself, that he not only formed a lump of dirt, but also gave it a soul with his breath. How God the Son humbled himself – he became man, became the least of all men, and took on the form of a servant; he became the most miserable of all men; he was made sin for us; in God’s eyes he was *the* sinner of the whole people. How low God the Holy Spirit stoops, that he became a historian of the smallest, most contemptible, most meaningless incident in the world, so that he reveal the counsels, mysteries and ways of the Godhead to man in his own language, in his own history, in his own ways.”<sup>10</sup>

## 2. Temporal'

“Mercy” is not self-evident. It cannot become an existential or epistemological principle. On the contrary mercy is actually something that is won and something, that emerging, happens unpredictably. And as this justifying God is not simply and in principle merciful, so also is sinful man not simply and in principle on the receiving end of God’s mercy. Otherwise he would not have to cry, “*Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam!*” (Ps. 51:3; English 51:1) “If he did not feel God’s wrath, he would not say, ‘Have mercy!’; thus he names himself [a man] under wrath that he has earned, and indeed he struggles to turn from the gaze of wrath and to lay hold of the gaze of mercy.”<sup>12</sup>

For this turning from wrath and turning to mercy time is needed, time in which the turning from and the turning to get carried out – time to pray a psalm like psalm 51. It is noteworthy, for example, that in psalm 22 the lament comes out in no less than three cycles (vs. 1-5; 6-11; 12-21). The psalm makes room for the lament – room for repetition and

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<sup>8</sup> Literally the German of vs. 7 reads, “Hold on to me . . . I *give* myself entirely for you . . .”

<sup>9</sup> *BoC*, 434 (explanation to the Second Article in the Large Catechism).

<sup>10</sup> Johann Georg Hamann, *Londoner Schriften*, ed. Oswald Bayer and Bernd Weißenborn (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1993), 151,37-152,8.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the theology of lament presented in this section see Oswald Bayer, “Toward a Theology of Lament” in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David M. Whitford, (article) trans. Matthias Gockel (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 211-220.

<sup>12</sup> Peccator, “qui sentit iram dei, sol er so fortem distinctionem machen inter peccatorem et propitium deum. Das ist non theologia rationis, sed supernaturalis, quod peccator nihil videt quam misericordiam, et tamen ibi sentit iram dei, quia si non sentiret, Non diceret: ‘Miserere’; ergo significat se sub ira et dignum ira, et tamen sic pugnatur, ut abigat spectaculum irae et misericordiae apprehendat. Das ist Theologia.” Martin Luther, *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1883ff.), 40 II:342,6-11 [hereafter cited as *WA*] in regard to Ps. 51:1.

escalation; apparently lament is not something that gets mopped up in the wink of eye. As is the case with suffering itself, so also suffering's lament evidently takes patience. And yet, at the same time – paradoxically it would seem – the lament happens in the impatient anticipation of the promised, saving mercy. This means living in waiting and in haste (2 Pet. 3:12), so that the way one speaks and the way one lives are shaped by the patience of the Holy Spirit as well as by impatient lamenting and pleading, which are also worked by the same Spirit. In a particularly clear and impressive statement Luther expressed this very point as he cited Rom. 8:26 (“the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings”) in a sermon on 1 Cor. 15:23 on Oct. 20, 1532: “Oh how I wish I were saved! Deliver me from death!’ That is the sort of crying out that no speech and no person in his body [knows], and [this crying out wants] nothing other than to be rescued from death. Thus let every Christian learn, that such groaning and lamenting gets heard in heaven and causes quite a commotion there, so that the Lord comes and helps.”<sup>13</sup>

Lamenting and pleading amount to nothing less than the call, “Maranatha! – Come, O Lord!” (1 Cor. 16:22), coming to a head in the plea, “*Mach End, o Herr, mach Ende / mit aller unser Not.*”<sup>14</sup> Finally, at the definitive point of being heard, as the world is brought to its completion, praise will echo with grand voice – just as the overarching architecture of the five-part Psalter is characterized by a movement from lament to praise (for praise, see especially Ps. 145-150).<sup>15</sup> The closing of many hymns in the *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* and in *Gotteslob*<sup>16</sup> parallel this layout of the Psalter;<sup>17</sup> see, for example, the last verse of Erasmus Alber’s hymn, “*Ihr lieben Christen, freut euch nun . . .*”: “*Ach, lieber Herr, eil zum*

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<sup>13</sup> WA 36:560,9-12.

<sup>14</sup> “Bring to an end, oh Lord, bring to an end, all our need.” This line comes from the last verse of Paul Gerhard’s hymn “Befiehl du deine Wege” (*Evangelisches Gesangbuch*, 361, vs. 12); compare “Entrust Your Days and Burdens,” *LSB*, 754, vs. 6. Grasped in christological specificity the Second Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom come,” in which we find nothing other than God’s first promise (“I am the Lord, your God”) along with the First Commandment, finds expression in the words, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Bernd Janowski, “Die ‘Kleine Biblia’: Zur Bedeutung der Psalmen für eine Theologie des Alten Testaments” (1998), in *Die rettende Gerechtigkeit: Beiträge zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999), 125-164, esp. 146. Cf. *ibid.*, “Der barmherzige Richter: Zur Einheit von Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit im Gottesbild des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments,” in *Das Drama der Barmherzigkeit Gottes: Studien zur biblischen Gottesrede und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte in Judentum und Christentum*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 183, ed. Ruth Scoralick (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2000), 33-91, esp. 76. See further: *ibid.*, “Die Antwort Israels,” *Bibel und Kirche* 56 (2001): 2-7, and also Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, “Von der Klage zum Lob – die Dynamik des Gebets in den Psalmen,” *Bibel und Kirche* 56 (2001): 16-20.

<sup>16</sup> The *Evangelisches Gesangbuch* [hereafter cited as *EG*] is the hymnal of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKiD)*, and *Gotteslob* is the normal prayer book and hymnal of the German-speaking Roman Catholic Church.

<sup>17</sup> If systematic theology would take this scope or flow of the Psalter seriously, the consequences for the layout and structure of a Christian dogmatic would be immense – especially in regard to setting the place and the function of the doctrine of the Trinity. Cf. Bayer, *Zugesagte Gegenwart*, 171-179.



*Gericht! / Laß sehn dein herrlich Angesicht, / das Wesen der Dreifaltigkeit. / Das helf uns Gott in Ewigkeit!*<sup>18</sup>

The vision of God is to partake of his righteousness.<sup>19</sup> “[T]he light of glory . . . will show us hereafter that the God whose judgment here is one of incomprehensible righteousness is a God of most perfect and manifest righteousness.”<sup>20</sup> The light of glory will shed light on the incomprehensible hiddenness of God, a hiddenness extant not only in the light of nature, but first and foremost in the light of grace. The light of glory, which is the same thing as the final judgment, brings the case argued with God over his own righteousness to a close and thereby dissolves the question of theodicy; “on that day you will ask me nothing” (John 16:23).<sup>21</sup>

Even if the full, unbroken praise of God’s goodness, with which we praise God in the absence of trial and temptation, will first take place at the end, in a certain way the praise of God is implied in every lament. If God could in no way be praised – and be it with tears –, then man could not lament. Lament is always tied to past and future praise. This fact manifests itself, for example, in Isa. 51:9-11. Here the impetuous plea, a plea that wells up from the lament (cf. Isa. 40:27), that God would finally take mighty action and prove himself the merciful Comforter and Deliverer – this plea holds up God’s previous mighty acts of creation and deliverance from Egypt before God (vs. 9f.) and extends itself simultaneously to the certain hope that the miserable tables will be turned and that there will be an new exodus, this time from Babylon to Jerusalem (vs. 11). And this exodus is then the reason for “everlasting joy” (vs. 11) and everlasting praise. Thus the current hardship is not treated as a matter of indifference, nor is it glossed over. Rather, it is taken seriously – but taken seriously in such a way that the hardship and misery do not become the final reality, leading to resignation and cynicism.

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<sup>18</sup> Translated this line from “Dear Christians, Now Rejoice . . .” reads “O dear Lord, hasten to (your) judgment! / Let your glorious countenance appear, (which is) the essence of the Trinity. May God so help us in eternity!” (EG 6, vs. 5).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Oswald Bayer, *Schöpfung als Anrede: Zu einer Hermeneutik der Schöpfung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1990), 181-184 (part of “Staunen, Seufzen, Schauen: Affekte der Wahrnehmung des Schöpfers,” pp. 169-184). Cf. also Bayer, “Die Zukunft Jesu Christi zum Letzten Gericht,” in *Gott als Autor: Zu einer poetologischen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 161-186, especially 172f., as well as the theses 10f. (pp. 183-185).

<sup>20</sup> *Luther’s Works*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955ff.), 33:292 [hereafter cited as *LW*]; cf. *WA* 18:785,35-37: “lumen gloriae aliud dictat, et Deum, cuius modo est iudicium incomprehensibilis iustitiae, tunc ostendet esse iustissimae et manifestissimae iustitiae.” In my judgment this, Luther’s closing from *The Bondage of the Will*, in the larger context of *WA* 18:783,17-785,38 (= *LW* 33:288-292), along with his preface to the book of Job (1524, *WA DB* 10 I:4 = *LW* 35:251-253) strikes precisely at the heart of eschatology. In this regard his closing is cited in the last chapter of my short outline of dogmatics (“Faith within the Lawsuit about God – Before God” in *Living by Faith: Justification and Sanctification*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003], 69-80). Thomas Reinhuber offers an impressive and comprehensive interpretation of *WA* 18:783,17-785,38 in *Kämpfender Glaube: Studien zu Luthers Bekenntnis am Ende von De servo arbitrio* (Berlin/New York: W. de Gruyter, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> For the relationship between God’s judgment and his having mercy cf. Bernd Janowski’s summary under the article on “Gericht Gottes (II. Altes Testament)” in *Religion in Geschichte in Gegenwart [RGG]*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 3:733f.

As we have just seen, as much as praise is implied in every lament, so little can it be made into some sort of principle and quasi into the “normal” sentiment of the Christian, as happened in the Schleiermachian tradition. Then lamenting and pleading would as a matter of principle have “no place” in the Christian congregation and its worship; “Kyrie eleison” would then have to be understood as “the call of one standing outside” the congregation.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. *Ethical*

In its effort to provide uplifting comfort, Christian ethics appeals to the mercy of God (Rom. 12:1; cf. 11:32) as the foundation for its merciful action. It is God who stoops to the depths and turns toward the lowly, promising and creating communion that holds, in death and beyond. When it comes to overcoming the power of death, mercy and comfort are the same thing (2 Cor. 1).

Over against the depths of this divine mercy today’s merciful sort of inter-personal solidarity is becoming increasingly suspect, with doubts looming that such inter-personal solidarity goes about its business in a rather haphazard spontaneity, not really reaching deep enough when it comes to shaping social structures. Legal guarantees of aid have a way of freeing people from the fear of not being able to find any help, switching fortune for the most part off. However, this guaranteed aid comes at the price of being handled by a cold system. The warmth of emotional concern and care, along with its freedom and spontaneity, cannot be organized. Not only in the holes and on the edges of a welfare state governed under the rule of law, but also within institutional structures we run into the question about a kind of freedom that despite adhering to the letter of the law does not let itself be forced into providing help and aid. This freedom is the freedom granted by God’s mercy, a freedom that allows people to go beyond themselves, to step into the next guy’s shoes, to sense his hardship and privation, to discern his need, to help him and be there for him. Being there for the next guy certainly has institutional consequences, but being there for the neighbor in need does not need to justify itself in institutional structures.

Mercy (*Barmherzigkeit*) means having a soft heart and is the opposite of hard-heartedness (*Hartherzigkeit*); heard-heartedness means closing myself off to the hardships and needs of next guy, thereby forgetting my own needs and my own privation. Four features constitute mercy’s gentle movement, showing clearly its anti-Stoic bearing: Mercy is affective; mercy stoops down; mercy lives outside itself; mercy seeks solidarity with the next guy. Mercy is a matter of the innermost being, a matter of the heart, now turned entirely outward. It cannot be equated with moral resolution, but rather underlies such resolution and is in this sense “pre-moral.” Mercy applies to the poor and the distressed; gaze and will fix themselves on what is below. It is no self-satisfying disposition or mindset; in mercy, borne along by love and pathos, we slip outside of ourselves to be with one lowlier. And yet the inequality, in which the one in need of help and the helper come into contact, is surrounded and pervaded by a yet greater commonality and equality. This greater commonality and equality consists in being creatures or creations of God and in the communion of need that was given with the loss the image of God, a loss to be distinguished from being a creature (being a creature and being one who has lost the image

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<sup>22</sup> Ernst Christian Achelis, “Kyrie eleison: Eine liturgische Abhandlung,” *Monatsschrift für Gottesdienst und kirchliche Kunst* (ed. Friedrich Spitta and Julius Smend) 4 (1899): 161-172 and 211-216, especially 215.

of God are not the same thing). As universal as this twofold communion is, so little does can mercy simply be assumed after the loss of the image of God. If mercy were simply self-evident Jesus would never have had to come up with the parable of the Good Samaritan. If mercy went without saying we would have no need of this parable continually being told us anew. The evidence of this narrated mercy is continually mediated by the Mediator of creation, Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, who sees to his presence in the present. Human mercy (Luke 10:33) is founded God's mercy (Luke 15:20).

Theses on the Captivated and Liberated Will  
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1. The most fundamental challenge for presenting the gospel in the current North American context is that the gospel presupposes a bound will while most North Americans presuppose a free will. More than anything, Americans value choice. With respect to God, however, they habitually make a category mistake. They think you can accept or reject God just like you might accept or reject a product.
2. The issue over the freedom of the will is not over whether or not people make choices. The problem is that the choices that people make are done by a will captivated to the self. The sinful human is unable to trust God and for that reason feels more secure in trusting the self.
3. Our transgression against God and our neighbor certainly can be seen in our various thoughts, words, and deeds. Yet it goes much deeper — to the very core of our condition. We are held captive by our own will, holding God in suspicion, hoping to create our own future, and working to manage life itself. Thus, we are unable to create or will faith in God or goodness on our part.
4. The question of the bound will has nothing whatever to do with choices before the world (*coram mundo*), but only before God (*coram deo*). The teaching that the will is free, neutral, or un-captivated endorses the view that the human as a subject can stand over the gospel, deciding either for or against Jesus Christ as the promise of new, eternal life.
5. Sinners in their captivity have already made a decision for Christ: it is to put him on the cross!
6. If God is all-powerful and all-good, then the will, *coram deo*, is not free. It is rather captivated to its own perception of its own good and, thus, bound to reject and crucify Jesus Christ. To be saved means to be delivered from such a self curved in on itself. If Jesus Christ is to be Lord, the sinful self must die and the new person in Christ must be raised.
7. One's religious identity (or seeming lack thereof) indicates the idols to which one's will is bound. Evangelical Protestants, no less than Roman Catholics, or secularists, assume that we deal with a God whom we can choose. This is most manifest in current evangelistic tactics: If I accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior, then Jesus will help me fulfill my potential — psychologically, economically, or socially. To accept Jesus on my terms is, however, in truth, to reject Jesus Christ as Lord and makes the self into an idol.

8. While touting radical difference from mainline Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism strikingly parallels mainline Protestantism. In a way, both liberal and conservative modes of American religion are the same tune but played in strikingly different ways. Both Evangelicals and Mainliners accentuate the subjective dimension to religion. Both seek a therapeutic Jesus, who can heal my psychological pain, in order to issue in a socially transformative Christ. For the political right, this Christ liberates an agenda that supports stability for the traditional family but license for the economy (even when that economy is indifferent to the traditional family's well-being). For the political left, this Christ liberates an agenda that promotes diversity in family structures but seeks to tame an economy run amok.

9. We might find ourselves as responsible citizens persuaded by proposals for social renewal presented by political ideologues. However, we must be clear that counter to all secular visions of politics on either side of the aisle, politics cannot save. Politics are for the ordering of community, matters of the first use of the law.

10. It is not clear that the Christian faith should fit itself into a political agenda. Instead that political agenda must be tested, step by step, with the Christian faith. When it is accepted that politics cannot save, then there is no reason ever to translate the faith into the requirements of any political ideology.

11. Both Evangelicals and Mainliners accept the "Christ transforming culture" perspective (Richard Niebuhr). Evangelical-Lutherans should reject this core fundamental assumption of both the left and the right. The role of the Christian is not to Christianize culture but to serve as a little Christ within one's vocation.

12. The self is not primarily a consumer of religious goods but, even in spiritual matters, is bound to will what one wills. Only law and gospel, properly distinguished, can free sinners from such self-centeredness. This is why sharing Jesus Christ, not primarily as example but as promise, directly in preaching, is the most important outreach that the church can offer to sinners.

13. Free choice, accepted by Scholasticism, Humanism, Roman Catholicism, Evangelicalism, and Mainline Protestantism, assumes the continuous subjectivity of the self. That view is incompatible with Evangelical-Lutheran teaching in which the accusing law and/or the hidden God mortifies and kills such subjectivity in order that the new person in Christ might walk by faith. In the Evangelical-Lutheran perspective, the chief heresy of our time is Pelagianism, the view that the sinner can save himself apart from grace, or semi-Pelagianism, the view that the sinner with a jumpstart from grace can grow more god-like. The answer to such heresy is that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. The Christian walks by faith not by sight, whether that sight be psychological wholeness, a "Christian family," material prosperity, or moral rectitude. It is faith, and faith alone, that both sets limits to the law and fulfills the law.

14. The gospel is not a repair job on the old being or God's acceptance of us "just as we are" but a summoning of the dead to life. In Christ we have new life, a new Lord, and a

new kingdom. It is because God loves the sinner that the sinner is reckoned by God as lovely. To have a Lord means that at the core of one's being one will be provided for and protected.

15. Sanctification, then, is not the goal but the source of good works. God is so for us in Jesus Christ that he becomes one with us — akin to fire as one with heated iron. Only preaching delivers these goods. Only this truth can extinguish that desire in which we think we can use God to control our fate.

16. The Christian seeks not the moral reform of the world but confronts the secular realm with the truths of the first commandment — challenging any and every idolatry by which secular government would justify its behavior.

17. In the Holy Scriptures God interprets sinners — simultaneously condemning them to hell and granting new, resurrected life. In God's written word, we are fitted into God's agenda, not vice versa.

18. The will as freed, paradoxically, is captivated to God, not self, and now has a new object and driving force. It fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things. And in that light, it lives outside of itself in God and neighbor, seeking the latter's well-being.

19. The doctrine of justification depends on the doctrine of election. The elect man is Jesus Christ. God's eternal election of the believer in Christ is made real in the actual proclamation of Christ as forgiveness and promise. The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone as a God- (not human-) centered theological perspective creates a new heart and right spirit within the sinner, so that the sinner in faith gives God the glory and praise which is His due.

## **CHRIST JESUS LAY IN DEATH'S STRONG BANDS**

*A sermon based on Luther's Hymn, 123 LW*

### **Choral Prelude: Christ Lag In Todesbanden"**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! This morning's sermon is based on a hymn written by Martin Luther in 1524. In this hymn, Luther teaches us how to view the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and how to draw our life and comfort from the fact that the crucified Son of God now lives as our Brother and Savior. As we sing and meditate on this hymn, keep in mind in what Luther says. *Christ bestows the gift of his resurrection, victory, and triumph to all who believe in him. Since we have been baptized in him and believe in him, it follows that even if you and I had one hundred thousand sins, deaths, and hells, it would still be nothing, because Christ's resurrection, victory, and triumph, which becomes ours through faith and baptism, are far greater*" (Klug II:15-16).

### **We Sing Stanza 1**

Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands for our offenses given." Here the hymn echoes the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 4 as he writes that Jesus "was *put to death for trespasses and raised for our justification.*" Throughout the Lenten Season, we have heard of Jesus' going to the cross as the Savior who was sent from the Father to suffer and die in our place, as our substitute. He did not go to the cross as one who was the victim of circumstances beyond His control. No, He willingly lays His life down for us, making Himself the victim of our sin and the death and judgement that sin brings. We confess it in the Creed: "who for us men and our salvation...was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried." Jesus dies as the sacrifice for our sin.

But the Gospel does not stop with Good Friday. The same Lord who was crucified on Good Friday was raised from the grave. "It was not possible" says Peter in his Pentecost sermon, "that He should be held by it (death)" (Acts 2:23). The Father cut loose the cords of death, raising up His Son who has answered for our sins and is now the source of life and salvation for all you trust in Him. Death could not hold the Price of Life in the icy grip of the grave and neither will it be able to imprison those who belong to Him. Our Redeemer lives and because He lives our graves will be vacated and in our flesh we will our God. Alleluia is our sing of victory!

### **We Sing Stanza 2**

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of God's victory over death: "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away all fears from all faces; The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 25:8). Jesus defeated death on death's own terms; He died under the condemnation of our sin. Our Lord did not vanquish death by an act of majestic power but by becoming "obedient unto death, even on a cross." When the Son of God tangled with death on Good Friday, "it was a strange and dreadful strife." Ever since the Fall, death had been devouring sinners for the

wages of sin is death, but now death bites onto the one Man who is without sin, the Man who came to destroy the works of the devil and set us free from a sure future in hell. Death gets gobbled up by Jesus' death. Jesus' death cracks death's jaw. C. S. Lewis puts it like this: "Death is, in fact what some modern people call 'ambivalent.' It is Satan's great weapon and also God's great weapon; it is holy and unholy; our supreme disgrace only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered" (The Business of Heaven. p. 328).

Jesus was Himself stung with the sting of death on the cross and now His death is the venom which poisons death. The open tomb proclaims that death is done in by Jesus' death. Remember those familiar words of the Apostle Paul: "Death is swallowed up in victory, O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57). Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!

### ***We Sing Stanza 3***

The Passover lambs, those perfect male lambs without spot or blemish, whose blood was to mark the doors of every Hebrew household in Egypt and whose flesh was to be eaten as food for the journey out of the land of bondage pointed to Christ, the Passover Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world. This Lamb is sent from the Father's heart and He comes not by compulsion but by love to save us. The cross is the altar where He is sacrificed for us. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" says the Apostle. Risen from the dead, the Lamb once slain lives never to die again. His blood now marks us as those whom He has purchased and won from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil. Our Paschal Lamb is the Resurrection and the Life and because He lives, we too shall live. Satan has no claim on us for we have been baptized into the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and so marked with his blood. This is our Easter victory.

### ***We Sing Stanzas 4-5***

The hymn invites us "to keep the festival," that is, to celebrate Easter. How are we to "keep the festival"? Listen again to the words of the Epistle for this Easter Sunday: "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you are truly unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and trust" (I Cor. 5:7-8). There is only one way "to keep the festival," to celebrate Easter and this is in repentance and faith. Repentance is more than regret, more than feeling sorry for your sins. Repentance is to die to sin and leave that sin dead and buried in Jesus' grave. To repent is to step out of the dark night of sin into the light of the Sun of Righteousness who shines with a brightness and glory that will never be eclipsed. When our Lord Jesus Christ rose up from the tomb on Easter morning, He left the world's sin buried in that dark cave. We are not grave robbers, exhuming decaying corpses. Leave your sin buried in the grave of your baptism where



you died and were buried with Christ. And in faith look to the crucified and risen Christ who bestows on us all the fruits of His cross and resurrection in His Word and Sacraments. He has left the grave and just as He met the Mary and the Disciples on Easter morning, He now meet us with His words of peace and blessing.

Faith feeds on Christ, He is the bread of heaven, given us to eat. He is our manna for the journey through this wilderness of sin and death to the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem where sin and death will be no more. C.S. Lewis says “God is a host who deliberately creates His own parasites” (The Business of Heaven, p. 327). God invites us to “feed on Him.” And on this Easter Day, we have come to the Lamb’s Table. “He is our meat and drink indeed,” He gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of our sins and with these gifts, He joins himself to us, giving us life in the midst of our dying and the pledge that because He lives we too shall live. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

## TETELESTHAI

*Professor emeritus Gerhard O. Forde preached this sermon on Good Friday in 1997 at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was part of a Tre Ore Service that included sermons on each of the seven words from the cross.*

John 19:30, "When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, 'It is finished!' And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

It is finished! Over. But not just ended. Completed. Perfected.

What is finished? A life, for one thing. The life of one who asked nothing of us but only gave himself to us. The life of one who chose us in spite of the fact that we did not choose him. The life of one who did not count equality with God as something to be snatched at, but became obedient unto death, even death on a cross; one who was despised and rejected, from whom we hid our faces. Now it is over. It ended the only way such a life could end among us—cast out, mocked, crucified. But it is not just over. It is finished, perfected, completed. He has reached in this awful place his goal. It is perfected just because he goes all the way to death. He goes the way none of us could go. He bears our sins in his body. He shows us in his body what sin is, who we are, what we think about God and what we do to one another. Because his life is over now, we can no longer say we don't know. We can no longer turn aside. The truth is out. That task is finished. As John put it elsewhere, we are convicted of sin because we did not believe in him.

It is finished! What is finished? A mission. God is finished with us. God's way with sinners comes to its end here. God has said here all he has to say to us as old beings, fallen creatures. His wrestling with us throughout the ages, his struggle to get us to see is over. He has tried in many and various ways through priest and prophet and king to get it said. Now he has finally done it. He has made his last move. He has no further plans. He has spoken to us through his Son, through this life that ends on the cross. He bowed his head and gave up his spirit. And so it is over. That is all God has to say. But again, it's not just over. It is completed. God gave his Son for this, as a ransom for sin. He gave him over into death, let him bear the iniquity of us all. It pleased God so to do because in the end he had one thing to say, the one thing we find so hard to believe: You are mine and I mean to have you back! And so it is finished, perfected, completed. This word from the cross is not finally a cry of defeat, but a cry of victory. There! It is done! It ought to be clear now that God wants nothing of us but that we should believe in him, trust him as a God of sheer mercy. The ancient foe is defeated, the power of sin is broken, death is robbed of its sting. God has found a way to be God even for the likes of us. He has found a way to save sinners.

So it is finished! What is finished? We are finished. You, friend, are finished. You are through. Never mind that things still go on pretty much as before. All that you were is ended, over—the refusal to take God at his word, the selfishness, the hatred, the prejudice, the grasping at being God, the despair at not being good enough, the desperate protecting of self and the fear of death. All of that has no purpose, no point, no future. You are through. God has put an end to all that. God has finally had enough. But it is not just over. It is completed. That's

because God has decided to make all things new. So hear this word from the cross: It is finished! And that's *final*! And all it takes now, miracle of miracles, is that you just be still, listen and wait. In that end is a new beginning. Amen!

## LUTHER ON MUSIC IN THE SCHOOLS

*From F. V. N. Painter's Luther On Education, pages 164–166.*

Luther's love for music was remarkable. He had a good voice, and played skillfully on the guitar and flute. Among the loveliest scenes in his happy home at Wittenberg are those in which, in company with chosen friends, he sought recreation from his arduous labors in the holy joys of sacred song. The tributes he paid to music are many and beautiful. He desired the young to be diligently exercised in vocal and instrumental music, and insisted on musical attainments as an indispensable qualification in the teacher. His influence on the musical culture of Germany is important.

By means of suitable hymns and tunes, many of which he composed himself, he popularized Church music and enabled worshiping congregations to unite in the singing. In the schools that were established under the influence of Luther and his co-adjutors, music formed a part of the regular course of instruction. It was honored not only as a useful adjunct in public worship, but also as a source of beneficent influence upon the character and life. The following passages—a few out of many—will serve to show Luther's regard for music:

"Satan is a great enemy to music. It is a good antidote against temptation and evil thoughts. The devil does not stay long where it is practiced."

"Music is the best cordial to a person in sadness; it soothes, quickens, and refreshes his heart."

"Music is a semi-disciplinarian and school-master; it makes men more gentle and tender-hearted, more modest and discreet."

"I have always loved music. He that is skilled in this art is possessed of good qualities, and can be employed in anything. Music must of necessity be retained in the schools. A school-master must be able to sing, otherwise I will hear nothing of him."

"Music is a delightful, noble gift of God, and nearly related to theology. I would not give what little skill I possess in music for something great. The young are to be continually exercised in this art; it makes good and skillful people of them."

"With those that despise music, as all fanatics are wont to do, I am not pleased; for music is a gift bestowed by God