

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**Septuagesima Sunday, January 20, 2008**

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Hymns: 385:1-5, (375:5) 385:6-10, 432, 401

Lessons: Malachi 3:13-18; 2 Corinthians 13:5-11; John 8:37-47

Text: Hebrews 6:17-19

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear fellow redeemed,

When a certain royal official pleaded with Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal his son who was close to death, the Lord said to him, ***“Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, ... you will never believe,”*** John 4:48. Some of the Jews had asked for miracles before they would believe. ***“So they asked him, ‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you?’”*** John 6:30. Yet, when Jesus had filled the land with his wonderful works, John says of the Jews, ***“Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him,”*** John 12:37.

This is in accordance with man’s sinful nature. Man is very slow to believe, but very quick to doubt God’s Word. Therefore, God has not only promised and sent a Savior for mankind. He has not only promised his covenant of grace. But he has also confirmed his promises and covenant with an oath. He has given us pledges and seals in various ways to make us who are so slow to believe sure of his grace and forgiveness.

Today we want to meditate on,

**THE CERTAINTY OF GOD’S PROMISE AND OATH.**

- 1. A covenant of grace has been established;**
- 2. We have a safe anchor ground for our soul.**

***“Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath.”*** God gave to Abraham and his descendants a promise that a Savior would be born to redeem mankind from sin. More than that, God also swore an oath that what he had promised would be fulfilled. Before our text we are told, ***“When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself,”*** v. 13. First of all God told Abraham, ***“All peoples on earth will be blessed through you,”*** Genesis 12:3. Abraham was told to leave his homeland, and his father’s household and go to the land of Canaan. God promised him, ***“To your offspring I will give this land,”*** Genesis 12:7. But Abraham had no offspring at that time. He was already 75 years old and God had not given any children to him and his wife Sarah. Abraham had to wait patiently before Sarah, his wife, gave birth to the promised son. He was 100 years old when Isaac was born. But God did keep his promise as he always does. To make Abraham more certain in his heart that the promise would be fulfilled, God also made an oath, swearing that the promise would be fulfilled. When God swears to something, it is established as being true and certain.

All of God’s promises to us are recorded in his holy Word, the Bible. God’s Word is infallible; there is no mistake in it. God’s Word cannot deceive us because God cannot lie. God added an oath to his promise to Abraham, and our text tells us why he did this. ***“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.”*** Our text makes that adding of an oath a matter of great importance. From our own experience we know that when a man simply says he will do something, it may be that he has probably not considered the

matter carefully. But when he makes an oath and swears that he will do what he has promised, we conclude that he has thought it over and knows what he is doing. So any promise and oath that God makes as recorded in his Word, that settles the matter, and we should never doubt that God will do what he has promised.

We may use the Lord's Supper as an example in the matter of a promise and an oath. We confess our sins and the pastor pronounces absolution or forgiveness. The Bible tells us the promise Jesus gave to his disciples after his resurrection, "***If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven,***" John 20:23. These are very clear and strong words, as simple and straightforward as any words in the Bible. So we are assured that when the called ministers of Christ remit sins they are remitted. To deny this is denying Christ's words, and to doubt what he says is questioning God's truthfulness.

We also have the Lord's oath in regard to absolution in the words of instruction Jesus gave to his followers in the matter of church discipline. He says, "***I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven,***" Matthew 18:18. The words, "***I tell you the truth***" is not a formal oath, but it has in effect the same strength as an oath. The Lord swears that what his ministers absolve on earth is absolved in heaven. So there is in the absolution a pastor pronounces when sins are forgiven the Lord's promise and oath.

The Lord's Word and oath are to make us certain that the absolution pronounced is valid and true. Therefore, let there be no doubt in our hearts that would cause us to ask, How can ministers forgive sins? The certainty of forgiveness and the validity of the absolution have nothing to do with the person of the pastor or his personal authority. The fact that the pastor has a divine call and has been ordained also does not give us the certainty of forgiveness. The certainty rests solely on Jesus' words. They are not empty words, for they give what they say and express. Christ's Word is the all-important thing. That Gospel Word is what the Holy Spirit uses to create faith in our hearts. The absolution we hear from the pastor's lips is as truly God's forgiveness as when Jesus said to the paralytic, "***Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven,***" Matthew 9:2.

We also have the Lord's Word and assurance as strong as an oath in the Lord's Supper. The Lord Jesus says, "***This is my body given for you,***" and "***This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you,***" Luke 22:19-20. These words also are clear and true. The certainty of forgiveness is in these words. The faith of the communicant or his unbelief has no effect whatever upon the validity or truthfulness of the words of forgiveness of sins. What Christ says in the words of institution of the Lord's Supper is fully as strong as an oath. He speaks of a new covenant in his blood. When a person makes a last will or testament that is something that cannot be changed when the person has died. The Lord made his last testament or covenant on the night in which he was betrayed and he confirmed it by his death on the following day and made it unchangeable. What a wonderful gift to us communicants, full and free pardon, the forgiveness of all our sins.

These two things, the Lord's word of promise and his oath we ought to believe with all our heart. Believing this, we have a strong consolation, a real refuge for our soul, and the sure hope of eternal salvation in heaven. We call it **a safe anchor ground for our soul.**

## 2.

Our text says, "***We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.***" The question arises, When do we have such assurance and to what must we look to be settled in our faith and not be troubled? Let us note for our instruction that our text uses the word "***anchor***". This introduces a comparison that is highly edifying for us. The cargo it carries does not secure a ship on the sea. The cargo cannot keep the wind and waves from beating against the ship. The ship may be secured only if the anchor is grounded securely.

This is the comparison we want to make. A person is not saved from sin by something within himself, but by something that comes from without. We cannot rely upon our own hearts and thoughts, for our hearts

are often fickle and unreliable. Our pious thoughts cannot save us. The only safe anchor for our soul is found in the unchangeable promise and oath of the Word of the Lord.

Of the hope we have as an anchor for our soul, our text says, ***“It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”*** In the temple there was a division between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place. A curtain separated the two places. In the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant, which contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s rod that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place and then only once a year, on the great Day of Atonement, and he entered with the blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins of the people. This foretold what Jesus our great High Priest did for us in his work of redemption. ***“Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence. Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself,”*** Hebrews 9:24-26.

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has made it possible by his death on the cross that each one of us might enter the Most Holy Place, that is to say, approach God’s throne of grace as forgiven sinners. Having this divine privilege, we should not think of God’s promise and oath carelessly or casually, but with a believing heart and with fervent prayer. And when we have the opportunity to go to the Lord’s Supper, we should do so most eagerly and with heartfelt anticipation of being assured of forgiveness of sins. Another way of saying this is that our faith must be anchored on the Rock of Ages. Our faith must stand firmly grounded on Christ the Cornerstone. May God grant that we all may have the assurance and faith of which the Christian poet writes when he says,

***“His oath, His covenant, and blood  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When ev’ry earthly prop gives way,  
He then is all my Hope and Stay.  
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand.”***

Amen.

(Hymn 370:3)