

16th Sunday after Trinity: September 24, 2023

“Singing Boldly”

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have thought much about our conversation and Bible Study from LWML on Monday and how they flow very well through our lectionary texts these past few weeks. In the midst of texts which put before us death and destruction, we sing beautiful poems set to music, which are full of trust, hope, and comfort.

If you know any of the history of these hymns, you know that they were written by men who were personally well acquainted with both earthly and spiritual suffering. These great hymns put good words in our mouths, divine ideas in our thoughts, and comfort on our hearts that confess against our current circumstances. They bring our eyes up out of our suffering and place them on the hope that, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, our suffering will have an end. They help us make a Christian confession when the words and thoughts escape us. That’s what a good poem does, that’s what these hymns do.

When we read about the Good Samaritan a few weeks ago, we rightly saw ourselves beaten, left for dead in the ditch by the devil, the world, and our sinful nature until our Redeemer came our way, stooped down into our ditch and rescued us. And then we sang “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” We sang both, “The bud may have a bitter taste, but sweet will be the flow’r,” and, “You fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds you so much dread are big with mercy and will break in blessings on your head.”

Then we have also heard about Jesus having mercy on the 10 Lepers, while only one turned to give Him thanks. That day we sang, “Let me depart this life confiding in my Savior; by grace receive my soul that it may live forever.”

Last week heard about God’s power over death and how His words give life eternal in the midst of that death and devil. All the while, we sang words that are meant to be directed to us from God Himself, “When through fiery trials your pathway will lie, My grace, all sufficient will be your supply.” Then during communion we sang, “What God ordains is always good.” What He ordains is always for our spiritual benefit.

Today we hear about the sorrow and anguish of the woman from Nain whose husband and only son had died. In the midst of this, we recount how Jesus restored her dead boy back to her alive, and we began this morning by singing, “The Will of God is Always Best.” This hymn was the subject of our Bible Study last Monday, and we were again reminded that even when we mourn loss and suffer heartache here, God’s will is always for us.

The Biblical accounts we have read the past several weeks have had us place ourselves into the story in some non-flattering places. We are the man in the ditch, the lone, thankful, leper, the bird of the air, the lily of the field, and the mourning widow. In all of these accounts, our Lord steps in and brings comfort where there was none, gives us a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven, and supplies what was needed where the sinful world had let people down. He brings compassion to dire circumstances.

One might question our own sincerity, but not that of Jesus. The compassion of Jesus is pure. Really though, there are times when our own compassion is sincere, because as Christians, it flows from Christ, but it is not like our Lord’s. Ours lacks power. Ours is still tainted with selfishness. His compassion is powerful. Nothing can stop it—no sin, no devil, no world. It cannot be denied by any unworthiness in us and it cannot be diverted even by sin. His Will is always done.

The truth is brothers and sisters in Christ, it is not because we are lovable that God loves us. It is because God is love. The Psalmist says in our Introit, “***Great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.***” That Palm later says, “***But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.***” God’s compassion and mercy are greater than our ability to understand.

This is not only seen, but it is felt and experienced most clearly at a funeral. This is clearly seen in our Gospel text today. Two very different crowds collided that day outside Nain. The crowd surrounding Jesus had just witnessed Him healing the centurion’s son. They were rejoicing and celebrating the accomplishments of God in the flesh. They basked in the glory of God.

That happy crowd was met by a different crowd coming out of the village with a casket. The funeral crowd suffered under the reality of sin in this world. They were not celebrating life. They were mourning. They were suffering. They were broken and that reality was right in their faces.

There on that road, death and life came face to face when those crowds met. In this blessed interchange, life overcame death. The Lord of Life approached the dead boy, and with a word, raised him to life again.

Christ's compassion is not limited to that place and time, although it differs in how it is manifested. The same Jesus who spoke then speaks today. Listen to what He said and did. Jesus didn't say that crying was bad, or wrong, or sinful. He told the woman that she could stop crying. Then he touched the open coffin of the dead man. He took the uncleanness of death onto himself and gave His purity to the boy. He spoke. "Young man, I say to you, be raised up!" His word brought the man back to life. The wages of sin killed the boy, but the sinless Lamb of God raised the boy to life.

I know this has not been our own experience at funerals. When our loved ones were in their caskets, our spouses, our children, our parents, our grandparents, our friends; Jesus did not give them back to us alive. He spoke, to be sure. We heard from His Word how death is swallowed up in victory; that Jesus has overcome death, and that all those in Christ, too, will overcome on the final day.

His words for us at funerals are future focused. We must still wait in sorrow and grieving for a time. There are very few in the history of the world that have received their loved ones back from the dead, and while we don't know why, we know from these few accounts and from our Lord's promise that one day we will be united with our Christian loved ones. And because our experience is not like the woman at Nain, that's why we sing our confessions more heartily now:

"In the midst of death's dark vale Pow'rs of hell o'ertake us. Who will help when they assail, Who secure will make us? Thou only, Lord, Thou only!" LSB 755

"Though I the cup am drinking which savors now of bitterness, I take it without shrinking. For after grief God gives relief, My heart with comfort filling and all my sorrow stilling." LSB 760

We sing these verses even as we look death right in the face, even as we peer into a casket, even as we contemplate our own mortality. And the only reason that we can do so with certain confidence is because our Savior has already passed through death into life. He has already blazed the trail through death and has been raised never to die again. We don't merely look from the outside in on His death and resurrection. We have been joined to it. We have been united with Him in it. We have been baptized into His death and have already been raised with Him in life.

Thus we sing even more boldly, "There is nothing worth comparing to this life-long comfort sure! Open eyed my grave is staring; even there I'll sleep secure. Though my flesh awaits its raising, still my soul continues praising: I am baptized into Christ; I'm a child of paradise!" (LSB 594:5)

As we leave committal services, we sing, "For they who with Him suffered here Shall there be healed from woe and fear; And when eternal bliss is won, They'll shine in glory like the sun. So help us, Jesus, ground of faith; Thou hast redeemed us by Thy death From endless death and set us free. We laud and praise and worship Thee." (TLH 596 This Body in the Grave We Lay)

Christians make an extraordinary confession. We confess against the devil and the world and our own reason that death is not the end. We confess, with St. Paul, ***"The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** (1 Corinthians 15:56-57).

Our Lord is one who knows our suffering because He took on our flesh. God has visited His people. He has stooped into our world of death, in the flesh. He knows the pain of loss. He witnessed the death of friends and family. He wept when his good friend Lazarus died. More than likely, He was at the deathbed of Joseph, His earthly father, and mourned with Mary and His brothers and sisters at his death. Jesus is not one who stands outside, peering in at our condition. He is One who knows from within our very own circumstances. He is with you to the end of the age. Therefore, we do not mourn as those who have no hope. We mourn with an eternal perspective. While we sorrow and mourn now, our sadness will have an end.

This real, historical, account in Nain gives us a picture of what will happen on the last day. The crowd of life will process out of heaven with our Lord and meet the crowd of death here on earth. Death will yield to eternal life. And until that day, we will confess boldly, “When life’s brief course on earth is run And I this world am leaving, grant me to say, ‘Your will be done,’ Your faithful word believing.”
Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of the Church
Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity
24 September 2023

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

O Lord, Father of all, we bow before You in all confidence and beg You: strengthen us by Your Spirit, ground us in Your love and fill up what we lack out of Your own abundance. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Great Physician, lend Your own power to the works of mercy done in the name of Your Son, that they may increase faith in the words Your servants speak. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful Father, when loss and heartache invade our homes and tempt us to doubt Your divine care, hear our cries and renew our faith and life in You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of life and death, You have given all things into the hands of Your Son. Inspire those who bear the sword in His stead to do so in faithfulness and love for their fellow man. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, we give thanks that in Holy Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, deliverance from death and the devil, and eternal salvation, bless those who celebrate baptismal anniversaries this week, especially, *Kistie and Rylee*, grant that by Your Word and Spirit they may faithfully keep the covenant into which they have been called, boldly confess their Savior, and finally share with all Your saints the joys of eternal life; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Heavenly Father, we give thanks for the joy and blessings that You have granted *Joel & Danielle and Nathan & Stephanie* during the years of their marriage. Assist them always by Your grace that with true fidelity and steadfast love they may ever honor and keep their marriage vows, grow in love towards You and for each other, and come at last to the eternal joys that You have promised; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Lord, You lead us, as St. Paul before us, through many tribulations to know the fullness of Your love. Strengthen *Esther, Marvin, Ruth, Zoey, Betty, Jeri, Denise, Jillian, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts*. If it be Your will, grant them health and healing, and give them grace to walk through these times with courage and hope. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of the harvest, grant that in true faith we may worthily go to Your altar to receive the very body and the true blood that Your Son has given for our redemption. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of hosts, Your saints in heaven now know as they are known and comprehend the fullness of Your love in Christ. Conduct our way through this fallen world to join them in Your heavenly presence. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**