

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday after Easter, April 8, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns 202, 207:1-2, 210, 411:1-5, 201:1-3.

Lessons: Job 19:25-27, 1 Corinthians 15:33-49, Matthew 22:1-14.

Sermon Text: Isaiah 25:1-9.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last Sunday you heard these words as our Old Testament lesson. Can you see why this is one of the Old Testament lessons selected by the church as a lesson for the day we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus? After 12 chapters in which Isaiah foretold God's judgment on many nations and mankind in general, God now gives some real comfort and hope. The Word of God assures mankind that

THE LORD WILL SWALLOW UP DEATH FOREVER

- 1. God planned marvelous things for his beloved children, and**
- 2. His power accomplished all those things through Jesus Christ.**

Last Sunday you heard that Jesus Christ conquered death. He came back to life after being in the grave three days. Today we find that promise in the Old Testament, given long ago to mankind. Because of that joyous promise, Isaiah praises the Lord God: ***“O LORD, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name.”*** Look at how Isaiah shows the power of God. He begins talking about the power of God by praising him. ***“For in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.”***

We especially see God's promises concerning the redemption of mankind.

Many cities were made primarily of stone. So to destroy these cities would take a great deal of power. But God made cities to be heaps of rubble and fortified towns to be ruined. For example, God destroyed the city of Jericho when he gave Canaan to his chosen people. He has also totally ruined, destroyed, and demolished other fortresses of the unbelievers so that they were not even cities. Many cities and towns named in the Bible just don't exist anymore. They may just be hills today, which, when archaeologists dig into them, show that they were once cities and have been totally destroyed and abandoned.

Although God directly destroyed cities when he was giving the Promised Land to his chosen people, today we can see God's power in earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes and other displays of his power destroying cities, bridges, and other works of men. ***“You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt.”***

God has ***“done marvelous things, things planned long ago.”*** God promised these things long ago, starting with the first promise to Eve and Adam to send a Redeemer from sin and death and the promise to Satan, to destroy him. But God's salvation was planned “from eternity”.

Isaiah just repeats these promises here. God has done these things, which were promised long ago. God's promises are not like the promises of politicians who are seeking to be elected. They are not like the promises of anyone here on earth, as sincere as men may intend for them to be.

Not only has God destroyed the works of men who oppose him, but he has also helped the poor and needy and Isaiah makes God's promises very personal. ***“You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert.”*** A refuge is a place of safety. Here God says it is a place of safety for the poor. This refuge is a place of safety for the needy in his distress. A storm beating on a wall doesn't destroy it like a storm beating on a ship can wreck the ship.

David speaks of God's comfort in this way: ***"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me."*** Psalm 138:7 (NIV)

God provides shelter from the storm. Especially in the upper Midwest we know the importance of refuge – a safe place ***"from the storm"***. Whether it is a winter storm, with its snow, cold and wind, or a tornado-spawning thunder-storm, we know the importance of a safe place, a refuge, a shelter.

God provides shelter from the heat of the desert. Just as God causes the shadow of a cloud to ease the burning of the sun, so he is able to instantaneously overcome all the raging and the triumph of his enemies. The psalmist gives us the picture of the importance of shade in Psalm 121. After he tells us ***"My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth"*** he goes on to say ***"The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul."*** Psalm 121:2. 5-7 (KJV)

Because Isaiah tells us of the great power of God, he tells us ***"Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you."*** When you remember the chosen people of God coming through the desert on their way from Egypt, you may recall how the pagan nations, when they heard of the children of Israel, were especially fearful of them, because the knowledge of the power of their God had spread before them. And on judgment day, all people must acknowledge and honor God, though it is too late to make a difference for unbelievers.

Isaiah acknowledges the power of the wicked but assures us that their power will be overcome. ***"For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled."*** God silences the uproar of the unbelievers, and their song is made silent.

When we think about ***"the breath"***, the voice of the wicked, ***"the song of the ruthless"*** and Satan with his allies attacking ***"like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert"*** we realize that God's enemies are just like powerless sounds. Jeremiah spoke of the power of ***"Pharaoh king of Egypt"*** in this way: he ***"is only a loud noise"*** Jeremiah 46:17 (NIV)

You know, sometimes we wish that would happen sooner rather than later in our lives. We want God to prevail completely over the heathen, over Satan and his evil legions now. But we must recognize and acknowledge that it happens in God's right time, in God's good time. The wicked, the ruthless may sing in joy or think that they are going to win, but God will finally silence their rejoicing, their ***"song"***.

Then we have a reminder of what happened on Calvary, in Jerusalem. ***"On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-- the best of meats and the finest of wines."*** Jesus suffered and died. But from his death came the feast of salvation. Isaiah describes it as a most spectacular banquet. We might even think of a vague reference of the blood and the flesh of Jesus Christ in the Lord's Supper. It is no accident that in our bulletins we regularly describe the Lord's Supper with the words "Jesus of Nazareth invites you to a banquet in his honor".

The feast of God's salvation is intended for all peoples. No one is excluded from the Gospel promise. And when ***"all peoples"*** come to confess their faith in Jesus Christ and become his disciples, they too, can share in the Sacrament he instituted for his disciples on the same night he was betrayed.

But the message of the Gospel, the Word of the forgiveness of sins is to be offered and given to all peoples, at all times, without exception.

And then come the Words of eternal life. ***"On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken."*** These verses tell of the grace of the Gospel and the ultimate victory and glory which is the gift of that grace.

At our resurrection this will have its full accomplishment. ***"When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"*** 1 Corinthians 15:54 (NIV) This is a prophecy of salvation and grace brought to us by Jesus Christ. Isaiah is one of many prophets who spoke of the grace that is to come through Christ Jesus.

Our text speaks of ***“the shroud that enfolds all peoples”*** and ***“the sheet that covers all nations”***. This is a veil of darkness, the darkness of sin. Isaiah speaks of this darkness in chapter 60: ***“For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee.”*** Isaiah 60:2 (KJV)

This is the darkness of sin, darkness caused by sin that covers all people.

The unbelievers in the world think that they have all knowledge and wisdom. But without Jesus Christ, everyone lacks true knowledge, for ***“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”*** Psalm 111:10 (NIV)

Without the knowledge of what Jesus Christ did for us, no one can come to believe in what Jesus Christ did for us. ***“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** Romans 10:17 (NIV)

Without Jesus Christ, everyone is really in the darkness of sin. Only God can remove that darkness, that shroud, that sheet and bring one into the light of the Gospel. Jesus says ***“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*** John 8:12 (NIV)

Paul writes to the Corinthians: ***“Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts”*** – the hearts of the unbelieving Israelites, the unbelieving Jews. 2 Corinthians 3:15 (NIV)

This darkness is spiritual blindness, brought upon mankind by their own natural depravity. But Isaiah says God will ***“swallow up death”***. Paul writes to Timothy that this gospel ***“has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*** 2 Timothy 1:10 (NIV) In heaven we will experience the final joy and comfort. ***“The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*** Revelation 7:17 (NIV) And that is repeated in these words: ***“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*** Revelation 21:4 (NIV) In that way God will finally remove the cause of all the troubles which men are suffering here on earth.

So Isaiah pictures the final victory of the Holy Christian Church. This is the joy of resurrection unto eternal life, which is so beautifully pictured in First Corinthians Chapter 15 – and many other places in Scripture! After the final victory over death the people of God, delivered from the power of death, will praise the Lord throughout eternity.

Finally Isaiah concludes triumphantly: ***“The LORD has spoken.”*** That is the final word! God – Jehovah – has spoken! On the Day of Judgment, God will finally rescue believers from this world and all its oppression!

Look at the coming joy: ***“In that day they will say, ‘Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the LORD, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.’”***

Can there be anything more exciting than final deliverance? Last week we were reminded that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Today we are reminded that we – and all who believe in Jesus Christ as our only Savior from sin – will be raised from the dead and delivered unto eternal life!

May that joyous resurrection message be yours today and forever! Amen.