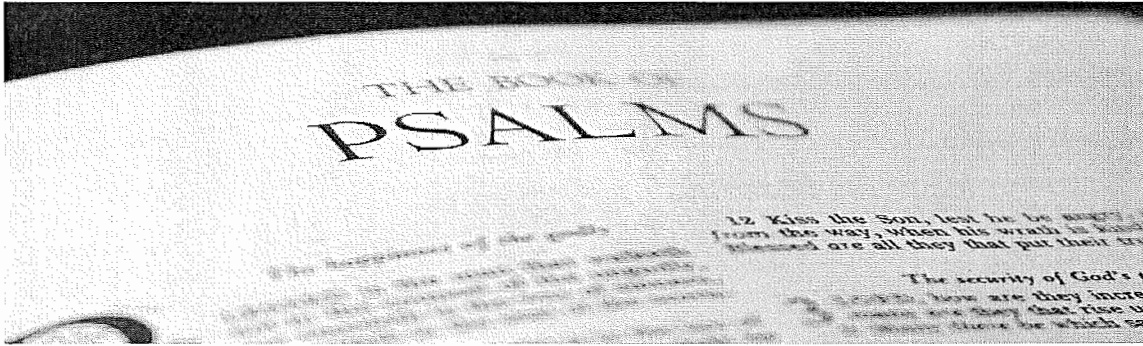


# Lenten Preaching Seminar



**Preaching the Penitential Psalms in Lent:**

## **"Lord, Have Mercy"**

Rev. Prof. John T. Pless  
Concordia Theological Seminary  
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## Preaching Repentance and Faith from the Penitential Psalms in Lent

The penitential psalms (6,32,38,51,102,130, 143) have long been associated with Lent. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) ordered that all seven psalms were to be prayed each day, while kneeling, during the Lenten Season or if this proved unfeasible at least on Fridays. In the Middle Ages, these psalms were associated with the seven deadly sins: Psalm 6 was said to address anger. Psalm 32 was associated with anger. Psalm 38 with gluttony. Psalm 51 with luxury. Psalm 130 was directed against envy and Psalm 143 against sloth.<sup>1</sup>

Luther lectured on the penitential psalms in 1517 and he revised these lectures and re-published them in 1525. Luther would provide a fuller exposition of Psalm 51 in 1532<sup>2</sup>. Luther would see sinfulness not merely as individual deeds but as a state of being that embraces all of man's existence which he has inherited from Adam; this is the root sin from which man cannot deliver himself.<sup>3</sup> In this commentary, Luther observes that David confesses not simply his adultery and murderous plot against Uriah but the corruption of all his all of his powers both inwardly and outwardly.<sup>4</sup> Luther writes "He [David] is not saying, 'My mother sinned when she conceived me'; nor is he saying, 'I sinned when I was conceived.' He is talking about the unformed seed itself and declaring that it is full of sin and a mass of perdition. Thus the true and proper meaning is this: 'I am a sinner, not because I have committed adultery, nor because I have had Uriah murdered. But I have committed adultery and murder because I was born, indeed conceived and formed in the womb as a sinner.' So we are not sinners because we commit this or that sin, but we commit them because we are sinners first. That is, a bad tree and bad seed also bring forth bad fruit, and from a bad root only a bad tree can grow" (AE 12:348).

Five years later in the Smalcald Articles, Luther is insistent: "The foremost office or power of the law is that it reveals inherited sin and its fruits" (SA III:2,4, K-W, 312). This statement is foundational for Luther's discussion of repentance. The law is retained, Luther says, in the New Testament in order to

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark A. Throntveit, "The Penitential Psalms and Lenten Discipline" *Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter 1987), 495-512. Throntveit writes "The connection between the psalms and these applications are tenuous, usually linked to a single word, and probably have more to do with the similarity in number between the psalms and the sins than with exegetical precision. More damaging in my opinion, is that such an application misses one of the crucial points these Psalms strive to make, namely the distinction between a cataloguing of specific sins, as in the individual laments and the recognition of sin as part of our human condition: 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.' (51:5), 'If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?' (130:3), 'for no man living is righteous before thee' (143:2b)." (500).

<sup>22</sup> For background on Luther's 1532 exposition of Psalm 51, see Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532*, trans. James L. Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 456-458. Brecht says "When confronted with the great Psalm 51 and its main thrust of repentance and justification, Luther felt that he was truly a student who needed the Holy Spirit as his schoolmaster. Nevertheless, his commentary may be called a masterpiece" (456).

<sup>3</sup> Here see Robert Kolb, "The Lutheran Doctrine of Original Sin" in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin* ed. Hans Maduene and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2014), 109-127. For an explicit treatment of "root sin" in Luther's interpretation of Psalm 51, see Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God: Biblical Narratives as a Foundation for Christian Living* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 104-106.

<sup>4</sup> See Kolb, "In breaking the fifth and sixth commandments, David has defied and despised the Lord and thus has become guilty of blasphemy against the first commandment. David thus served as an excellent example of the interconnectedness of individual sinful acts and their root in the rejection of God and doubt of his Word"- *Luther and the Stories of God*, 104.

work repentance: “Now this is the thunderbolt of God, by means of which he destroys both the open sinner and the false saint and allows no one to be right but drives the whole lot of them into terror and despair” (SA III:3, 2, K-W, 312). Luther equates the law with the hammer of which Jeremiah speaks (Jeremiah 23:29). In opposition to papal theology, Luther asserts that the law does not work an “active contrition” or a “contrived remorse” but a “passive contrition,’ true affliction of the heart, suffering, and pain of death” (SA III:3,2, K-W, 312). Contrary to the Antinomians Luther argues, repentance is produced by the law not the Gospel. But to the office of the law, “the New Testament immediately adds “the consoling promise of grace through the gospel” (SA III:3,4, K-W, 313). Where the law is preached without the Gospel there is only death and hell. The law never provides consolation.

The papists do not preach genuine repentance for they fail to see sin for what it. They continue to hold out hope for some uncorrupted part of man retaining the capacity to will the good.<sup>5</sup> This leads to what Luther condemns as an “active contrition” where penance is parsed into three parts: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. “In this way, they directed the people who come to penance to place confidence in their own works” (SA III:3, 13, K-W, 314). This Luther concludes is a Christless procedure: “Here we see how blind reason gropes around in the things of God and seeks comfort in its own work, according to its own darkened opinions” (SA III:3,18, K-W, 314).

Luther holds up John the Baptist as the model preacher of repentance for his preaching of the law condemns the totality of sin whether it is inward or outward (see SA III:3,30-32, K-W, 317). The repentance which John preaches is not uncertain or fragmentary (SA III, 3,36, K-W, 318). Likewise the forgiveness which John proclaims is inclusive for he preaches Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (SA III:3,38, K-W, 318). This repentance is not confined to a single episode in the life of the Christian; it is ongoing: “This repentance endures among Christians until death because it struggles with the sin that remains in the flesh throughout this life” (SA III:3, 40, K-W, 318)

The understanding of repentance laid out by Luther in the Smalcald Articles is evident in his exposition of the Psalter<sup>6</sup>. Luther says that the Psalms might be called a “little Bible” for they should us Christ and His kingdom: “The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ’s death and resurrection so clearly – and pictures his kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom –that it might be called a little Bible. In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enchiridion or handbook” (AE 35:254). Luther sees the Psalms as God’s words to us; words which we in turn are authorized to speak to him in lament and praise, confession and thanksgiving. Because the Psalms are God’s Word, they give us certainty in our speaking.

Luther sees the Psalms as universal. They apply to all the saints: “Hence it is that the Psalter is the book of all saints; and everyone, in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake, so that he could not put it better himself, or find anything better” (AE 35:256). When it comes to the preaching of repentance and faith, the Psalms are indispensable for in them, Luther says, “There you have a fine, bright pure mirror that

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<sup>5</sup> Here also see Article II in the Augsburg Confession and the Apology.

<sup>6</sup> For an introduction to Luther on the Psalms, see Carl Axel Aurelius, “Luther on the Psalter” in *Harvesting Martin Luther’s Reflections on Theology, Ethics, and the Church*, ed. Timothy J. Wengert (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 226-239.

will show you what Christendom is. Indeed you will find in it also yourself and the true *gnothi seauton*, as well as God himself and all creatures" (AE 35:257).

The knowledge of self of which Luther speaks is a knowledge of our sin. The knowledge of God is the saving knowledge of His mercy in Christ Jesus. Preaching the Psalms give us a true knowledge of self (repentance) and a true knowledge of God (faith).<sup>7</sup> Luther recognized that in the penitential psalms, God gives us the words to cry out to Him in our distress, lament our sins, and confess trust in the promise of His righteousness in which alone is our sure and certain hope.<sup>8</sup>

John T. Pless  
I.10.2017

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<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive guide to the preaching of the Psalms is to be found in Stanley Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). Greidanus includes extensive treatments of three of the penitential psalms (Psalm 51, pp. 240-271), Psalm 32 (pp.272-295), and Psalm 130 (pp. 364-379). Sample expository sermons are also included.

<sup>8</sup> On Luther's understanding of the lament psalms, see Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015). For exegetical and historical treatments of these psalms see Philip Johnson, "The Psalms and Distress" in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. David Firth and Philip Johnson (Downers Grove: IVP Academic Press, 2005), 63-84; Bruce Waltke, James Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith Crim and Richard Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).



Preaching the Penitential Psalms in Lent: Lord, Have Mercy!

Service	Psalm	Suggested Hymns
Ash Wednesday	51	<p>"O Lord, throughout These Forty Days"- 418 LSB</p> <p>"On My Heart Imprint Your Image"-422 LSB</p> <p>"To Thee, Omniscient Lord of All"-613 LSB</p> <p>"Your Heart, O God, Is Grieved"- 945 LSB</p> <p>"As Rebels, Lord, who Foolishly Have Wandered"-612 LSB</p>
Lent 1	6	<p>"Jesus, I Will Ponder Now"-440 LSB</p> <p>"O God, Forsake Me Not"-731 LSB</p> <p>"Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ"-565 LSB</p> <p>"My Song is Love Unknown"- 430 LSB</p>
Lent 2	38	<p>"Christ, the Life of All the Living"-420 LSB</p> <p>"Oh, How Great is Your Compassion"-559 LSB</p> <p>"Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me"- 683 LSB</p> <p>"Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow"-428 LSB</p>
Lent 3	32	<p>"Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing"- 421 LSB</p> <p>"Lord, to You I Make Confession"- 608 LSB</p> <p>"I Lay My Sins on Jesus"-606 LSB</p> <p>"In Silent Pain the Eternal Son"- 432</p>
Lent 4	130	<p>"When in the Hour of Deepest Need"-615 LSB</p> <p>"From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee"-607</p> <p>"Savior, When in Dust to Thee"- 419 LSB</p> <p>"O Christ, You Walked the Road"- 424 LSB</p>
Lent 5	143	<p>"Jesus, Refuge of the Weary"- 423 LSB</p>

		"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"- 609 LSB "Not Unto Us"-558 LSB "Stricken, Smitten, and Afflicted"-451 LSB "I Lie, O Lord, with Your Care"- 885 LSB
Good Friday	102	"Lamb of God, Pure and Holy"- 434 LSB "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth"-438 LSB "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded"-450 LSB "O Perfect Life of Love"-452 LSB

Liturgical Notes:

For Ash Wednesday, the order of service is in the *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (pp. 483 ff). The lectionary is that appointed for Ash Wednesday.

Two services are provided for Good Friday in the *LSB Altar Book*, ("Good Friday- Chief Service" pp. 511ff and "Good Friday- Tenebrae Vespers, pp. 525 ff).

For the midweek services, there are several options (Vespers, Evening Prayer, Service of Prayer and Preaching in LSB). In keeping with the penitential nature of Lent (and this sermon series), "Corporate Confession and Absolution, pp. 290 LSB would also be appropriate.

For the midweek services, the passion history is the lectionary. See *LSB Altar Book*, pp. 487ff.

Collects fitting each of the psalms are available in the *Concordia Psalter*.



Preaching Psalm 51 in Lent

Service	Psalm Verses/Sermon Theme	Suggested Hymns
Ash Wednesday	Psalm 51:1-2 "When Mercy is All That We Can Ask For"	"O Lord, throughout These Forty Days"-418 LSB "Today Your Mercy Calls Us"-915 LSB "Kyrie! God, Father in Heav'n Above"-942 LSB "Lamb of God, Pure and Holy"-434 LSB
Lent 1	Psalm 51:3-5 "God's Judgment is Justified"	"Lord, to You I Make Confession"-608 LSB "All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall"-562 LSB "Your Heart, O God, Is Grieved"-945 LSB "O Dearest Jesus"-439 LSB
Lent 2	Psalm 51:6-8 "God Seeks Truth"	"A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth"-438 LSB "On My Heart Imprint Your Image"-422 LSB "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain"-435 LSB "Jesus, I Will Ponder Now"-440 LSB
Lent 3	Psalm 51:9-13 "A New Creation by the Mercy of God"	"Jesus, Grant That Balm and Healing"-421 LSB "Upon the Cross Extended"-453 LSB "Renew Me, O Eternal Light"-704 LSB
Lent 4	Psalm 51:14-15 "God Opens Lips to Praise His Mercy"	"Christ, the Life of All the Living"-420 LSB "My Song is Love Unknown"-430 LSB "We Sing the Praise of Him Who Died"-429 LSB "O Sacred Head Now Wounded"-449 LSB
Lent 5	Psalm 51:16-19 "Sacrifices by the Mercy of God"	"Not All the Blood of Beasts"-431 LSB "O God, My Faithful God"-696 LSB "How Can I Thank You, Lord"-703 LSB

		"Lord Jesus Christ, the Church's Head"-647 LSB
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## Sermon Studies

### Psalm 51/Ash Wednesday

Luther came to understand that the knowledge of self without the knowledge of God leads to despair and that knowledge of God without the knowledge of sin leads to presumption.<sup>1</sup> Psalm 51 gives us both. The preacher may wish to set the psalm in the context of II Samuel 11:1-12:15, unfolding the dynamic of Nathan's proclamation of God's law to David which brings about the knowledge of self. See Ps. 51:3, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." Here the preacher could explore the connection what is entailed in this self-knowledge. Ash Wednesday is a day for self-examination. Recall the words of the Exhortation in *Corporate Confession and Absolution* (LSB, p. 290): "...it is proper that we diligently examine ourselves, as St. Paul urges us to do, for this holy Sacrament has been instituted for the special comfort of those who are troubled because of their sin and who humbly confess their sins, fear God's wrath, and hunger and thirst for righteousness. But when we examine our hearts and consciences, we find nothing in us but sin and death, from which we are incapable of delivering ourselves."<sup>2</sup>

The somber words of the Ash Wednesday liturgy announce to us what deep down we already know, that we are dust and to dust we must return. But the problem is not merely mortality. It is not just that we die but that we die as sinners under God's judgment. It is a judgment that is not misplaced; it is justified (Ps. 51:4). It is a verdict of condemnation that falls not simply on miscalculated choices and perverse deeds; it falls on me, my person. It falls on the one who was a sinner before he first cursed, lusted, lied, hated, or killed. It falls on the one who was brought forth in iniquity and conceived in sin (Ps. 51:4).<sup>3</sup>

To confess your sin is to agree with God's evaluation of your life. To confess your sin is to cease the futile attempt to self-justify. Rather it is to join with David in saying to God: "Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you might be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment" (Ps. 51:4). In confession, the sinner acknowledges that God is right. It is to agree with God's verdict: Guilty.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On this point, see Dennis Ngien, *Fruit for the Soul: Luther on the Lament Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 29.

<sup>2</sup> Note Hans-Joachim Iwand: "Our knowledge of God will only be true insofar as the essence of sin is taken into account and is understood. Likewise, our knowledge of sin will only be genuine if it is at the same time understood and recognized in connection with God's Being, for the one includes the other." – *The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther*, trans. Randi H. Lundell (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 26-27.

<sup>3</sup> "Misleading are the statements of H. Gunkel that the OT does not recognize the total depravity of human nature but only affirms weakness vis-à-vis what is good, and that thus the OT statements are 'a preparation for the church's doctrine of original sin.' On the contrary, the OT emphasizes the total depravity, the degeneracy of guilt of human existence with an altogether different force than the church's doctrine of original sin"-Hans-Joachim Kraus *Psalms 1-59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 503.

<sup>4</sup> Here see Hans-Joachim Kraus: "In a confession of guilt over against God himself, the petitioner submits to the righteous judgment of Yahweh"- Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 503.

But to speak of guilt requires some clarification today for another word has come to attach itself to guilt. So we speak of guilt feelings. Guilt is seen as the subjective reaction of the doer to the deed, i.e., how I feel about what I have done<sup>5</sup>. But this is not the case with the Scriptures use of the word guilt. In the Bible guilt has not so much to do with emotions as it does with what happens in a courtroom when a judge declares the defendant, “guilty.” The criminal may or may not have reactions of remorse, regret or shame. It doesn’t matter. The verdict of the judge establishes the reality. God’s word of law unerring establishes His judgment. There is no appeal.

To deny the verdict means that the truth is not in us says the Apostle John. But denial can never bring release. Only God’s absolution can release from the accusation of the law and unlock the sinner from his sins. Lutheran theology is nothing if it is not realistic!<sup>6</sup> Like the Scriptures, Lutheran theology does not start with notions about human freedom and the potential (great or small) that human beings have. Theologies that start with assumptions about human freedom end up in bondage<sup>7</sup>. Lutheran theology begins with man’s bondage in sin and ends up with the glorious liberty of the Gospel. The bondage to sin is not a slight defect that can be corrected by appropriate self-discipline. Neither is it a sickness that can be cured by the appropriation of the medication of regular doses of God’s grace. Sin is enmity with the Creator that carries with it God’s verdict of guilt and a divinely-imposed death sentence. To be a sinner is to be held captive in death and condemnation. The distance between God and humanity is not the gap between infinity and the finite but between a Holy God who is judge and man who is the guilty defendant.

Confession is the acknowledgment of this reality. The sin is named not in an effort to “get it off my chest” but to acknowledge it before the Lord to whom no secrets are hid. Where sin is not confessed, it remains festering and corrosive, addicting the sinner to yet another attempt at self-justification. Confession admits defeat and so leaves the penitent open for a word that declares righteousness, a verdict which justifies. That word is called absolution. It is absolution alone, says Gerhard Forde that is the answer to absolute claim of God who is inescapably present to the sinner.<sup>8</sup>

It is the absolution, the word by which God declares sinners righteous for Christ’s sake, that the bones which God has broken with the hammer of His law are brought to rejoice. The Gospel alone puts joy and gladness into the ears of sinners (Ps. 51:8). For it is this verdict that the Judge of heaven and earth is hiding His face from our sins and scrubbing us clean from all

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<sup>5</sup> On this point see the discussion of Werner Elert, *The Christian Ethos*, trans. Carl Schindler (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 163-173. Elert traces the subjective understanding of guilt to F. Schleiermacher.

<sup>6</sup> Here note the German New Testament exegete, Udo Schnelle’s comment on Pauline anthropology: “his view of human beings is not merely pessimistic, but realistic” in *Theology of the New Testament* translated by M. Eugene Boring (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2009), 319.

<sup>7</sup> On this point see Gerhard Forde, *The Captivation of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 21.

<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Forde, “Absolution: Systematic Considerations” in *The Preached Word: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament*, edited by Mark C. Mattes and Steven Paulson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 153.

iniquity (Ps. 51:9). The flipside of God's hiding His face from our sins, is His causing His face to shine on us (Numbers 6:24-26).<sup>9</sup>

This salvation is completely the work of the triune God. In forgiving sins, the God who created the heavens and the earth is bringing forth a new creation. Just as by His Word God called all things into existence at the beginning, so now by His Word He is creating a clean heart and renewing a right spirit (Ps. 51:10; also see II Corinthians 4:6<sup>10</sup>). Hans-Joachim Kraus observes "The petitioner knows that he is entirely dependent on the merciful activity of God. From God's mercy alone he expects the blotting out of the guilt which is looked on as corruption (v.5) that totally permeates the human being. Only God can eliminate the threatening, dark wall of separation, sin, that separates God and human beings and blot out what is intolerable. Only by God's creative, renewing power can the heart be cleansed and led to a new obedience. Also the future is in the hands of God alone. If God sends the spirit of willingness and constancy, then the psalmist is saved from fickleness and unfaithfulness. Even the witness of thanksgiving (v.15) is exclusively left in the hands of powers furnished by Yahweh. Everything is God's act. The *sola gratia* shines forth from every verse. No gift, no condition comes between God and man. No sacrifice has an effect on Yahweh. Only the pleading and trusting human being is the sacrifice, he who with body and life surrenders himself to God, who has nothing to offer but a heart that is bruised and broken (v.17). The human being presents himself to God for what he is. For him nothing remains except to plead for forgiveness and confess his guilt. In its extreme of knowledge and wisdom (v.6) which has been won from the prophetic word of the OT, Psalm 51 stands out in the Psalter. Its peak statements are unique. And its fullness of insights is incomprehensible".<sup>11</sup>

Only where there is the forgiveness of sins can God be rightly honored and praised. Apart from God's forgiveness, we open our own mouths and we know what spews forth. It is not the confession of Christ's righteousness, but blasphemous assertions of our own righteousness. The sin of the heart defiles the lips. Here the preacher may wish to draw out connections with the Second Commandment and its explanation in the *Small Catechism*.<sup>12</sup> Christ's absolution is the key which unlocks lips to praise His name by confession of His righteous deeds.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this point, see Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, trans. J.R. Porter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 98.

<sup>10</sup> Here see Mark Seifrid on II Corinthians 4:16, "Paul simultaneously defines salvation as an act of creation and presents creation as an act of salvation. They are bound together not only in their like action but also in their form: just as the creation of light is the work of the word of God, so the Gospel is God's effective word that creates light in the darkness the human heart. In this effective word, that performs what it says, God's person and work are revealed. Salvation is coming to know and confess God as the creator of our life."- *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 200.

<sup>11</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1-59*, 507.

<sup>12</sup> For more on this, see John T. Pless, *Praying Luther's Small Catechism* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016), 19-21. Also see Albrecht Peters, *Commentary on Luther's Catechisms: Ten Commandments*, trans. Holger Sonntag (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2009), 149-165.

In Psalm 51, David links this praise of God with sacrifice (also see Hebrews 13:15-16). Sacrifice is not a means that we use to placate a wrathful God. On account of Christ's once and for all sacrifice for sin on the cross, the category of sacrifice gets re-located as we see in Romans 12:1-2. Now by the mercies of God, the redeemed offer their bodies as living sacrifices not in order to achieve God's favor or to merit reconciliation with Him but for the sake of the neighbor. This is nicely put by Steven Paulson: "God is keeping his Christians and their churches in this old world as a sacrifice of the body for the neighbor. He does this along with the appeal that they endure suffering, not for their salvation, but for the sake of the old world, that it might be sustained for now, and that the preacher arrives in time to those who have not heard."<sup>13</sup> Here the preacher could draw out the implications of the Christian life as one of sacrifice as the answer or response of the one who is justified by faith. Good works are completely withdrawn from the equation of justification before God. They are relocated in the world for the well-being of the neighbor. God doesn't need or want your sacrifice (Ps. 51:16), but the neighbor needs it and so freed from the burden of self-justification we are liberated to live for the sake of the world.

#### Psalm 6/Midweek in Lent I

Psalm 6 narrates the psalmist own experiences of life under the wrath of God, languishing which permeates his very being. "What the psalmist wants restored is a life of continual praise of Yahweh, not simply a continued existence. The experienced 'realities' move from Yahweh's wrath, via sickness, to death. The prayer is for grace and steadfast love to a life of praise and hope in Yahweh's steadfast love and will to fellowship."<sup>14</sup>

Frederick Gaiser observes that "Psalm 6 is the prayer of one 'shaking in terror,' a person in great distress who turns to God for healing."<sup>15</sup> Psalm 6 is a lament<sup>16</sup>. Luther sees lament as an element of repentance in this psalm as the psalmist discloses his own desperate need for God's consolation and deliverance from turmoil, distress and affliction: "In all trials and afflictions man should first of all run to God; he should realize and accept the fact that everything is sent by God; whether it comes from the devil or from man. This is what the prophet does here. In this psalm he mentions his trials, but first he hurries to God and accepts these trials from Him;

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Paulson, "The *Simul* and the Two Kingdoms: The End of Time Twice" *Logia* (Reformation 2016), 20. The whole of Chapter 11, "The Fruit of Faith" based on Romans 12:1-2 in Paulson's book, *Lutheran Theology* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 228-243 is especially helpful in preaching the "new obedience" of which David speaks in Psalm 51:16-19.

<sup>14</sup> Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick Gaiser, *Healing in the Bible: Theological Insights for Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Here the preacher is advised to study Oswald Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament" in *Caritas et Reformatio: Essays on Church and Society in Honor of Carter Lindberg*, ed. David Whitford (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 211-220. On the place of lament in the Psalms, see Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. Crim and R. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 165-280.

for this is the way to learn patience and the fear of God. But he who looks to man and does not accept these things from God becomes impatient and a despiser of God" (AE 14:140).

The preacher might address the "why question" on the basis of Psalm 6<sup>17</sup>. In doing so, we do not engage in speculation but in the proclamation of repentance and faith. Speculation, it seems, is more comfortable than repentance and lest risky we imagine rather than faith in a God who kills and makes alive. But speculation cannot penetrate God in His absolute hiddenness; it will finally yield no answers. In providing pastoral care to folk vexed by questions concerning predestination, Luther directs us away from God in His hiddenness. This is precisely where the "why" questions lead. Instead Luther points to God's mercy revealed in the manger and the cross, coming at God from below. The table talk recorded by Caspar Heydenreich on February 18, 1542 sets forth Luther's response to those who use the doctrine of election for speculation rather than faith. Luther warns against an "epicurean" approach that is nothing more than fatalism. Such a fatalistic approach casts aside the Passion of Christ and the Sacraments. It is the work of the devil to make us unbelieving and doubtful. It would be foolish of God to give us His Son and the Scriptures if he wished us to be uncertain or doubtful of salvation.

God is truthful and His truth gives us certainty. A distinction must be made, Luther asserts, between the knowledge of God and the despair of God. We know nothing of the unrevealed God, the hidden God. God blocks the path here. "We must confess that what is beyond our comprehension is nothing for us to bother about."<sup>18</sup> We are to stick with the revealed God. "He who inquires into the majesty of God shall be crushed by it."<sup>19</sup> God gives us His Son so that we may know that we are saved. Hence we are "to begin at the bottom with the incarnate Son and with your terrible original sin."<sup>20</sup> We are to stick with Baptism and the preaching of God's Word.

Turning to his own experience, Luther recalls the consolation he received from Staupitz when vexed by the question of election. Staupitz directed him to the wounds of Christ wherein we have the mercy of God revealed; God is surely there for us. The example of Adam and Eve is warning against every attempt to find God apart from His Word for such an endeavor is more than spiritually frustrated; it ends in unbelief for God wraps Himself in His promises of mercy and grace and He will not let sinners access Himself in place other than His Gospel: "Without the Word there is neither faith nor understanding. This is the invisible God. The path is blocked here. Such was the answer which the apostles received when they asked Christ when he would

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<sup>17</sup> Here see, John T. Pless, "Answering the 'Why' Question: Martin Luther on Human Suffering and God's Mercy" in *Mercy in Action: Essays on Mercy, Human Care and Disaster Response*, ed. Ross Johnson (Saint Louis: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, 2015), 45-55.

<sup>18</sup> Theodore Tappert (editor), *Luther: Letters of Spiritual Counsel* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, nd), 132.

<sup>19</sup> Tappert, 132.

<sup>20</sup> Tappert, 133.

restore the kingdom to Israel, for Christ said, 'It is not for you to know.' Here God desires to be inscrutable and to remain incomprehensible."<sup>21</sup> Apart from the baby of Bethlehem who goes on to suffer and die as the man of Calvary, God remains an evasive presence whose ways are inexplicable and whose power is condemnation.

No comfort is to be found in the "hidden God" (*deus absconditus*) but only in the "revealed God" (*deus revelatus*) that is in Christ<sup>22</sup>. Hence preaching begins below at manger and cross and not above in the majesty that terrifies. "Paul...desires to teach Christian theology, which does not begin above in the utmost heights, but below in the profoundest depths...If you are concerned with your salvation, forget all ideas of law, all philosophical doctrines, and hasten to the crib and his mother's bosom and see him, an infant, a growing child, a dying man. Then you will be able to escape all fear and errors. This vision will keep you on the right way. He (Luther) says the same in the briefest possible formula: 'To seek God outside of Jesus is the Devil.'"<sup>23</sup> We are given only to hear the "preached God," the *Deus revelatus* as Luther puts it in *The Bondage of the Will*: "The God who is preached and revealed to us, who gives himself to us and is worshipped by us, differs from the unpreached, unrevealed, not given, not worshipped God...The preached God purifies us from sin and death, so that we become holy. He sends his son to heal us. The God hidden in his majesty, however, does not weep bitterly over death and does not abolish it, rather this hidden God effects life, death, and everything in between. As such he has not become restrained in his Word; rather he has reserved for himself freedom above everything else."<sup>24</sup>

Luther notes that "when God seizes man, man is by nature weak and disheartened, because he does not know whether God is taking him in hand out of anger or in grace." (AE 14:140). Hence Luther argues that we must distinguish between God's wrath revealed against sin and the

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<sup>21</sup> Tappert, 132.

<sup>22</sup> On God's hiddenness, see the excellent treatments by Steven Paulson, "Luther's Doctrine of God" in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, L'ubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 187-200 and Oswald Bayer, "God's Hiddenness" *Lutheran Quarterly* XXXVIII (Autumn 2014), 266-279. Bayer writes "The dreadful *deus absconditus* does not let himself be tamed to an open horizon of meaning; he attacks and leads into affliction [*Anfechtung*]. His hiddenness besieges us in the experience of blind and furious natural catastrophes, irredeemable injustices, innocent suffering, starvation and murder, in each and every war, and the experience of incurable disease. 'God' remains in these things, mostly anonymous and almost always veiled in the 'divine passive' (*passivum divinum*), no lover of life but the accuser and denier- easily confused with the devil – in contrast to his revealed will and the gospel" (273). Also see, Joshua Miller, *Hanging by a Promise: The Hidden God in the Theology of Oswald Bayer* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

<sup>23</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther: An Introduction to his Thought*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 235.

<sup>24</sup> Cited from LW 33:319 by Notger Slenczka, "God and Evil: Martin Luther's Teaching on Temporal Authority and the Two Realms" *Lutheran Quarterly* XXVI (Spring 2012), 19-20. Commenting on this Luther text, Slenczka says "The way God works in the rubble of history might as well be called fate; either way, no person will ever understand the motives and intentions of the force which drives history" (20). In history the works of God remain "opaque" (21) as they are hidden to human beings. Compare with Werner Elert's discussion of "fate" in *An Outline of Christian Doctrine*, trans. Charles M. Jacobs (Philadelphia: The United Lutheran Publication House, 1927), 33-36.



chastisements that He sends to His children as a kind Father who disciplines those that He loves. This is the tension (or the *Anfechtung*<sup>25</sup>) which Luther sees expressed in this psalm. Psalm 6 is an example of God's twofold work, that is His alien work of condemning sin and His proper work of forgiving sin. God does His alien work for the sake of His proper work. He terrifies so that finally He might console. He kills in order to make alive. In short, Psalm 6 reflects what Luther had earlier called the *theologia crucis* as the Christian life is lived *sub contratio*, under contrary appearances so that life is found in death, victory in defeat.

Lament is not simply a cry of undirected despair. It is directed to God even in those times when God seems distant and unresponsive. As Bayer puts it "Lament directed to God is always related to past and future praise."<sup>26</sup> This is surely the case with Psalm 6 as is evidenced by the psalmist's affirmation in verses 9-10 that the Lord has accepted his plea and his enemies will be put to shame. Lament is recognition of human neediness as one is under attack and has no place you to turn but Christ alone. We recognize our powerlessness over sin, death and the devil but such recognition does not end in despair but the Lord whose promises are sure. Thus Luther writes "Blessed are they who experience this in life, for every man must finally meet his end. When man thus declines and becomes as nothing in all his power, words and being, until there is nothing but a lost and condemned and forsaken sinner, then divine help and strength appear as in Job 11:11-17: 'When you think you are devoured, then you shall shine forth as the morning star.' (AE 14:141). In this weakness, we are made strong (see II Cor. 12:10).

#### Psalm 38/Midweek in Lent II

Psalm 38 reveals "a truly penitent heart" (AE 14:156) says Luther. In this psalm, we hear the voice of one who recognizes the enormity of sin under God's wrath. Luther's commentary on Psalm 38 captures something of the weightiness of divine condemnation as he writes of how the arrows of the law have penetrated the heart: "Because of the consciousness of my sin. For the arrows of God and His angry words make real the sin within the heart. That causes restlessness and terror in the conscience and in all the powers of the soul, and it makes the body sick throughout" (AE 14:157). But then, immediately Luther adds "Where this is the case, things are right with man, for the same thing happened to Christ" (AE 14:157).

Luther sees Psalm 38 as descriptive of the condition of man in sin. While also of Christ who was made sin for us and bore the curse of the law in His own body (see Galatians 3:10-13; II Corinthians 5:21).

The language of Psalm 38 is intense and rapidly paced. Gaiser notes "On quick reading, Psalm 38 may give the impression of being a stream-of-consciousness outburst by someone in

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<sup>25</sup> Here see Athina Lexutt, "In Praise of *Anfechtung*" *Lutheran Quarterly* (Winter 2013), 439-442. Also note Dennis Janz, "To Hell (and Back) with Luther: The Dialectic of *Anfechtung* and Faith" in *Encounters with Luther: New Directions for Critical Studies* ed. K. Stjerna and B. Schramm (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2016), 17-29.

<sup>26</sup> Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament," 218.

distress. The words seem to tumble forth, moving from God to self to others, from petition to lament to trust, with little direction or order. It is true that all those elements are present, even true that the themes recur in intermittent mixture, but a more careful reading will demonstrate a literary and rhetorical order that is hardly haphazard – an order that will prove to be therapeutic.”<sup>27</sup> Luther also sees a particular movement and structure in this psalm.

Luther’s reading of this psalm focuses on the potency of the law, that is, God’s “arrows” (v. 2) which have embedded themselves in the conscience terrified by sin. God Himself is the archer who aims His arrows at the heart. The Reformer is of the opinion that the poet (David) is not a hardened sinner for if that were the case, “the arrows would glance off as from a hard stone” (AE 14:157) as they do when they hit the smug and secure. Rather it is David, the believer, who is under attack. He feels the heaviness of sin and gives a visceral description of its effects not only on his soul but also in his body and his social relationships.

The secure sinner does not recognize his sin. David, on the other hand, recognizes his sin, he claims the consequences as own. As we have observed earlier, Luther speaks of the need for a knowledge of self and he recognized that the Psalter in particular provides this knowledge. In his exposition of verse 5, Luther returns to this theme: “But it is foolishness when a man does not know himself but imagines that he is altogether well. The arrows, however, reveal this foolishness when a man does not know himself but imagines that he is altogether well. The arrows, however, reveal this foolishness that man may see how blind he has been in knowing himself. Hence this is the meaning: When I recognized my own foolishness and lack of self-understanding, I also recognized how very foul and stinking my wounds really are” (AE 14:158).

Those who say they have no sin deceive themselves says the Apostle in I John. Decorated tombs conceal the sight of rotting bodies. Those who are blind but claim to see demonstrate how blind they are indeed. The law is preached that the lie might be broken and the truth of human sin revealed. Only then can sin be confessed for what it is.

The confession of sin is not a work which merits forgiveness. Confession is the recognition of our neediness before God; our acknowledgment in words of verse 4 that our sins are “too heavy for me.”. Without the knowledge of sin in all of its ugliness, there will be no need for the redemption provided by Christ alone.

Luther does not leave this psalm before confessing the gracious work of God in Christ Jesus: “It is God’s nature to make something out of nothing, hence one who is not yet nothing, out of him God cannot make anything. Man, however makes something else out of that which exists; but this has no value whatever. Therefore God accepts only the forsaken, cures only the sick, gives sight only to the blind, restores life only to the dead, sanctifies only the sinners, gives wisdom only to the unwise. In short, He has mercy only on those who are not in grace. Therefore no proud saint, no wise or righteous person, can become God’s material, and God’s purpose

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<sup>27</sup> Gaiser, *Healing in the Bible*, 75.

cannot be fulfilled in him. He *remains* in his own work and makes a fictitious, pretended, false, painted saint of himself, that is, a hypocrite" (AE 14:163). For Luther there is no continuum from nature to grace, from vice to virtue; the movement is from death to life.

### Psalm 32/Midweek in Lent III

Psalm 32 is a beatitude<sup>28</sup>. It speaks of blessedness for the one who stands righteous before God in the forgiveness of sins. Blessedness consist not in being without sin for all have sinned and fall short of God's glory (see Romans 3:23) but of the forgiveness of sins which we have freely on account of Christ. "No one is without unrighteousness; before God all are unrighteous, even those who practice works of righteousness and imagine that thus they can escape from unrighteousness; for no one can rescue himself. Therefore blessed are they- not those who have no sin or work their own way out but only those whom God forgives by grace" (AE 14:148).

Pop spirituality asserts that you must learn to forgive yourself. Such advice is both blasphemous and cruel for only God can forgive sin. When we attempt to forgive ourselves we are deifying the self which is idolatry.<sup>29</sup> Thus Luther comments on verse 2: "...not blessed but unblessed is he who does not impute sins to himself, is well pleased with his himself pious, has no qualms of conscience, considers himself innocent, and takes this for his comfort and hope. The apostle says (I Cor. 4:4): 'I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.' This is the same as saying: 'Blessed is he to whom God does not impute sin, of whose sin God is not mindful.' They are those who constantly impute manifold sins and transgressions to themselves" (AE 14:148). Neither the Psalmist nor the Reformer could ever be accused of promoting a gospel of self-esteem! Blessedness is found not in self-rendered declarations of righteousness but in Christ's verdict: "Your sins are forgiven."

Luther sets the truthfulness of God in both the law and the gospel in contrast to the deceitfulness of the human heart. Hermann Sasse once observed that where people cannot recognize the truth they cannot live without the lie. Luther writes on the depth and potency of this lie, the deceit which the psalmist speaks of in v. 2: "Therefore he calls it deceit of the spirit, not a deception which a person commits or deliberately devises against himself or against another, but one which he bears and with which he is born" (AE 14:148-149). This lie is suppressed (see Romans 1:18). This lie, Luther says "can be covered and adorned with a good life, so that man begins to think he is pure and free, while beneath lies the wicked filth which theologians call 'self-love.'" (AE 14:149). It is the task of preaching the law to unmask this pious lie. In fact, Luther asserts that is impossible to recognize of overcome the lie except through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>28</sup> Here see A. Weiser: "The poet wrote two 'Beatitudes' with which the psalm opens his heart's blood"-*The Psalms*, trans. Herbert Hartwell (Piladelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 283.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Luther's understanding of the idolatry of self, see Michael Lockwood, *The Unholy Trinity: Martin Luther Against the Idol of Me, Myself, and I* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2016).

Where sin is not recognized and confessed, the conscience is afflicted and this affliction has bodily consequences (vs. 3-4). The heavy hand of God's judgment will not let up. Luther says "This is due to an evil conscience, which envisions only God's wrath, as if He were standing over me with a club; hence there can be no peace of heart" (AE 14:4).

In contrast, to the futile attempts to cover one's own sin with a façade of self-righteousness, to know the truth is not to hide one's sin (v. 5). Failure to live by faith in the God who justifies the ungodly leads only to the dead-end of self-justification. Luther writes "This is in contrast to those in whom deceit of spirit produces such false confidence that they can unabashedly justify and excuse themselves. Because of this they get into quarrels with other people and lapse into pride, anger, hatred, impatience, condemning, and slander. Their innocence makes them guilty, and yet they claim to have done justly and rightly and to have acted fairly. They conceal deeply their own iniquity, for they look at their own righteousness and do not want to confess their sins to God sincerely and without deceit of the inner spirit. Righteous people, however do not hide their iniquity, do not become angry, do not grow impatient even when they are wronged; for they do not feel that they can be wronged; for they find no righteousness in themselves. These are the blessed to whom God remits iniquity and cancels it because they confess it. Since they do not hide and cover their sin, God covers and hides it" (AE 14:150).

Trials and afflictions will come. Luther sees these as the "rush of great waters" in v.7. The one who does not attempt to survive the onslaught of this attack by appealing to his own righteousness will stand secure. "...that person is holy who stands not on his own holiness but on the Rock of Thy righteousness which is Christ. Everyone who is his own accuser, punisher, and judge is founded on Him when many blows and cruel tribulations come over him like a great flood of water, or when he is persecuted on account of his humble life" (AE 14:151). Paradoxically, the old Adam seeks to rescue himself from condemnation through self-justification; the believer accuses himself: "By my own fault, by my own most grievous fault!"

The psalmist's confession of sin leads to a confession of the Lord's mercy as the God who forgives sin and is Himself a hiding place for sinners (v.7). God's grace delivers and brings salvation. Standing in this salvation we do not trust in our own wisdom but rely on God's Word just as Abraham, Luther says went out from his homeland (Gen. 12:1ff) with only God's promise.

Luther takes the reference to the horse and mule who are without understanding and, therefore, can be controlled only with a bit and bridle (v.9) as a picture of those who are without Christ. "I do not like those who must be forced by law, like animals with a bridle, but those who serve Me freely and willingly without the pressure of the Law, in spirit and in love" (AE 14:153).

In preaching Psalm 32, Luther invites the preacher to proclaim genuine confession as an accusation of self-based on the truth of God's law. Such confession is no recital of self-pity in which we rehearse how we have other have made us victims. Confession is never rationalization. Confession is agreement with God's verdict of guilt. It opens the way for

another verdict; an absolution: "Your sins are forgiven you." The one who hears and trust in this verdict is blessed for the sake of the suffering and death of God's Son.

#### Psalm 130/Midweek in Lent IV

The significance of Psalm 130 for Luther is evident in his hymn, "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee" (607 LSB).<sup>30</sup> This hymn, says Claus Westermann, "shows that in this psalm particularly the Reformers found again their own understanding of fear and grace. When Luther renders vv.4 and 7b: 'Though great our sins and sore our wounds...His helping mercy hath no bounds,' he gives the same weight to the praise of God's grace that the psalm does."<sup>31</sup>

"We are all in deep and great misery, but we do not all feel our condition" (AE 14:189). But Psalm 130 is the prayer, Luther argues, of one who feels the misery brought about by sin: "These are the noble, passionate, and very profound words of a truly penitent heart that is most deeply moved in its distress. In fact, this cannot be understood except by those who have felt and experienced it" (AE 14:189). The psalm speaks not simply to the need for rescue from challenging circumstances of life but for the ultimate need for deliverance from sin.

External afflictions such as sickness, financial woes, family difficulties, impending death and the like may indeed accentuate the power of the law's internal accusation of the conscience, magnifying the reality of sin in one's life. Luther sees Psalm 130 as a prayer for deliverance from this distress. It is the voice from the depths where sin presses one to despair. Bayer observes "...the lament does not become silent in light of the promise of an answer, rather, it becomes louder and more sharp. The distress articulated in the lament gains painful depth."<sup>32</sup>

In Thesis 18 of the Heidelberg Thesis, Luther argues, "It is certain that man must despair of his own ability before he is prepared to receive the grace of Christ" (AE 31:51). Here the preacher should keep in mind the distinction between "utter" and "ultimate" despair<sup>33</sup>. Utter despair is to despair of self. Ultimate despair is to despair of God. In utter despair, we recognize our inability to save ourselves; we are brought to the recognition that the only place to look to for rescue is the Lord whose steadfast love and plenteous redemption are sufficient (v. 7).

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<sup>30</sup> See Robin Leaver, *Luther's Liturgical Music: Principles and Implications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 142-152. Leaver notes "It is this hymn, one of the first Lutheran hymns to have been written that expounds the essence of Reformation faith and theology, that the response to the Law and the Gospel is not 'do acts of penance' but 'repent and believe.'" (152).

<sup>31</sup> Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 121.

<sup>32</sup> Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament," 212.

<sup>33</sup> See Gerhard Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 65-67. Also note Iwand: "The despair of one's own actions before God is therefore exactly the opposite of the despair that drives men to destruction and to despair of the forgiveness of sins. For this 'hellish journey of self-recognition' in which I really know how things stand with myself brings home the truth to me. The bitter truth about myself is the price I pay for being rewarded with the blessed truth about God"- Iwand, *The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther*, 57-58.

Luther brings out the evangelical thrust of this psalm. If God were to act as an accountant and keep record of sin, no one would stand (v.3). No creature can forgive sins. "What good would it do if all creatures were gracious to me and disregarded and forgave my sins, but God marked and retained them?" (AE 14:190). Likewise Luther says "what does it matter if all creatures heap sins upon me and hold them against me as long as God forgives and pays no attention to them?" (AE 14:190). Citing Romans 8:31, Luther asserts that it is God alone who is for us.

Preaching on Psalm 130, the preacher has the opportunity to clarify the "fear of God." Luther does not see the fear of God merely as a reverential awe of God but a recognition of God's power over life and death. Recall Luther's language in the Conclusion to the Ten Commandments in the Small Catechism: "Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them [His Commandments]." It is only in the fear of God that faith in His forgiveness is possible. Luther treats the fear of God in vv.4-5 in relationship to the ongoing battle between the "old man" and the "new man" which continues in this life. The old man always stands under the judgment of God so "As long as the old man lives, the fear, that is the crucifixion and execution of the old man, must not cease; nor dare the judgment of God be forgotten. And whoever would live without this crucifying and fear of the judgment of God, does not live aright" (AE 14:190).<sup>34</sup>

Then Luther goes on to speak of the life of the new man constituted in faith now living in opposition to the old man: "Now he describes the hope, the life of the new man, and how one should walk in it. These two things are taught in all the psalms, indeed, in all of Holy Writ. For God deals strangely with His children. He blesses them with contradictory and disharmonious things, for hope and despair are opposites. Yet His children must hope in despair, and perish; for fearing is nothing else than the beginning of despair, and hope is the beginning of recovery. And these two things, direct opposites by nature, must be in us, because the two natures are opposed to each other, the old man and the new man. The old man must fear, despair, and perish; the new man must hope, be raised up, and stand. Both of these are in one person and even in one handiwork at the same time. Just as a wood carver, by chiseling and taking away the wood that does not belong to the carving, enhances the form of his work, so hope, which forms the new man, grows in the midst of fear that cuts down the old Adam" (AE 14:191). Here Luther is speaking of the *simul*, the fact that the Christian is at the same time both "saint and sinner" as can be seen from Romans 7:7-25.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> For a good example of how to preach the fear of God, see Mark Mattes, "From Fear to Love or Fear *and* Love of God" *Lutheran Forum* (Easter, 2003), 49-51.

<sup>35</sup> For an instructive defense of the Lutheran reading of Romans 7, see Mark Seifrid, "The Voice of the Law, the Cry of Lament, and the Shout of Thanksgiving" in *Perspectives on our Struggle with Sin: 3 Views of Romans 7* ed. Terry Wilder (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 111-171. The *simul* is not an excuse for continuation in sin but rather a lament that one utters with confidence in the promise of deliverance in Christ. So Bayer speaks of Romans 7:24-25a as an "anthropology of answered lament"- "Toward a Theology of Lament," 212

Another theme that invites the preacher's attention in this psalm is that of waiting in hope.<sup>36</sup> Living under the cross, the believer does not retreat in despair or turn to his own merits but looks to Christ alone. Hope is grounded in God's sure word of promise (v.5) This hope, Luther says "is nothing else than relying on God and letting His will stand in every respect" (AE 14:193). God's promises of redemption are sure for the sake of Christ's death and resurrection. In Him there is "plenteous redemption" (v. 7). The outcome of Romans 7:25, the victory we have in Christ Jesus is the hope for which Psalm 130 bids us wait. This waiting "is not a sign of capitulation and weakness" for "According to the Old Testament faith, hope is legitimate only where God remains the sole Lord, in activity, in gift and promise, and where man anticipates the future in no other way than as the free gift of God."<sup>37</sup>

### Psalm 143/Midweek Service in Lent V

Weiser says that Psalm 143 portrays is the song of lament of one who prays to God to preserve his endangered life in the face of "outward and inward helplessness."<sup>38</sup> Luther accents the helplessness of the one who makes supplication to God. To stand before God is always to be in need and utterly dependent of Him: "The life of a saint is more a taking from God than a giving; more a desiring than a having; more a becoming pious than a being pious" (AE 14:196).

The psalmist's appeal to God is made not on the basis of fragmented and polluted human righteousness but on the sure foundation of God's reliable righteousness. Human righteousness is untrustworthy. Luther says human righteousness is not the "real thing," it is not genuine: "So the life, work, and righteousness of the conceited saints is, in comparison with the righteousness and the work of the grace of God, only a semblance and a deadly, harmful fraud if it is held to be the real thing. This is not the truth, but the real truth is that of God, who gives the genuine and fundamental righteousness, namely faith in Christ. If the servant of God, who is without doubt in the state of grace, cannot stand before God's throne but takes refuge in mercy, where will the proud stay; who, in the blind arrogance of their works and good life, feel they can merit, reward, favor, and God's righteousness? They also do not fear God's judgment on the good works, but only on the evil ones, just as though they knew what God's judgment will pronounce to be good or evil in their case." (AE 14:197).

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<sup>36</sup> Here also see Bayer on the tension between patience and urgency. The Christian is strained to the breaking point as he holds on to God's promise even as he hopes while recognizing "the painful difference between need and promise....In this tension of waiting and hoping on the grounds of promise, the lament's seriousness and urgency (its sighing and waiting, cf. Rom. 8:18ff) exists: 'We await you, O Son of God.' "-"Toward a Theology of Lament," 212.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, trans. Keith Crim (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 158

<sup>38</sup> Weiser, *The Psalms*, 818.

The preacher might spend some time drawing out the contrast between human righteousness and the righteousness of Christ.<sup>39</sup> It is natural to think of repentance as sorry for and regret over evil deeds. Here Luther says that the Psalm is teaching us to repent also of our “good” works that become the object of our trust rather than God’s righteousness in Christ. Luther’s point is, of course, that good works- even those done by the Christian energized by God’s grace- are not sufficient for salvation. Even when we claim that these deeds are done with a pure motive we are left on slippery ground.

Psalm 143 conflates the supplication for God’s mercy with an appeal for God’s deliverance from the enemies. Luther sees these enemies as those who oppose Christ and His Gospel (see Philippians 3:18-19): “That is, my enemies, who always oppose me with their wisdom and righteousness. Every Abel has his Cain, every Isaac, his Ishmael; every Jacob, his Esau; and Christ, His Judas, who wars against his soul, especially in those things which pertain to the soul, namely, faith and righteousness. The proud in heart will not stand for it that their work and righteousness is regarded as nothing. Therefore they persecute the truly pious, who live only in the faith and righteousness of God” (AE 14:197). The *tentatio* of persecution from enemies, isolation and rejection face the psalmist to the point that he sits in darkness like one long dead (v.4).

Yet here we see that Luther’s *oratio, meditatio, tentatio* works in reverse. Now the *tentatio* leads to the *meditatio*, which in turn issues in *oratio*. This meditation is on the works of the Lord (see Psalm 1). Rather than pondering his own works, the believer recalls and dwells on what God has done: “I have taken no notice of man’s works and words, no matter how brilliant and dear they are to the world, for I know that they can save no one and are of no use except to contribute toward false and vain glory. All comfort, help, and blessedness are due to Thy work alone” (AE 14:199). Luther’s reflections on this kind of meditation echoes Paul in I Corinthians 2:2 where he asserts: “For I have decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

Meditation on the works and words of God lead to prayer as the psalmist stretches his hands out to God, thirsting for Him (v.6) and makes supplication for mercy, deliverance, and comfort in Christ.

Luther anticipates the charge that he is so exclusively focused on Christ that he has nothing else to say: “Now someone might say to me: ‘Can’t you ever do anything but speak about the righteousness, wisdom, and strength of God rather than of man, always expounding Scripture from the standpoint of God’s righteous and grace, always harping on the same string and

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<sup>39</sup> Here also see theses 8, 11 and 16 in Luther’s Heidelberg Theses (AE 31:40). Also Forde, *On Being a Theologian of the Cross*, 43- 48, 59-63.



singing the same old song? To this I answer: Let each one look to himself. As for me, I confess: Wherever I found less in Scriptures than Christ, I was never satisfied; but whenever I found more than Christ, I never became poorer. Therefore it seems to me to be true that God the Holy Spirit does not know anything besides Jesus Christ, as He says of Him (John 16:13-14): 'He will not speak of Himself, but He will take of Mine and declare it to you.'" (AE 14:204). For Luther it is all about Christ. For in Him "God establishes the righteousness of faith in opposition to works" (AE 14:203).<sup>40</sup>

### Psalm 102/Good Friday

Psalm 102 shows some parallels to Psalm 22 and Isaiah 52:13-53:11 making it appropriate as a text for Good Friday. The psalm itself is a prayer of one who is afflicted. Not only is there bodily disease and impending death there is loneliness and rejection. Luther sees this psalm as descriptive of the person who shares in Christ's suffering and His resurrection victory. While classified as a penitential psalm, this psalm has all the characteristics of a lament. It clearly falls within the description provided by Bayer: "Although the full, uninterrupted praise of God's goodness, which we praise God without affliction and temptation, will happen only at the end, the praise of God is nevertheless assumed in some way in every lament. If God could not be praised at all – even in tears- then humanity would not be able to lament. At least there would be no address for the cry of lament. The lament would be without direction or orientation; it would be aimless and only-self-related lamenting and sooner or later fall silent. Lament directed to God is always related to past and future praise."<sup>41</sup>

The lament is directed to God in v. 1: "Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you." Luther says that the petitioner's prayer "is his desire for grace" and his cry is "his story of misery" (AE 14:178).<sup>42</sup> Because life is transitory (v.3), the psalmist invokes God to act swiftly (v.2).

As he often does in his reading of the penitential psalms, Luther sees the suffering as both inward and outward: "For this psalm, like the others, first describes the inner suffering which the saints bear because of their sins in a penitent spirit, then also the persecution by others on account of this same crucified life" (AE 14:179). Here the preacher may wish to elucidate the connection with the suffering of Christ. He did not suffer for His own sin. He is the sinless Son of God who takes our sin into His own body and suffers vicarious (see Galatians 3:13-14; I Peter 2:22-24) and so He suffers under the wrath of God for us, crying out as one forsaken by God.

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<sup>40</sup> The preacher will do well to carefully study "Faith and Works" in Iwand, *The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther*, 57-68.

<sup>41</sup> Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament," 218.

<sup>42</sup> Also note Luther's sermon on II Corinthians 15:23 from October 20, 1532: "Therefore, every Christian must learn that this sighing and lamenting will be heard and makes a noise in heaven, that the Lord will come and help" – cited by Bayer, "Toward a Theology of Lament," 217.

The cry of dereliction is not pretend; it is real (see Matthew 27:46 and note connection with Hebrews 5:7).

Luther notes the contrast drawn by the psalm between the quickly passing life of the sinner under God's wrath (vs. 3-11) and God's own everlastingness (v. 12) and the mercy of this God whose name endures forever (v. 13). This God gives a future in a kingdom that is without end. Oppressed temporarily in this short life, Christ's people "comfort themselves with the thought that they are oppressed with Christ temporarily here on earth, but not on the Last Day" (AE 14:186).

John T. Pless

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Psalms of the Fifth Petition: Confession and Absolution

Psalm	Pastoral/Theological Notes
6	PCC prescribes this psalm for use with those ensnared by addictions (363) and verses 1-9 in cases where an abortion is being contemplated or has already taken place (191). Here also see “O Lord, Heal Me: The Primal Witness of Psalm 6” in <i>Healing in the Bible</i> by Frederick J. Gaiser (Baker Academic Press, 2010), 6-20, Ngien, 1-23, and “Psalm 6” in <i>When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms</i> by Ingvar Flóysvik (CPH, 1997), 27-46.
32	Psalm 32 is assigned for use with those struggling with homosexual lusts and behavior (371). Verses 1-5 are provided for the pastoral care of those overtaken by guilt and shame (308). Verses 1-7 are included for use at times of separation or divorce (401)
38	This psalm is provided for use in situations where reconciliation between Christians is sought (328). Verses 1-11, 15, 21-22 is used at times of loneliness (292) and in ministry to those tempted by homosexual lusts and acts (372).
51	Verses 1-12 is suggested for times of chronic illness (206), guilt and shame (307), and homosexuality (370). See Ngien, 25-83.
102	Kraus describes Psalm 102 as the “Prayer of One Afflicted” (Kraus II:281). “Trust in the unchangeable, ruling God and hope in Yahweh’s intervention are elevated to become prophetic proclamation....In view of the last intervention of Yahweh, there is in Psalm 102 an echo of the comprehensive promise of the prophet Joel” (Kraus II:287). See Joel 2:28ff.
130	Psalm 130 is used for the Commendation of the Dying (85), the Committal Service (127), the Burial of a Stillborn or Unbaptized Child (139), a Sudden of Accidental Death (263), for Depression and

	Discouragement (322), for Those in Prison (507). Verses 1-5 are used at the Time of Death (238). See Advent sermon, "Fear Born of Forgiveness" (Ps. 130:4) in <i>Ha! Ha! Among the Trumpets</i> by Martin Franzmann, 20-30
143	This psalm is suggested for ministry in situations where there is entanglement with occult practices and/or demonic affliction (356). Verses 1, 7-12 are assigned for times of spiritual doubt and affliction (286). Verses 1-2, 5-8 are used for End of Life Decisions (223)

The penitential psalms (with the exception of Psalm 32) are a sub-category of the psalms of lament. Claus Westermann suggests the pattern of the structure of lament has at its core the description of deliverance in Exodus 1-15. He observes this chiasmic structure after the description of the deplorable conditions in Exodus 1-2:

- A. The people lament (2:23)
- B. God hears their cry (2:24)
- B'. God delivers them by calling Moses (3:1-4:31) and defeating Pharaoh through plague (5:1-11:10), Passover (12:1-13:36) and miraculous crossing of the Red Sea (13:17-14:31)
- A'. The people respond with a hymn of praise (15:1-21)

This pattern is reflected, at least in part, in the penitential psalms

(See C. Westermann, "The Role of Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament" *Interpretation* 28 (1974), 27 and *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 72-75).

The penitential psalms are listed for meditation prior to individual confession and absolution in LSB (292-293)

-Prof. John T. Pless  
II. 18 2016

## Points from Luther's Commentary on Psalm 51 (AE 12:303-410) for Pastoral Theology

For background of Luther's work on Psalm 51 in 1532 see "The Teacher of Justification" in Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532* (Fortress), 451-459.

1. Luther says that David speaks of a twofold theological knowledge in this psalm, a theological knowledge of man and of God. Hence "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison" (311).
2. Note Luther's definition of the knowledge of sin: "it means to feel and to experience the intolerable burden of the wrath of God" (310). Luther writes "...the sinful man is one who is oppressed by his conscience and tossed to and fro, not knowing where to turn. Therefore we are not dealing here with a philosophical knowledge of man, which defines man as a rational animal and so forth. Such things are for science to discuss, not theology. So a lawyer speaks of man as an owner and master of property, and a physician speaks of man as healthy or sick. But a theologian discusses man as a sinner" (310). Luther says that David speaks of a twofold theological knowledge in this psalm, a theological knowledge of man and of God. Hence "The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison" (311). Also see Ngien's discussion of Luther's distinction between man the "conscious" sinner and man the "unconscious" sinner (Ngien, 38).
3. Psalm 51 shows us the depth of sin. Luther observes that the psalm teaches us not to look superficially at the external sins but go deeper to the root of sin, that is, to see "the whole nature, source, and origin of sin." (305) "Therefore our sin is that we are born and conceived in sin" (310)
4. The psalm sets forth the two elements in true repentance: recognition of sin and recognition of mercy-fear of God and trust in mercy (305). On the development of Luther's understanding of repentance, see Korey Maas, "The Place of Repentance in Luther's Theological Development" in *Theologia et Apologia: Essays in Reformation Theology and its Defense Presented to Rod Rosenblatt* edited by Adam Francisco et al (Wipf & Stock), 137-154.
5. Luther uses Psalm 51 to clarify the distinction between *deus absconditus* and *deus revelatus*. *Deus absconditus* is what Luther calls the "absolute God" or the "naked God." Luther writes "Let no one therefore, interpret David as speaking with the absolute God. He is speaking with God as He is dressed and clothed in His Word and promises, so that from the name 'God' we cannot exclude Christ, whom God promised to Adam and the other patriarchs. We must take hold of this God, not naked but clothed and revealed in His Word, otherwise certain despair will crush us" (312). Also N.B. Here see G. Forde's discussion in "Absolution: Systematic Considerations" in *The Preached God* (152-162), noting Forde's argument that "The only solution to the problem of the absolute is actual absolution" (152). Also see Steven Paulson, "Luther on the Hidden God" *Word & World* (Fall 1999), 363-

371 and Oswald Bayer's distinction between God's "understandable wrath" and His "Incomprehensible Wrath" in *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, 196-201.

6. Unbelievers speak with God "outside His Word and promises, according to the thoughts of their own hearts; but the Prophets speak with God as He is clothed and revealed in His promises and Word. This God, clothed in such a kind appearance and, so to speak, in such a pleasant mask, that is to say, dressed in His promises – this God we can grasp and look at with joy and trust. The absolute God, on the other hand, is like an iron wall, against which we cannot bump without destroying ourselves. Therefore Satan is busy day and night, making us run to the naked God so that we forget His promises and blessings shown in Christ and think about the judgment of God. When this happens, we perish utterly and fall into despair" (312). Outside the Word and promises of God, sinners devised their own means of accessing God.
7. David has been crushed by the hammer of the Law (316). His terrorized conscience does not turn back to the Law or flee to the naked God but to the mercy of God. Thus Luther can speak of David's prayer for mercy "as though he were praying against the whole Decalog" (314). Commenting on verse 1 of Psalm 51, Luther says that "at the very beginning David shows an art and a wisdom that is above the wisdom of the Decalog, a truly heavenly wisdom, which is neither taught by the Law nor imagined or understood by reason without the Holy Spirit" (314). Note the section on "Guilt and Shame" in the PCC: "For the Christian who is driven by the Law to despair of the mercies of Christ Jesus, the pastor 'must set the whole Decalogue aside' (Luther) and make the most of the Gospel" (PCC, 307). This is taken from Luther's letter to Jerome Weller where he says "When the devil attacks and torments us, we must completely set aside the whole Decalogue" (Tappert, *Luther's Letters of Spiritual Counsel*, 86). Without this heavenly wisdom, Luther says that trouble consciences are like geese, they see the hawk coming and they attempt to escape by flying when they should run. They see the wolves threatening and they attempt to run when they would have a better chance of escaping if they were to run (368)
8. The divine wisdom of the Gospel is that God is merciful to sinners for the sake of Christ Jesus. To pray for mercy as David does is not to trust in oneself or works. "God does not want the prayer of a sinner who does not feel his sins, because he neither understands nor wants what he is praying for" (315). Such praying, Luther says, is to be compared to a beggar who cries out for alms and when offered money begins to brag of his riches (315). "Thus mercy is our whole life even until death; yet Christians yield obedience to the Law, but imperfect obedience because of the sin dwelling in us. For this reason let us learn to extend the word 'Have mercy' not only to our actual sins but to all the blessings of God as well: that we are righteous by the merit of another; that we have God as our Father; that God the Father loves sinners who feel their sins – in short, that all our life is by mercy because all our life is sin and cannot be set against the judgment and wrath of God" (321). David is like a beggar, he asks for forgiveness for no other reason than that he is a sinner (334)

9. The psalm sets forth these two principal teachings of Holy Scripture: First, that our whole nature is condemned and destroyed by sin and cannot emerge from this calamity and death by its own power. Second, God alone is righteous. Political, domestic or ceremonial righteousness will not free us. Even a prince or husband who is righteous in the execution of his office, must confess “Against Thee only have I sinned; Thou only art righteous” (339). Also see *The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther* by Hans Joachim Iwand.
10. To confess your sin is to cease the futile attempt to self-justify. Rather it is to join with David in saying to God: “Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you might be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment” (Psalm 51:4). In confession, the sinner acknowledges that God is right. It is to agree with God’s verdict: Guilty. “When sins are thus revealed by the Word, two different kinds of men manifest themselves. One kind justifies God and by a humble confession agrees to His denunciation of sin; the other kind condemns God and calls Him a liar when He denounces sin” (341). Note Johann Georg Hamann: “With respect to my life I have justified God and accused myself, indicated and discovered myself – all for the praise of the solely good God, who has forgiven me, in the blood of his only begotten Son, and in the testimony which the Spirit of God confirms in his word and in my heart” (quoted by Bayer, *A Contemporary in Dissent: Johann Georg Hamann as a Radical Enlightener*, 50). Also Elert: “We must agree with the men of the Bible that God’s word concerning the question of guilt (Psalm 51:4; Romans 3:4) is decisive; and this means not only that His decree is infallible, but also that His whole course of action is blameless. The recognition of this fact, despite our inability to fathom all His motives is expressed in the biblical idea of holiness (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). It means not merely that He can stand every moral test, but that His moral quality is an unsearchable mystery and superior to every human judgment” (Werner Elert, *An Outline of Christian Doctrine*, 40-41).
11. Luther’s interpretation of Psalm 51 reflects the reality that the whole of the Christian life is lived baptismally, in repentance: The Christian “is not formally righteous”...that is, righteous according to substance or quality. Rather the Christian’s righteousness is “according to his relation to something, namely, only in respect to divine grace ...which comes to those who acknowledge their sin and believe that God is gracious and forgiving for Christ’s sake” (329). The bath or washing of which the psalm speaks in verse 2 is continual as while sin cannot condemn us it continues to vex us and ever threatens to drag us down in unbelief (329)
12. “Human nature such as it is cannot be without the worship of God; and if it does not have the Word, it invents services, as the examples of both the heathen and the pope show” (361)
13. Only when the Gospel is preached does the ear of the sinner “hear joy and gladness” and the bones that God has broken rejoice. Luther says that both “the man of thought as well as the man of action” are in error (369). Justification by faith alone brings an end to both justifying thinking and justifying action (see O. Bayer, *Living by Faith*, 25). Luther: “As far as we are concerned , the whole procedure in justification is passive. But when we are most holy, we want to be

justified actively by our works. Here we ought to do nothing but this, that we open our ears, as Psalm 45:10 tells us, and believe what is told us. Only this hearing is the hearing of gladness, and this is the only thing we do, through the Holy Spirit in the matter of justification” (368). Also see “Faith and Promise” in *Lutheran Theology* by Steven Paulson (114-137)

-Prof. John T. Pless  
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## Luther on Psalm 51 (AE 12:303-410)

- The failure to understand sin and grace makes it impossible to comfort timid consciences and give consolation. “How can anyone give consolation if he does not understand what grace is?” (304)
- The psalm sets forth the two elements in true repentance: recognition of sin and recognition of mercy-fear of God and trust in mercy (305)
- Luther observes that the psalm teaches us not to look superficially at the external sins but go deeper to the root of sin, that is, to see “the whole nature, source, and origin of sin.” (305)
- “Therefore our sin is that we are born and conceived in sin” (310)
- Note Luther’s definition of the knowledge of sin: “it means to feel and to experience the intolerable burden of the wrath of God” (310). Luther says “...the sinful man is one who is oppressed by his conscience and tossed to and fro, not knowing where to turn. Therefore we are not dealing here with a philosophical knowledge of man, which defines man as a rational animal and so forth. Such things are for science to discuss, not theology. So a lawyer speaks of man as an owner and master of property, and a physician speaks of man as healthy or sick. But a theologian discusses man as a sinner” (310)
- Luther says that David speaks of a twofold theological knowledge in this psalm, a theological knowledge of man and of God. “The proper subject of theology is man guilty of sin and condemned, and God the Justifier and Savior of man the sinner. Whatever is asked or discussed in theology outside this subject, is error and poison” (311).
- Hence David is not speaking of “the absolute God” but God clothed in His promises. “We must take hold of this God, not naked but clothed and revealed in His Word; otherwise certain despair will crush us” (312).
- Satan is bust day and night making us run to the naked God so that we forget His promises and blessings shown in Christ and think about God and the judgment of God...and fall into despair (312)
- When David prays “Have mercy on me” it is as though he were praying against the whole Decalog (314)
- God does not want the prayer of a sinner who does not feel his sins, because he neither understands nor wants what he is praying for” (315). Such praying, Luther says, is to be compared to a beggar who cries out for alms and when offered money begins to brag of his riches (315)
- When the hammer of the Law has crushed the conscience, the the divine wisdom of the Gospel is to be grasped (316)
- “Amid these terrors of conscience, therefore, you must see to it that these terrified minds do not judge according to their nature and sense, since this would plunge them into despair” (316)
- “Thus mercy is our whole life even until death; yet Christians yield obedience to the Law, but imperfect obedience because of the sin dwelling in us. For this reason let us learn to extend the word ‘Have mercy’ not only to our actual sins but to all the blessings of God as well: that we are righteous by the merit of another; that we have God as our Father; that God the Father loves sinners who feel their

sins – in short, that all our life is by mercy because all our life is sin and cannot be set against the judgment and wrath of God” (321)

- David feels sin and the wrath of God and yet prays for mercy. Luther says that “Reason does not know this teaching, but the Holy Scriptures teach it as you see in the first verse of this psalm” (321)
- God is not wrathful to those who acknowledge their sins (322)
- Luther writes of David: “He takes hold of God the Promiser and turns the whole vision of his heart upon His mercy” (323)
- “Therefore both statements are true: ‘No Christian has sin’; and ‘Every Christian has sin.’” (328)
- The Christian “is not formally righteous”...that is, righteous according to substance or quality. Rather the Christian’s righteousness is “according to his relation to something, namely, only in respect to divine grace ...which comes to those who acknowledge their sin and believe that God is gracious and forgiving for Christ’s sake” (329). The bath or washing of which the psalm speaks in verse 2 is continual as while sin cannot condemn us it continues to vex us and ever threatens to drag us down in unbelief (329)
- David’s prayer is prayed against spiritual smugness (329)
- Two parts of justification: grace revealed in Christ that we have a gracious God and conferral of the Holy Spirit who enlightens us against the defilements of flesh and spirit (331)
- A judge customarily attaches a punishment to the admission of guilt but God does not want to be a judge. “He has replaced the Law with the preaching of the Gospel...”(334)
- David is like a beggar...he asks for forgiveness for no other reason than that he is a sinner (334)
- In this psalm, David speaks not merely for himself but for all the saints (336)
- The psalm sets forth these two principal teachings of Holy Scripture: First, that our whole nature is condemned and destroyed by sin and cannot emerge from this calamity and death by its own power. Second, God alone is righteous. Political, domestic or ceremonial righteousness will not free us. Even a prince of husband who is righteous in the execution of his office, must confess “Against Thee only have I sinned; Thou only art righteous” (339)
- “When sins are thus revealed by the Word, two different kinds of men manifest themselves. One kind justifies God and by a humble confession agrees to His denunciation of sin; the other kind condemns God and calls Him a liar when He denounces sin” (341)
- Sin is not against a God who is a tyrant or murderer but a God is merciful and kind (347)
- David does not say that he is a sinner because he is a murderer or adulterer. “But he wraps up all of human nature as in one bundle and says, ‘I was conceived in sin’” (348)
- Note Luther’s definition of original sin. He is a sinner not because he sinned when he was conceived but because he was conceived as a sinner (348)
- The doctrine of original sin is most difficult teaching of this psalm (351)

- “Human nature such as it is cannot be without the worship of God; and if it does not have the Word, it intends services, as the examples of both the heathen and the pope show” (361)
- This psalm is an example of justification in David and in all people (367)
- “Troubled consciences are like geese. When the hawks pursue them, they try to escape by flying, though they could do it better by running” (368)
- Hearing is the only thing we do in justification (368)
- The hearing of gladness is there in preaching and sacraments (369)
- Because God delays His help, our hearts make a wrathful idol of God, who is always like Himself and constant (374)
- Forgiveness of sins depends simply on the promise which faith accepts (377)
- The new heart comes by divine creation (379)
- God opens lips (393)
- Everything the person does pleases God because the person pleases God (401)
- God rejects sacrifices done with the purpose of placating Him (402)

Prof. John T. Pless  
II. 12. 2012



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-Prof. John T. Pless  
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