

THE LUTHERAN HERALD

QUASIMODO GENITI—CANTATE
(APRIL 8—MAY 4, 2013)

A PUBLICATION OF
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN DIOCESE OF
NORTH AMERICA

AND

THE ASSOCIATION OF CONFESSIONAL
LUTHERAN CHURCHES

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. John 20:19-31 (NKJV)**

Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.

Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

THE COLLECT

Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God, that we who have celebrated the solemnities of the Lord's resurrection may by the help of Thy grace, bring forth the fruits thereof in our life and conversation; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

During this week's readings, we've seen Jesus use various approaches to drive home the seriousness of the Judgment. Today's reading is no different. Interestingly, Jesus' Parable of the Great Banquet is introduced by a naïve dinner guest: "Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'"

Those are fine words, indeed. But little did Jesus' dinner companion know how rarely they come to fruition. For Jesus goes on to tell this sad tale of a fine dinner attended only by empty chairs. Much has been done to prepare a great feast, and yet one feeble excuse after another leads to an empty banquet hall. The first two excuses, not surprisingly, deal with possessions: "The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.'" The third excuse, which many would find "excusable," is still invalid in God's eyes: "Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come'."

How sad for the hospitable Master, yet sadder still for those who turn down His gracious invitation. May we be found eager to partake of His heavenly food, both at the Great Banquet in Heaven, and at the foretaste of that Feast in the Eucharist.

It has been said that the modern version of Christianity is easy, convenient, and compatible. There's no sacrifice, discipline, or humility. It's being marketed as "consumer driven." If we treated God like a consumer item, we'd be picky and selective—and pass over things about Him that didn't suit us. But God is not a melon in a marketplace—and He didn't come to suit our whims. Jesus said: "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it."

In a world where the customer is always right, it's a radical stance to go against the grain of "Consumer Christianity." So when the man asks "Lord, are there few who are saved?" Jesus must answer: "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able."

The door to the banquet feast of Heaven is narrow—and many won't fit through. And the one who tries to bring in baggage will find the doorway too confining. For his "bag of tricks" and "pet sins" will crash against the doorposts and keep him from entering. How ridiculous it is to see one who refuses to drop his "burlap sack of junk" rather than leave it for the "riches of Heaven." And yet, that's the way of the world. Let us be wise and check our sins at the door, that the Master may welcome us in.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Quasimodo geniti Sunday

Article V.

That we may obtain this faith, the Office of Teaching the Gospel and administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who worketh faith where and when it pleaseth God in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justified those who believe that they are received into favor for Christ's sake.

They condemn the Anabaptists and others, who think that the Holy Ghost cometh to men without the external Word, through their own preparations and works.

Article XXV.

Confession in our churches is not abolished; for it is not usual to give the Body of the Lord, except to them that have been previously examined and absolved. And the people are most carefully taught concerning the faith and assurance of absolution, about which, before this time, there was profound silence. Our people are taught that they should highly prize the absolution, as being the voice of God, and pronounced by His command. The power of the Keys is commended, and we show what great consolation it brings to anxious consciences; that God requires faith to believe such absolution as a voice sounding from Heaven, and that such faith in Christ truly obtains and receives the forgiveness of sins.

Aforetime, satisfactions were immoderately extolled; of faith and the merit of Christ, and the righteousness of faith, no mention was made; wherefore, on this point, our churches are by no means to be blamed. For this even our adversaries must needs concede to us, that the doctrine concerning repentance has been most diligently treated and laid open by our teachers.

But of Confession, they teach, that an enumeration of sins is not necessary, and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins, for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the Psalm testifies [19:13]: "Who can understand his errors?" Also Jeremiah [17:9]: "The heart is deceitful, who can know it?" But if no sins were forgiven, except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see, nor can remember.

—The Augsburg Confession

Jesus preached the Word. He spoke both Gospel and Law to the people, and the people tried to kill Him because of it.

His preaching did not go along with their assumptions, so they were filled with wrath. Christ came to bring forgiveness, healing, and freedom from sin, and they “marveled” at the gracious Words from His mouth. If humility and repentance had been part of their perspective perhaps they would not have wanted to throw Him off a cliff when He preached the Law!

Christ does not come to confirm us in our worldly desires for comfort or security. His gracious Words do not always mean liberty in this life because He wants us bound to the Truth! We are freed from sin, death, and the devil by His grace, but that does not mean we are free to act as spoiled children who despise the Words of God that conflict with our wants.

When considering this story, there is the temptation to distance oneself from the people in the synagogue by saying they were completely unbelieving and evil. But the truth is that all of us, especially Christians, are very much capable of falling into the temptation of hating what Christ says to us. For Christians, the danger is compounded by appealing to pious motives or trying to misapply other parts of Scripture as an excuse.

But our identity in Jesus Christ, through our Holy Baptism and our partaking in His Body, indicates joyous discipline and obedience to the Word of God, as well as freedom according to the Gospel. May God strengthen us in this blessed identity, according to His gracious Word. Amen.

As Jesus continues His discussion on the End Times, He again points to the folly of being solely worldly-wise. It seems the people of His day were consumed with the weather, as are we. It always gives us something to talk about, and we’re fascinated with its force and changing patterns. And yet, when it comes to spiritual things—the really important things—we’re hardly the devout students we should be. Jesus says: “Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, ‘A shower is coming’; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, ‘There will be hot weather’; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?”

Such a condition is no different than Tuesday’s lesson, which dealt with the rich barn-building fool. He became the ultimate accountant, while ignoring His day of reckoning. In today’s reading, the consumption is weather rather than accounting. With either subject, there’s little to no focus on things eternal. Jesus says such an attitude is hypocritical. There’s a superficial Christian look on the outside, but the inside has a different allegiance.

And if life is temporarily “shining on us”—with health and wealth in our favor—that doesn’t mean God is pleased with us. Jesus says in 13:1-5 that neither the Galileans whom Pilate killed—nor the victims of Siloam’s Tower—were “worse sinners.” Repentance is the key. Without it, all is for naught. While we must dwell in this minefield of temptation, let us keep our eyes ever fixed on Jesus—the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

In today's reading, Jesus discusses His final return. The emphasis is on watchfulness, as the day and hour of the return are not revealed to us. We're compared to servants who must wait for their master to return from a wedding banquet. They're well prepared, as they stand watchful at the door—lamps burning brightly. When the master does come, He's so overjoyed that He reverses roles. He takes on the role of servant—and serves as a waiter to their table.

Although the end will be relaxing and rewarding, the time prior will not be. Jesus discusses the stress and cost of true discipleship in verses 51-52: "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on, five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three."

The presence of Jesus causes division. There's no "fence straddling" when it comes to faith. Either one believes or one does not. And where there's a mix of believers and unbelievers, there's bound to be contention. For the believer cannot hide or keep quiet his faith. At the same time, the unbeliever wants to see or hear none of that "Christian stuff." As oil and water may dwell in the same glass, yet stay uncomfortably apart, so are relationships where the ultimate bond of unity is missing. Whether it be a family or friendship, there's a high price to pay when the Lord isn't welcomed by all parties. Thanks be to God for the true Church—where we can celebrate fellowship as it was meant to be: one with Christ and one with another.

The Word of God has power and authority. It can silence and drive out the evil words of Satan, whether it is casting out demons in clear cases of exorcism (such as those in the Scriptures), or it is used faithfully to rebuke and restore people who are in error. In any case, the cleverness or traditions of man have no authority to overcome the Devil. If his corrupting influence is to be defeated, it can only be defeated through Christ Jesus, Who is the Word of God.

Satan's destructive power can be seen in many ways: in demon possession, in the rantings of those in congregations who say to Christ's preachers "Leave us alone!", in the sickness and death that man suffers because of Adam's fall into sin, or in the skewed testimonies of false confessors. God's Word has power over all these things.

While overt cases of demon possession are usually considered fiction in our modern age, there is no fiction in the significance of God's baptism, which gives us His Holy Spirit according to the Word with which the baptismal water is connected. And those who scream against Christ's teachings in the congregations can, and should, have their defiance silenced and cast out by the authority of the Word, in order to save them from harm. For those who are sick according to their bodies, even if their physical state is not cured, their souls are most certainly healed and strengthened through the blessings of the Gospel and partaking of the Body and Blood of Jesus Himself.

The power of God's Word should not be forgotten, or underestimated. It is our true life and salvation!

Simon Peter's responses to Jesus are a significant contrast to the responses of the people and demons in the previous chapter of Luke's gospel. At Jesus' words the people of Nazareth resented Him and tried to kill Him, whereas Simon obeyed Him (although, perhaps reluctantly). And after the miraculous catch of fish, Simon's reaction was similar, in ways, to that of the demon who cried out at Jesus, "Let us alone!...I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" However, the important difference is that Simon told Jesus "Depart from me" out of fearful humility over his sin, unlike the demon, who unrepentantly wanted to be spared from the fate that belonged to all the devil's servants.

Also interesting is the proclamation of the demons as Jesus drove them out, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" These words from the demons are remarkably similar to Simon Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ in the Gospel accounts of the other Evangelists. But, again, while the words are similar the difference of meaning is profound. The demons cried out against their enemy, the Son of God, whom they hate. The words of these corrupted angels were meant to confuse people, yet the confession of Peter, and the faithful confession of all God's holy people, is for the purpose of glorifying Jesus as the Savior of all mankind!

The power and authority of God's Words are found in their connection with His Holy Spirit. May He keep us steadfast in the faith that His Spirit creates, so we speak truthfully like Simon Peter, and keep us from the twisted words of the devil. Amen.

There's a lot going on in today's two-part text. In the first part, a rich man is portrayed as one greatly distracted by his possessions. The distraction is so great that his possessions are doing the possessing. They "dictate" to him that he needs to build more and bigger barns to store the great abundance "he" accumulated. But the plentiful fruit the ground had yielded proved fruitless in the end, as the man became so consumed with his temporal goods that he forgot about his eternal destination. He was ill-prepared for what lay ahead, and therefore his end was destruction.

Jesus contrasts the folly of earthly absorption with the carefree, worry-free attitude of the lowly raven. Even this simple creature knows better than many of us, for it concerns itself only with the present. As Jesus says in the text: "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which have neither storehouse nor barn; and God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds?" How embarrassing that a scavenging bird can "show us up," being satisfied with day-to-day living—even while consuming leftovers! And if that example weren't humbling enough, Jesus goes down another rung on the ladder—from the fauna to the flora. Their sole purpose on earth is simply to provide beauty for today, then tomorrow is used to start fires. The point is that Jesus provides for His lowliest of creation, why wouldn't He do much more for His highest? Let us then concentrate on the Kingdom of God, while knowing God will add on our earthly needs.

In today's reading, Jesus emphasizes a pattern. It's a very sad pattern that's found throughout history. It has to deal with truth and consequences. Unlike the old TV Game show Truth or Consequences, it's a both/and situation when it comes proclaiming Law and Gospel. When the prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed the truth, the consequences for them were rejection, punishment, and even death. Jesus knew the same awaited Him, and the pattern would continue with the Apostles and the many disciples who would follow.

Although concern of temporal persecution is natural, Jesus advises His followers not to fear the things of this world. Those things pale in comparison to what lies beyond. "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

It would be natural for us to worry about how we're going to perform—and what we're going to say—when under duress about our faith. I'm sure many of you reading this devotion can echo that sentiment. But once the situation is "under way," Jesus' words ring true: "Now when they bring you to the synagogues and magistrates and authorities, do not worry about how or what you should answer, or what you should say. For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say." God grant that we remain firm in the true faith unto life everlasting.

Jesus asked the scribes and the Pharisees, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"—He said to the man who was paralyzed, "I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And the man was healed and did so.

The realities of our bodies and souls are very much connected. This is a tremendously important point when it comes to Jesus and our redemption from sin. God became man in order to forgive our sins. He became true flesh and blood in order to suffer and die so that we would be saved from the death of our souls.

The Pharisees were right that only God can forgive the sins of man, but they were unwilling to believe that Jesus was God. The Christ was one of us so He could give His life for us, yet the Pharisees were often preoccupied with more mundane things. Jesus did use these things as well to teach the Gospel, and we see this with His healing miracles.

In addition to showing that He had divine power and authority from the Father, His healings were an outward sign of the greater healing that came through His forgiveness. Furthermore, the result of people's bodies being made whole (sometimes even raised from death!) was a small glimpse of the resurrection of the dead, where both our bodies and our souls will be made gloriously whole in the perfection of His eternal kingdom of life everlasting!

In today's reading Jesus is not saying we can ignore God's teachings for the sake of doing good; rather, He shows that good is that which is truly in agreement with His Word.

The Pharisees twisted the wisdom of God's Law into a false means of holiness, but the Law is not the only part of God's Word that false teachers twist. Christendom is constantly plagued by the distortions of people who ignore the clear teaching of God in their misguided efforts to "spread the Gospel," "grow the church," or do "works of mercy." Jesus did not break the Law or sin in order to teach the truth to the Pharisees, nor does He expect His faithful people to disregard any of His commands in order to preach the Word to all nations.

Christ does not stand in conflict with Himself (nor with the Father, nor the Holy Ghost). The ends do not justify unfaithful means, because God has given us both the end and the means by which to accomplish it. His will be done! Jesus teaches us that the Law must be understood according to God's righteousness, not the assumptions of men.

We must also beware of a generic gospel of "love and forgiveness" that is divorced from the rest of Christ's teachings. The Law is still perfect and wise, and it shows sinners the evil from which they need to be saved. And Jesus' commands on the sacraments, including how they are to be administered through the Apostolic Ministry, are never truly in conflict with the Gospel. They are all part of the same holy Word by which we are blessed and made His people!

THE HOLY GOSPEL**St. John 16:5-15 (NKJV)**

"But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you."

THE COLLECT

O God, who makes the minds of the faithful to be of one will, grant unto Thy people that they may love what Thou commandest and desire what Thou dost promise that among the manifold changes of this world our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Here we see Christ the Victor, Christ the Conqueror, Christ the ultimate winner. This is not simply a story of one isolated exorcism. Jesus casts out a demon, but then explains exorcisms in a general way, and makes an application to all mankind. We little recognize the power of demons and the Devil in this world, but they do have much of the world in their thrall. One gets the impression that Western society is in such a state today. Layer upon layer of wickedness prevails in this world.

So how is Jesus the Victor, the Conqueror? We do not seem to be winning any battles. So many Christians we know pray to be delivered from sorrows, temporal trial, and even physical diseases, but they are not. They continue to suffer like St. Paul. They continue to be persecuted like St. John. They are even killed in spite of their prayers like all the martyrs down through the ages. Jesus never promises us victory in this world.

Pray for the revival of the church within our society. Pray for healing and deliverance. But pray even more for the revival of faith in your own heart. Pray for the blessing of a true and strong faith. Pray that Christ is Conqueror of your heart. “Blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!” They are those who have been conquered by Christ. Nothing else will overcome the demonic evil of this world but Christ. This world cannot be cleansed but by Christ. And Christ will cleanse this world of its demons and give it back, purified, to those who love Him.

Jesus’ preaching about beatitudes (blessedness) stands in contrast to the false teaching of the Pharisees. Christ teaches that the humble and the despised will be blessed according to faith and God’s mercy, while the Pharisees emphasized superficial works and a piety that focuses on loving oneself more than others. The difference is faith in God’s Words.

The poor and the hungry can truly be blessed in their souls even while their bodies are in distress. Jesus’ promises of peace and abundance in His kingdom are true, even if we must faithfully wait for them. And as He showed with His healings, God blesses us with bodily help in times and places according to His merciful will, but His blessings for the soul are far more widespread, and more important.

However, these realities do not excuse us from loving others and helping them. The false teachers were concerned with themselves, and despised others. But even as Christ would show us the way of love and mercy, Satan can twist these things into self-serving works just as he did with the Law and the Pharisees. We often see this when people quote the verse, “Judge not, and you shall not be judged.” Used apart from faith, people cite these words to rationalize all sorts of wickedness. But Jesus said this so that, through faith, we would understand God’s righteous mercy over and against the merciless judgments of false teachers.

All these words on blessedness and love must be understood with all that Christ teaches us. May He continue to grant us His Holy Spirit so that we have the faith to do so, and be truly blessed! Amen.

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 10:11-16 (NKJV)

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

THE COLLECT

God, who by the humiliation of Thy Son did raise up the fallen world, grant unto Thy faithful ones perpetual gladness, and those whom Thou has delivered from the danger of everlasting death do Thou make partakers of eternal joys; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

“Identities are defined by the self but they are the product of the interaction between the self and others.” “To define themselves, people need another.” These are certainly true statements. We come to know ourselves through those we interact with. We either identify with them or we identify ourselves in contrast to them. Or, sometimes both.

After World War Two, the United States found much of its purpose and identity in its conflict with the Soviet Union. It was a unifying element of American identity. “Better dead than red!” This element of identity was so strong for some, that they could not give up that element even after the Soviet Union collapsed. They thought Russians must still be “godless commies” no matter what evidence showed otherwise. We come to know ourselves through those we interact with. This is true spiritually as well.

We come to know ourselves, define ourselves, through our interaction with God. We form our identities with Him, in His presence, or against Him, trying to flee His presence. For those whose identities are positively shaped by God, they find that shaping taking place in Word and Sacrament. But also, prayer also is a molding of identity. It is a reaching out for the ultimate other. In prayer God lets us know that He is “Our Father.” He is not an abstract god or some disengaged deity, He is related to us. He is our Father, and we are His sons. And we are not only children relating to their Father, but we find that we have a community relationship as well. He is “Our” Father. By Him we know who we are.

Who is your neighbor? We often think of a neighbor as someone who lives next door to us. We have an image that is weighted towards the geographic. We think of people geographically near to us as neighbors. And while that may be true, Jesus uses a different yardstick to measure the concept of neighbor. Jesus does not use residential address as determinative. Whomever one comes across, is one's neighbor.

The need for mercy and the nearness at hand were the determinative factors. And so we ask ourselves not "who is my neighbor?" We ask, have I been a neighbor to those near me in need? Hopefully we answer the question with a yes. We can also ask another question, what is a neighbor? The very term implies relationship. One must have some interaction with this other person. But today we often do not have any interaction with those who live next door or those on our block. Community identity is largely gone in today's America. And it is so, often, because there is nothing in common between Americans.

It is natural to not be in a close relationship with those you have nothing in common with. It is natural to not count them as "neighbors" in the civil sense. But even when this is true, one can still act the neighbor to anyone. One can still be a neighbor to the enemy and the stranger. It matters far more what one does than how one feels. You don't even have to like your neighbor, just be a neighbor to him or her. This is what Christ would have us do.

Lesson from the Book of Concord Misericordias Domini Sunday

Article XIV.

Of Ecclesiastical Order, [the Lutherans] teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church or administer the Sacraments unless he be regularly called.

Article XV.

Of Rites and Usages in the Church, they teach, that those ought to be observed which may be observed without sin, and which are profitable unto tranquility and good order in the Church, as particular holydays, festivals, and the like.

Nevertheless, concerning such things, let men be admonished that consciences are not to be burdened, as though such observance was necessary to salvation. They are admonished also that human traditions instituted to propitiate God, to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are opposed to the Gospel and the doctrine of faith. Wherefore vows and traditions concerning meats and days, etc., instituted to merit grace and to make satisfaction for sins, are useless and contrary to the Gospel.—The Augsburg Confession

Article IV. Of the Papacy.

That the Pope is not, according to divine law or according to the Word of God, the head of all Christendom (for this name belongs to Jesus Christ solely and alone), but is only the bishop and pastor of the Church at Rome, and of those who voluntarily or through a human creature (that is a political magistrate) attach themselves to him, not to be under him as a lord, but with him as brethren and associates, as Christians; as the ancient councils and the age of St. Cyprian show.

But today none of the bishops venture to address the Pope as brother; but they must call him most gracious lord, even though they be kings or emperors. Such arrogance we neither will, can, nor ought with a good conscience to approve. Let him, however, who will do it, do so without us.

—The Smalcald Articles, Part II, §1-2

MONDAY, APRIL 15: LUKE 7:1-17

MISERICORDIA DOMINI

Today's text presents the all encompassing nature of the Lord's gospel that powerfully touches all people, regardless of nationality, socioeconomic status, or gender. Jesus' statement of "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" tells us much about the state of the centurion. He appears to be one of the Gentiles who practiced Judaism to some degree and believed Jesus' proclamation at some level. He also exhibits Christian humility with his belief that he is not worthy to come before the Lord in person. That is all we are able to gather with any confidence from the text, but that level of reverence was enough for Christ's positive response about him and his faith.

This man of authority in the Roman military acknowledges that any aid he receives is not because of his earthly position, but due to God's grace. The narrative about the raising of the widow's son is the first time the evangelist calls Jesus "Lord." That divine authority for which distance was no obstacle, and the grace which reached beyond the lost sheep of Israel to help a believing Gentile centurion are now united in Jesus' compassion for the widow and His Word of power to the only son lying dead. Here is cause for holy fear, reason for glorifying God; the long awaited prophet, "mighty in deed and word" has appeared. The prophecy of Zechariah is being fulfilled: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people" (Luke 1:68). The Gospel, preached to the high and the lowly, the Gentiles and the Jews, is a divine power that delivers grace and redemption.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 24: LUKE 10:1-22

JUBILATE

Our world is full of intelligent, educated people who are capable of many great things. They are self sufficient and independent. They depend on no one. They are smart and strong and can determine what is true and false in the universe. They create their own religious beliefs. However, Jesus lets us know that we need someone to tell us what is true and what is false. We need someone to reveal to us the nature of God and the universe in which we live.

Jesus tells us that we are not capable of figuring it out on our own. As a matter of fact, He seems to say that the very opposite is true. The more we believe in our own abilities the more lost and blinded we really are. It is almost as if God has a sense of humor about it. It pleased Him to reveal the truth about Himself and His work to those who are most convinced that they are incapable of finding out.

But those who reject the gospel, because they believe themselves too smart for that sort of thing, are the ones who are the blinded fools. They are pseudo intellectuals. The real difference between the "wise and learned" and the "children". Children (no matter what age they are) acknowledge their dependence upon God. They also acknowledge that God can be and do whatever He desires and, He doesn't have to conform to their conceptions of what He should be. God is sovereign.

James and John were indignant at the treatment that their master had suffered at the hands of the Samaritans. They loved Jesus so much that it pained them to see Him mistreated. They were jealous for His honor, as all followers of Christ should be. But Satan used those feelings of love and protectiveness and twisted them to his evil plans. James and John want to call fire down upon these ungrateful, miserable heretics. How dare they fail to welcome the Christ, destroy them!

But Jesus didn't need to be defended from the Samaritans, He must continue to travel the road so that He could die for those Samaritans. Jesus must not be turned aside from the truly important work ahead of Him, the reconciliation of all mankind with His Father. This goal is so important, so infinitely more urgent than anything else that it must always be kept directly in front of view.

But Satan doesn't want Jesus to complete this journey and reach His goal, and Satan doesn't want Jesus' disciples to stay on this path, following Jesus either. He uses all sorts of tricks to get men and women not to follow Jesus on His lonely path. How many parents with misguided priorities to their children, choose a church because it's entertaining for the kids, rather than valuing the soundness of the teaching the children are receiving? Or how often do we hear the excuse from delinquent members, that Sunday is the only real "family time" they have? Family is a wonderful and godly blessing to us all, but Satan can even lurk in the shadows of devotion to family.

The message, in word and deed, of both Jesus and John the Baptist proclaims the truth and the grace of God. In receiving John's baptism of repentance people declare that God has dealt righteously, in dealing with them as sinners, and offering them entry into His kingdom by way of repentance and forgiveness. At the same time, this was a stone of stumbling for Pharisee and scribe; they were offended at free forgiveness, whether proclaimed by John or enacted by Jesus.

The Pharisees and the lawyers, who sought salvation by way of the Law, rejected the purpose of God, "who desires all men to be saved," by refusing John's baptism of repentance. They sought to establish their own righteousness and did not submit to God's. The new people of God--made up of forgiven sinners and redeemed outcasts--will, at the end, inherit the Kingdom, while those who in their self-sufficiency have refused God's way of grace will perish. Thus the children of God, created by His wise redemptive counsel, will demonstrate that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

John and Jesus represent the broad net God casts to gather the redeemed, while the Pharisees and scribes demonstrate the sinful rebellion against the Lord's chosen means of grace. People reject both John and Jesus, but for different reasons—like children who refuse to play either a joyful game or a mournful one. They would not associate with John when he followed the strictest of rules, or with Jesus when he freely associated with all kinds of people.

Jesus' host, Simon the Pharisee, is basically making the same complaint in his heart about Jesus being "a friend of sinners" that so many others had. When he saw Jesus accepting the lavish devotion of a sinful woman he concluded that Jesus was no prophet. He determined that a prophet would know what sort of woman was touching him and shrink from such contact with a sinner, as every good Pharisee did. Jesus' answer to Simon's objection proves Him to be a prophet indeed; He sees the sin in Simon's heart and with prophetic authority calls him to repentance.

The parable of the two debtors makes it plain that all men are sinners, and all need a "friend of sinners" if they are to have a friend at all. All men are in God's debt, and only divine release from that debt, great or small, can release a man for a life of love as a redeemed sinner and holy saint through grace. Simon learns that the Prophet who sat at table with him is not only a friend of sinners; He forgives sins with divine authority and sends the forgiven sinner on her way in peace. She was a redeemed sinner who looked in faith to the Friend of sinners, a sinner whose faith was active in abundant love through the assurance of salvation and peace.

We hear the "gracious words" of the Anointed of the Lord, and we sense the contradiction they evoke: only a sinner who has been mercifully crushed by the Law can fully appreciate the super-abundant grace of the Gospel, found in Jesus Christ.

Moses and Elijah, who represent the law and the prophets, all of the Old Testament, now see and talk face to face with the One they had been waiting for. And what are they talking about? St. Luke tells us. They are talking about Jesus' "exodus." So what does that mean? What is Jesus' "exodus"? His exodus was His crucifixion and resurrection.

Jesus would lead the world out of captivity to sin and death and Satan by His crucifixion and resurrection. It was the world's exodus, its way out, of sin and death. As Moses leads the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt so, Christ leads us out of slavery to sin and Satan. As Moses leads them through the waters of the Red Sea so, we are led by Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism. Christ is the fulfillment. Christ is the focus and goal of all salvation history.

He is the one we should focus on, not the law or, the ethnic people of Israel. Jesus was removing all aspects of physical descent from the relationship between God and man. The chosen people, the children of God would be those who followed Jesus in faith through the exodus of His crucifixion and resurrection. Salvation was for the whole world. The cloud descended on the mountain just as it had on Sinai and, God the Father said, "This is my Son...listen to Him"! The Law was not the goal. The ethnic nation of Israel was not the goal. Jesus was the goal. The chosen people of God are those who "listen to Him".

THE HOLY GOSPEL

St. John 16:16-23 (NKJV)

“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”

Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? “Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing.

THE COLLECT

Almighty God, who shows to them that are in error the light of Thy truth to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness, grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowship of Christ’s religion that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Much of Jesus’ ministry had been centered in Capernaum with most of his preaching taking place in synagogues, but now He traveled again from town to town on a second tour of the Galilean countryside, proclaiming the good news in ever widening circles. This expanded gospel preaching and teaching was supported by those who had previously benefited from it. Jesus and His disciples did not provide for themselves during this time, but were supported by the service and means of grateful people reacting to the gospel proclamation, such as the women presented in this text.

From this point on, Jesus used parables more extensively as a means of teaching. They were particularly effective and easy to remember because He used familiar earthly scenes to present heavenly realities. Although parables clarified Jesus’ teaching, they also included hidden meanings needing further explanation. These hidden meanings challenged the sincerely interested to further inquiry, and taught truths that remained concealed from unbelievers. The secrets of the kingdom of God are manifested in truths that can be known only by revelation from God. It is not that God desires some not to understand, but it is simply the sad reality that those who are not willing to receive God’s message as presented will find the truth hidden from them. Without the Holy Spirit and the faith He instills, one is ignorant of these divine revelations in Scripture, and God’s word becomes nothing more than human literature—rather than His holy proclamation of eternal life. An ever deepening appreciation for God’s Word is manifested in the principles of “Scripture interprets Scripture” and “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable.”

In today's text Jesus conquers the natural and spiritual world with nothing more than His Word. The disciples witness the power of Jesus' Word; their faith, still weak and wavering, grows stronger as they marveled in holy fear at Him who commands even wind and water. Contrast their reaction in faith to the reaction of unbelief that rejects Jesus and His proclamation as manifested in the Gadarenes who prefer the security of their pigs to the freedom of the gospel. The demons recognize the Son of God and know that He is destined to overthrow them. They are startled and terrified by the person of Jesus. Both the devil and the demons always recognize Jesus for what He is, the "Son of the Most High God." Through this reality He is King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling all things.

Jesus asked the man his name, but it was the demons who replied, thus showing they were in control. The man does not choose Jesus or decide to welcome the Lord into his heart, but instead the Lord chooses to deliver him from his imprisonment by the devil and his legions. Only after this redemption by Christ through grace is the man able to turn toward or cling to Jesus in faith and seek to follow Him. In all cases, it is God Who initiates action leading to (or increasing) faith, while any rejection of Christ comes from man, because of his sinful attachment to the world in favor over receiving God's gracious call.

Luke is making the point that Jesus is exactly Who He says He is: the Christ. To Jesus Christ death is nothing more than a sleep from which one can be awakened with a soft touch or a gentle word. Though this is true, many today try to have a relationship with God in the same *at arms length, anonymous* way as the woman who attempted to quietly touch His garment within the cover of the crowd—attempting to receive His blessing without having to come face to face with Him. This is not the way the Lord desires to know us, or have us know Him, for we will be more abundantly blessed if we come face to face with Him, in a more intimate way than a casual brush in the crowd. He also commands her to have courage in her faith toward Him.

There can be no secret believers who are not willing to confess their Lord before the world while looking to Him for their redemption. Many in that throng touched Jesus and nothing resulted. Only to this woman's touch of faith did Jesus respond with His power. We too have such faith when we come to the Lord's baptismal font, receive His bread and wine, and His absolution. It is not the physical element or touch that our faith looks to, but the sure Word of God, coupled with His promise associated with these tangible earthly things. In all these things, we, in faith, hear our Lord graciously proclaim "do not fear; only believe," and in that belief we have peace and salvation.