

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday After Christmas, January 5, 2020

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

Hymns: 291, 292:9, 414, 412, 644.

Lessons: Psalm 144, Ephesians 5:1-12, Luke 3:1-18.

Sermon Text: Psalm 1

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Where do you spend your time? Where do you stand? Where do you walk? Where do you sit?

Are you receiving all the blessings you should – all the blessings the Lord wants you to receive? What do you take joy in? Are you missing out on something? Let's see what Psalm 1 tells us about

THE BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN WHO ...

- 1. We see a picture of the “ungodly”.**
- 2. We see how the blessed one, the man of God, lives.**
- 3. We see the continued blessings of the believer.**

Blessed, happy, filled with blessings. This Psalm is talking about the believer, the child of God, the godly one, who strives to live in harmony with God's will. The love of God, his mercy and grace are just some of his blessings. The forgiveness of sins has been called God's greatest gift and blessing.

“The godly”, “the righteous”, those who are blessed as God's beloved children, fight against sin. They love God's Word and they produce fruits of faith.

Because they are guided by God's Word, they do not guide their lives by the false values of the unbelieving world. They seek daily to follow Paul's words in Romans: ***“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** Romans 12:2 (NIV) At our conversion to faith in Christ, for many of us at the time of our baptism, we were transformed, changed by the work of the Holy Ghost. And because of our sinful nature within us fighting against our new man, that must be a daily transforming.

This Psalm uses words like ***“the wicked”, “the ungodly”, “sinners”, “mockers”, “the scornful”***. The King James Version uses the words ***“the ungodly”*** four times. Who are the ungodly?

They cannot be simply “those who sin”, for everyone is guilty of sinning, everyone is a sinner. They may be the atheists, who do not believe in God at all. But they may also be those who are without God in the world, who show by their lives, words, and thoughts that they are thoroughly wicked. They may also be indifferent to God and to God's Word. They are everyone who is not influenced by God or makes a mockery of everything sacred. Scripture does not say only “those who are Godless. We read the word “ungodly”. The Ungodly man walks, the Sinner stands, and the Scornful man sits down in the way of iniquity.

Such a person is unconcerned about religion, or religion may be just an outward veneer he puts on to try to impress people. He is not concerned for his own salvation, or for that of others. He counsels, advises and encourages those with whom he has contact to adopt his ways, and not trouble themselves about praying, about reading the Word of God, about repenting, and so on, for he thinks there is no need for such things. He may think that if you live an outwardly honest or good life some of the time, and make no fuss about religion, you will end up in “a better place” when you die.

But the Word of our God tells us: "blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel" of such an ungodly person, who does not follow his ways and words nor act according to his plan. What are such attitudes? In Galatians, for example we read: ***“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery;***

idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV)

Christians must not derive their values and goals from the sinful standards of the world. Whatever shapes our thinking will soon shape our actions.

The first admonition is don't walk *“in the counsel of the wicked”*. Isn't it easy to walk, to go along with, the ungodly? Sometimes we may not recognize where people are going and what their values and intentions are. But more often, there are clues – and sometimes outright signs – about the kind of people we hang out with and that our sinful flesh wants to hang around with.

Don't go along with them. Excuse yourself. Don't take the first steps with them, and if you do, if you get sucked up along with those who are leading you away from God, that is the time to speak up and stop. Perhaps the situation is so serious that you must say with Joseph, no matter what the sin tempting you is, *“How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”* Genesis 39:9 (NIV)) Perhaps a simple “I can't” or “I don't want to” will be adequate to stop walking with the ungodly. But there will always be opportunity to speak up and be a witness for Jesus Christ. Remember, Scripture warns us *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* 1 Corinthians 10:12-13 (NIV) There is always *“a way out”, “a way to escape.”* (KJV) Sometimes that way out is to just say no.

The second admonition is don't stand, don't hang around with them and join in their sinful actions. Walking can become stopping and “standing with”.

And finally comes the sitting down with someone. Don't sit with the mockers, that is, don't make yourself at home with them. Don't join them in their impenitent way of life and their bold defiance of God. Don't become one of them.

Paul makes this point in our Epistle lesson: *“Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. ... For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.”* Ephesians 5:1-2 and 5-12 (NIV)

Although the first verse of this Psalm has a warning against ungodly values, it really contains a promise. Those who guide their lives by God's Word so that they avoid the way of the ungodly and produce the fruits of faith will be truly blessed. To be blessed means to enjoy the happy and rewarding life which comes from God alone. Real happiness is the peace which comes through the forgiveness of sins. Real happiness is receiving the freedom to live according to God's Word. Real happiness is enjoying the glory of living with God throughout eternity. This is the blessing that awaits all those who delight in God's Word.

The prevalence of ungodly attitudes in the world around us, things such as covetousness and materialism, sexual immorality and disregard for the family, violence and war makes us who confess Christ realize that we must resist these things before they gain a foothold in our lives. If we let them walk into our lives, they will soon stand firmly planted there. Finally, they will sit down and make themselves at home in our lives. We will soon grow comfortable with ideas and actions which once would have horrified us. When this happens, we will be no different from the world around us.

“But [the] delight [of the child of God, the believer,] is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” If meditating on the law would make us happy, then the word, “law” must mean more than the Ten Commandments. We usually use the word “law” to refer to the commandments, which, among other uses, shows us our sinfulness. Here, as in many places in the Old Testament, and especially the Psalms, it means the whole Word of God, both law and Gospel. “Law” here is the translation of a Hebrew word meaning “teaching” or “instruction”. It is the Word of God that makes us happy and gives us the answers we have been looking for.

Why am I here? God's Word tells me that I am here to grow in faith in my Lord Jesus and to bring the Word of faith to others.

What is my life all about? God's Word explains that he gives me my life as an opportunity to serve him and my neighbor with the gifts he has given me.

What about the future? God promises me that he will direct and keep me as his child unto eternal life. These are wonderful answers found only in the Word of God, The more we meditate on them, remember and consider them, the happier we will be.

Christians find their greatest joy in the gospel, which tells them of God's forgiveness of their sins. But when Christians are motivated by the new spirit of faith which the Holy Spirit has created within them, they also delight in God's law as it is summarized in the Ten Commandments. Because they love their Savior, they want to obey his commands. For the believer, the commandments of God become a guideline, something he and she rejoice in following. The child of God says ***"I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."*** Psalm 119:32 (KJV) ***"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free."*** Psalm 119:32 (NIV) I don't have to be dragged like a stubborn child to follow God's commands. I will run the way of God!

The believer ***"is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."*** In this verse the Psalmist compares the child of God, you and me, to a strong and healthy tree that has its roots well-watered and bears fruit at the appropriate time. We realize, of course, that the Psalmist is not talking about our physical bodies, for not every child of God has a strong and healthy body. The Psalmist is referring to our inner being, to our happiness, to what we think, to what we love, to how we feel about other people and things. If our inner being, our New Man, is strong and healthy, we will be happy because God through Jesus forgives our sins. We will evaluate our lives and our world in the light of God's Word, and we will find other people more important than ourselves.

If we are that way on the inside it will show on the outside and that is the fruit! It will show in our cheerful nature because we are God's forgiven creatures. It will show in the respect we show other people. It will show in the fact that we listen to their troubles and do all we can to help them. Our lives will be filled with ***"the fruit of the Spirit [which] is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."*** Galatians 5:22-25 (NIV)

Our text reminds us that the spiritual tree of the believer becomes weak when it lacks nourishment. Strength comes from the roots, but if the roots are dry, the tree will eventually die. How much we need this encouragement to go to the rivers of water, the living water of the Word of God! It is through this water of life that our Father in heaven sends his Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, and to lead us to be kind, tender hearted and forgiving.

This is the transformation that we pray for. This is the kind of people we want to be but do not have the strength or ability to be by ourselves. This is what it means to be spiritually alive. What a powerful encouragement to read our Bible, and to pray the Holy Spirit to bless our reading and pondering on the Holy Scriptures.

After pointing out that ***"the wicked ... are like chaff that the wind blows away"*** we read that ***"the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous."*** On judgment day the Lord will announce that all those who are his children through faith in Jesus Christ will receive eternal life, but the rebellion of the wicked against God will come to an end, and they will be excluded from his presence forever.

Although ***"the way of the wicked will perish"*** we have the confidence and joy and blessing that ***"the LORD watches over the way of the righteous."*** For the child of God, who is blessed, has the assurance that the Holy ***"Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** Romans 8:26-28 (NIV)

Turn to the Lord daily with penitent hearts and lives, and receive all the blessings that God intends for you, even here on earth! Amen.