

Sermon for August 2nd, 2026
NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Samuel 22:21-34

- 21** “The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.
22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD
and have not wickedly departed from my God.
23 For all his rules were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.
24 I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.
25 And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.
26 “With the merciful you show yourself merciful;
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
27 with the purified you deal purely,
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.
28 You save a humble people,
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down.
29 For you are my lamp, O LORD,
and my God lightens my darkness.
30 For by you I can run against a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
31 This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.
32 “For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
33 This God is my strong refuge
and has made my way blameless.
34 He made my feet like the feet of a deer
and set me secure on the heights.

Psalm 51:1-12

- 1** Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!
3 For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.

5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
6 Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.
9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
11 Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, **2** and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, **3** and all ate the same spiritual food, **4** and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. **5** Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.
6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. **7** Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." **8** We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **9** We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **10** nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **12** Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. **13** No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Luke 16:1-9

1 He also said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. **2** And he called him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.' **3** And the manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. **4** I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.' **5** So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' **6** He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.' **7** Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.' **8** The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. **9** And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."

Our text for meditation this Ninth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

After the wars of David were finished, toward the end of his life he composed this song. The children of Israel finally had secure borders, a functioning economy, their enemies brought to heel and paganism extinguished from the land. This was the first time the Israelites had peace, a righteous peace, in close to *four hundred years*. After such a long period of exhausting, bloody struggle, the Israelites finally reached the goal of being a prosperous, faithful nation.

Royal Swan Songs

So David writes the song in 2 Samuel 22, wherein we have our reading. Now, in his day this was common practice. As a king was in his old age, he would often write a *swan song*, or final public address to the people. Often times this would be a set of annals that he wrote, or a poem reflecting on his accomplishments. These were often stilted, bragging, and arrogant texts that reflected what they wanted people to think about them. Let's read from a few of the *other* swan songs from the pagan kings of the era.

From Sennacherib, a king of Assyria:

*Sennacherib, the great king,
the mighty king,
king of the world,
king of Assyria,
king of the four quarters,
the wise shepherd,
favorite of the great gods,
guardian of right,
lover of justice,
who lends support,
who comes to the aid of the destitute,
who performs pious acts,
perfect hero,
mighty man,
first among all princes,
the powerful one who consumes ⁹the insubmissive,
who strikes the wicked with the thunderbolt.¹*

From Mesha, a king of Moab:

And I built Baal-Meon, and I built a water reservoir in it. And I built Qiryaten. And the men of Gad lived in the land of Atarot from ancient times; and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself, and I fought against the city and captured it. And I killed all the people of the city as a sacrifice for Kemosh and for Moab. And I brought back the fire-hearth of his uncle from there; and I brought it before the face of Kemosh in Qerioit, and I made the men of Sharon live there, as well as the men of Maharit.

And Kemosh said to me, "Go, take Nebo from Israel." And I went in the night and fought against it from daybreak until midday, and I took it and I killed the whole population: seven thousand male

¹ The rest of his annals are just a list of military accomplishments:
<https://www.kchanson.com/ANCDPCS/meso/sennprism1.html>

*subjects and aliens, and female subjects, aliens, and servant girls. For I had put it to the ban for Ashtar Kemosh. And from there I took [the Lord's] vessels, and I presented them before Kemosh's face.*²

Finally, from Kilamuwa, a king of Gabbari:

"I am Kilamuwa, the son of King Chaya.

King Gabar reigned over Ya'diya but achieved nothing.

*Then came Bamah, and he achieved nothing. Then there was my father Chaya, but he accomplished nothing. Then there was my brother Sha'il, but he also accomplished nothing. But I Kilamuwa, the son of TML, what I accomplished not (even) their predecessors accomplished. My father's house was in the midst of powerful kings, and each put forth his hand to eat it; but I was in the hand(s) of the kings like a fire that consumes the beard or like a fire that consumes the hand. The king of the Danunians overpowered me, but I hired against him the king of Assyria. He gave me a maid for the price of a sheep, and a man for the price of a garment.*³

Do you see the difference?

Unlike those kings' writings, David's song is *not* written to brag about the state of Israel after his wars and state reforms. No my friends, that sort of arrogance is for *other* kings, *pagan* kings. Those unbelieving men wrote as though their earthly lives were the best they could do, the highlight of their eternities. They write as though they were trying to *earn* something from their ugly false gods. Meanwhile, David writes as a man who is justified by faith before God, and so he spends almost the entirety of his swan song praising the Lord. Ever the poet, he meticulously crafts every stanza of our reading to a fervent praise to God. Let us read through it once more.

i.

21 "The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.

22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD
and have not wickedly departed from my God.

23 For all his rules were before me,
and from his statutes I did not turn aside.

24 I was blameless before him,
and I kept myself from guilt.

25 And the LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to my cleanness in his sight.

At first, David sounds like he is making the same arrogant claims that the pagan kings are making. But then he explains how God deserves all the credit: the righteousness being rewarded is not *inherent* to David. It is not his righteousness, but the Lord's righteousness imputed to him by faith.

ii.

26 "With the merciful you show yourself merciful;
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;

27 with the purified you deal purely,
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous.

28 You save a humble people,
but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them down.

The king speaks as one who is justified before God on account of our Lord's graciousness. Why are David's hands clean? Because God, being merciful, cleansed him of his sins and rendered him blameless. How can David say that he has kept our Lord's ways? Because God purified him from his

² The rest is Mesha's exploits with some mentions of his false god chemosh:
<https://www.kchanson.com/ANCDPCS/westsem/mesha.html>

³ More of his inane bitter ramblings may be found here:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kilamuwa_Stela

former iniquities. How does he receive reward from God? Because our Lord heard his humility, and instead of counting his sins against him God counted his good deeds in his favor.

iii.

29 For you are my lamp, O LORD,
and my God lightens my darkness.
30 For by you I can run against a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.

While the other near eastern kings spoke of their exploits and their greatness as a way of “earning” favor from their idols, David points to our Lord as the one who made everything good happen. Because God enlightens, enables, and empowers David to do everything he accomplishes, God deserves all the praise. The same way David could not have defeated Goliath without the Holy Spirit's work, neither could he have written so many of the Psalms, or even this final song.

iv.

31 This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the LORD proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.
32 “For who is God, but the LORD?
And who is a rock, except our God?
33 This God is my strong refuge
and has made my way blameless.
34 He made my feet like the feet of a deer
and set me secure on the heights.

Though the song goes on further, it is nonetheless best captured with these verses. Who is Israel to praise for their newfound security? The king? No, for he could do nothing without help. Ah, but God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *He* is the one whose Word proves true at all times, and *His* protection is worth far more than many armies. This God made David's way blameless, and brought him to the heights of salvation.

My friends, why would David proclaim this song throughout all Israel as he did? Because all these things our Lord did for him, our Lord can do for anyone – including, even especially, yourself. David was not just a king, he was also a *prophet*, and as a prophet he speaks on behalf of God to all people. Seeing the Gospel from afar in time, he knew that the Lord would make people blameless by the suffering Messiah who would rise again.⁴ The Holy Spirit inspired him, showing that the safety and prosperity of Israel foreshadows the paradise that shall belong to all Christians after the Resurrection. David writes with a view of Divine grace showered on all believers, and speaks of his own experiences as proof so that we can trust God even further.

Conclusion

The author of First and Second Chronicles is constantly comparing all the kings of Judah to their forefather David. The reason for that is not that he was the greatest king or anything like that, but rather moments like this. Given rest from all his enemies, David points us to God, to faith in Him and entrusting ourselves to His care and empowerment. He was different from the other kings, certainly, but the difference is found in his swan song, wherein he exhorted all Israel – and us – to expect from our Lord in faith all the things He did for David.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

4 This is especially evident in Psalm 22.

Sermon for August 9th, 2026
TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Jeremiah 7:1-11

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: **2** “Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. **3** Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. **4** Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

5 “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, **6** if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, **7** then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

8 “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. **9** Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, **10** and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? **11** Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.

Psalms 92

1 It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
2 to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
3 to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
4 For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.
5 How great are your works, O LORD!
Your thoughts are very deep!
6 The stupid man cannot know;
the fool cannot understand this:
7 that though the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction forever;
8 but you, O LORD, are on high forever.
9 For behold, your enemies, O LORD,
for behold, your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.
10 But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me fresh oil.
11 My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;
my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.
12 The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
13 They are planted in the house of the LORD;

they flourish in the courts of our God.
14 They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
15 to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

1 Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Luke 19:41-48

41 And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 42 saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side 44 and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

45 And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, 46 saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

47 And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, 48 but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Our meditation for this Tenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Most people alive today are on their way to hell. They have not believed in the Gospel, preferring to stay in their sins and remain in their false religions, resisting every attempt the Holy Spirit makes to bring them to the faith. They know that the things they are doing are wrong, that their beliefs are wrong, and that they have nothing good waiting for them at the end of their earthly lives, yet they do not repent. Scripture attests that this is a choice as well, saying that the nonbeliever suppresses the truth so they can continue doing what they are doing, and is thus without excuse; some of them even become reprobates, whom God gives over to their own depraved desires.¹

For us Christians, this leads to a great deal of angst. The Gospel is self-evidently true while the threat of God's wrath is self-evidently terrifying. Why then won't these people turn around?

1 Romans 1:18-25

Theologians have tried to answer in theological ways for over a thousand years now, but their answers come off as either insufficient or wildly off base. Some of them decide that the nonbelievers are the way they are because God predetermined for them to be damned; this doesn't work, because God says He wants everyone to be saved!² Others try to say that there is no need for them to believe, because everyone in their estimation ends up in Heaven; this does not work either, for Scripture is explicit about damnation being an eternal thing.³ We are left with the only answer being that the damned are the damned because that is what they want to be. Of their own free will, they choose to reject the true God; our Old Testament reading helps us to understand it.

Most do Not Repent

“Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.” This is the heart of the message Jeremiah was told to pronounce to the children of Judah. Predictably, they did not listen. Why is this the case? They did not heed his warning because they did not care. The pressure placed on them by the world, the flesh and the devil created a powerful counterbalance to the proclaimed Word of God, the witness of their conscience, and the knowledge they have of right and wrong. For one thing, they had to work hard manual labor all the time, whether that is in the fields or in the sea or working to build. The oppression that God speaks of involves the very audience that the prophet spoke to, with many of the uncharitable and manipulative among Judah being victims of exploitation themselves. Why would they listen to someone telling them to clean up their act when they were struggling under heavy yokes of labor? Why would they obey the man telling them to be *even poorer* than they were under subsistence wages?

For a moment, let us use our imaginations. Jeremiah went to the gate of the Temple in Jerusalem to proclaim his oracle. A stream of people were going in and out, some for making sacrifices and some for official business. These were ostensibly *religious* people, since those who cared nothing for the Lord would not be at His Temple. Put yourself in one of these men's shoes my friends; you are going to the Temple *to make a sacrifice to God*, leading your goat by a small loop, when there at the gate is an angry prophet shouting (to speak above the noisy crowd) that God is angry. “Well of course!” you might reply, “Why do you think I'm making this here sacrifice?” The prophet replies that you must stop sinning in the first place, and you get confused; *what sins*? You were told that making the sacrifices takes those away, what need is there to change? That is what the Temple is there for in the first place, just as the Levites taught you when you were young. And so you go on your merry way, offer your goat to the priests, and the go right back to doing wickedness.

Making matters worse, Jeremiah's message was in all likelihood drowned out in the ears of the people. Louder voices than Jeremiah's were saying “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” as though it were some magic slogan. For close to four hundred years, that Temple had stood, and the *false* prophets pointed to it as a sign of stability. Such false prophets were popular in their day, because they spoke positively about the future, reassuring an anxious population that the nation was safe. If you or I were among the children of Judah in Jeremiah's day, there would be a *very* powerful temptation to listen to the man who says “everything will be okay” instead of the angry prophet foretelling doom.

So if we put ourselves in the sandals of the average child of Judah in Jeremiah's day, what do we have?

- People were stretched thin economically and suffering, so they turned to exploiting others to get by.
- They were taught that ceremonial observances like sacrifices rendered them acceptable to God entirely, with no real need for inner repentance.
- False prophets were more numerous than true ones, and they gave a far more comfortable message.

2 1 Timothy 2:1-4

3 Revelation 14:9-12, wherein the Apostle St. John says that the damned (the “worshippers of the beast”) are tormented.

It ought not surprise us that the people did not repent until after they were taken in to the Babylonian Exile. For that matter, it should not surprise us that people don't want to repent *now*, either! Honestly, what difference is there in the people between Jeremiah's day and ours? Economic hardship is everywhere, most believers are shallow in their faith *at best*, and false teachers outnumber true teachers by a ratio of about 5000 to 1. The major difference is the “information age,” wherein anyone can find the true doctrines of Scripture on the internet – which is just as accessible as pornography, cult websites, endless propaganda, rumor mongering “drama” channels and scams. Most of us believers are spending most of our time navigating modern life under the oppressive fog of unprecedented mass temptation; most of humanity (including most of the visible Church) is absolutely *lost* in it.

Shall we remain?

The deal God offers the children of Judah is this: change your ways and you will get to remain in the land. End the oppression, end the murders and thefts and idolatry and adultery, and the Lord will avert the disaster of Babylonian invasion. The Scriptures attest that Judah *did not take this deal*, because few of them were willing to take more financial losses, accuse their own motivations, lay in dust and ashes and repent as they were told. So the ones who survived Nebuchadnezzar's slaughter campaign went off into Exile, where they lived as impoverished slaves for seventy years.

This raises the question: is God saying the same to us right now? Are we doomed to invasion and destruction and plague unless all of our society engages in repentance the way Nineveh did in Jonah?⁴ The answer is “possibly.” He always reserves the right to make the same offer to any nation, as our Lord relates later in Jeremiah's book:

If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it.⁵

Yet at the same time, what does God say to Abraham when it comes to judgment on Sodom? If He finds fifty, forty five, forty, twenty, or even just *ten* righteous people in Sodom, then He will not destroy it.⁶ But what does our Lord do? He removes the righteous people *from* Sodom and *then* destroys it along with its wicked inhabitants. God reserves the right to offer the same deal to any nation that He did to Judah, but He may also stay His Hand for the sake of the righteous, and if all else fails then He will evacuate the righteous before judging the nation.

As it stands now, we have a massive sin problem. It hasn't been this bad in the world in a long time, at least not to the naked observer. Previous generations, even those in medieval Christendom were just as bad as we are, but it was never this *openly* wicked. Parades are held worldwide in celebration of depravity. Young men are being sent to die in pointless wars between competing nations ruled over by evil men. Great masses of women have turned to selling their bodies to make a profit, while campaigning for the “right” to kill their children through abortion. Housing is unaffordable in every country, and the poor have responded by stealing, gambling or – barring financial success – suffocating their sorrows in an ocean of drugs. And all the while, massive corporations are racing to install a surveillance state that watches and polices our every action, word and transaction. Mankind is poisoning their food, neglecting or abusing their children, ruining lives for fun, and more. What is the Church doing in light of this? Not speaking as Jeremiah did – oh no. Instead, the Church halfheartedly mumbles the Gospel while policing impolite speech.

4 Jonah 3:6-10

5 Jeremiah 18:7-10

6 Genesis 18:22-33

I have a feeling that God is getting ready to do *something* my friends.. He may punish nations the way He punished Judah, offering through the witness of faithful ministers a way of repentance first; seeing as this was fruitless in Judah, it would likely be fruitless here, leaving only violence and plague in response. Perhaps He shall stay His Hand for the sake of the righteous among nations, those who follow the Gospel. But one thing is for certain, namely the return of Christ for the final Judgment. Let us pray we see that glorious Day in our lifetimes.

Conclusion

Yet let us pray more fervently that people *shall* repent before that Day arrives. Our God is not silent, nor does He sit in Heaven doing nothing all day; He *acts*, for this is His world and He is intimately involved in it. The men and women who are in unrepentant sin are thus on borrowed time. My friends, do you know any of them? Have you spoken to them? Do you love them enough to tell them of the need for repentance, to bear fruit in keeping with repentance, to be Baptized and to entrust themselves to Jesus? If so, for their sake you do well to reach out. It could be that your message leads them to penitent faith and salvation; it could also mean that the judgment upon our nations is stayed as your friend (and more people); it could mean a hastening of Christ's Return, and the true changes needed to fix the problems of sin and death. To say nothing else my friends, let us witness to them and care for their souls!

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for August 16th, 2026
ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Genesis 4:1-15

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” **2** And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. **3** In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, **4** and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, **5** but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. **6** The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? **7** If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. **9** Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?” **10** And the LORD said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. **11** And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.” **13** Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. **14** Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” **15** Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

Psalm 50:7-23

7 “Hear, O my people, and I will speak;
O Israel, I will testify against you.
I am God, your God.

8 Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you;
your burnt offerings are continually before me.

9 I will not accept a bull from your house
or goats from your folds.

10 For every beast of the forest is mine,
the cattle on a thousand hills.

11 I know all the birds of the hills,
and all that moves in the field is mine.

12 “If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
for the world and its fullness are mine.

13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
or drink the blood of goats?

14 Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and perform your vows to the Most High,

15 and call upon me in the day of trouble;
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of

disobedience— **3** among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **4** But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, **9** not a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Luke 18:9-14

9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: **10** “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **11** The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **12** I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ **13** But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ **14** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Our text for meditation this Eleventh Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Before Adam and Eve were cast out from the Garden of Eden, God delivered four curses. Eve and all women after her were to experience suffering in childbearing and living a life that revolved around men. The ground was cursed, with Adam and all men being relegated to hard labor all their lives. There was the curse of death as well, which entered into the world from that moment. Yet these three came *after* the curse on the serpent, which contained within it a promise. “The Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.’”¹ One day, a male offspring from the woman would bruise – that is, *crush* – the head of the wicked serpent that tempted man. There would be a *Savior* who comes and undoes all of this suffering forever.

As believers today, we recognize that Jesus is the one promised to destroy the serpent. He bound the devil's power by dying on a Cross for our sins and rising again so that we may be justified. Today, we recognize that what God said to the serpent in Eden was a Gospel promise for us to hold onto. It was the message of hope that Adam and Eve were supposed to cling to as they adjusted to living in a cursed world. When Eve became pregnant, she must have felt all sorts of excitement as the baby started kicking within her womb. She was ignorant of the future arrival of Jesus Christ. So she must have asked, was this son going to be the hero? Was he going to be the savior that was promised? After she gave birth, it seems that she indeed believed that Cain was going to save everyone. I believe this is why Cain was a tiller of the ground. His parents were the ones to raise him up in his vocation, and since the promised seed of the woman would bruise the head of the snake, what better way to find snakes and kill them than to till the ground? So Cain was the farmer, breaking up the soil and planting crops while slaying any serpent he found: perhaps one of them would be the original snake, and then humanity

1 Genesis 3:15

might be allowed to re-enter Eden. Think my friends: *something* motivated Adam to learn how to farm, then to teach his oldest son how to do it, *then* to have this son be the only one of the two brothers to till the soil! This could only be that the man thought Cain was going to be that prophesied hero, just as much as his wife thought so.

The two sons

The resultant favoritism of Adam and Eve on Cain is shown in the names of their sons as well as their vocations. Cain's name means “to get” - as in, Eve *got* Cain by the help of the Lord, just as she exclaimed when he was born. By this name, she thought she was giving something of a prophecy regarding her son. Abel's name on the other hand means “emptiness” or “vanity.”² If Cain was to be the savior as Eve reasoned, then Abel was at best a servant and at worst an unneeded burden. All of their hopes were on Cain, while Abel's status and destiny were considered worthless. The older brother got to embark on a heroic quest of reshaping the land while hunting down a primordial serpentine enemy; Abel the redundancy was left to keep sheep, make clothes, and spin wool for his family. He was relegated to being a servant to everyone else.

We can see why God accepted Abel's offering and not Cain's. Both men made sacrifices but it was Abel who made an offering by faith, not Cain. Abel was raised to be a humble servant to others, and that is just the sort of character God wants to see in men; as he offered up the sheep that he so tenderly raised, God accepted his act of trust.³ Imagine that, a man whose name means “vanity” being considered the brother of *substance* before our Lord! Meanwhile mighty Cain gave his offering not out of love and trust, but out of pride; he already believed that *he* was going to be the one to save humanity, so the offering was merely a formality.

Cain trusted in himself instead of the Lord, and much to his dismay and confusion he was rejected. God wanted the sort of faith that says “You are my Savior so I make this offering,” not the kind of faith that says “*I* am the savior, so I bring this offering.” It is easy to understand though why Cain would be so angry here. Why wouldn't he believe he was the savior? He was named for it, trained for it, tasked with it and hard at work trying to make it happen...but Abel, the *servant boy*, gets credit from God? Behind his anger must have been fear, for this moment brought the foreboding feeling that perhaps it was Abel who was chosen to save instead of him. His mind must have been flooded with the thought that now Abel was not just the less favored brother, but now he was *competition*.

Quite suddenly, as St. John attests, Cain hated Abel.⁴ Abel's deeds were righteous by his faith, while Cain's offering was wicked because he lacked it. God warned him that his sinful nature was trying to inspire heinous deeds, but by that time he had made up his mind. Cain decided to “take out the competition,” and then murdered his brother. The first murder in human history was performed by a man who thought his works justified him, lashing out as he did at someone whom he thought inferior to himself.

The Same Problem Observed in Us

Now, let none of us think that we would never do such a thing ourselves. We have the same capacity for horrible sins as he did. God tells Cain, “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.” My friends, do you rule over the sin that dwells in you? Let us suppose that you do... or at least you *try* to. Every time you try to say no to temptation, you find yourself having to fight something inside of you. The indwelling wickedness of our sinful flesh rises up, cajoles,

² Luther explains it thus in his commentary on Genesis, which may be found for free here:
<https://www.lutheranlibrary.org/356-luther-genesis/>

³ Hebrews 11:4

⁴ 1 John 3:11-15

attacks, tempts, and convinces us to do wrong at every opportunity it gets. Throughout our lives we find ourselves perplexed at this, as though we are our own worst enemy. Even the Apostles found this same dynamic within themselves, unable to completely extinguish the flames of sin in their mortal bodies.⁵

Never tell yourself “I would never do that.” You have the same sort of sin in you that Cain had in his own flesh. The Pharisees told themselves that they would never shed the blood of prophets,⁶ but then they orchestrated the Crucifixion of our Savior – who is not only a Prophet, but God Himself! The ancient Israelites before them promised to never turn from worshiping the true God, yet the Old Testament is replete with examples of them doing just that, over and over and over again. King Saul was a man filled with the Holy Spirit, the pinnacle of righteousness in Israel, but then he found himself on an insane quest to seek out the murder of his former protege David. Every sinner throughout all history, all of us, have had the same problem as Cain did. Unlike Cain though, we Christians are aware of it. Let us not say “I would never do that,” but rather “there but for the Grace of God go I.” Without our Lord's help, we are *all* Cain.

Conclusion

Let us recognize that sinful Cain in our own flesh, and let it be a cause for humility. Let us think like Abel did. Like any man, Abel had his own sins just as we do. Yet Abel approached the Lord in humility and faith, the kind that says “I need you Lord.” He could have used those sheep for anything else, he could have withheld sacrifices from God out of bitterness over being the less favored son, but he did neither of these for he knew that our Lord was the only One who could truly help humanity. Let us *not* be like Cain, who lost everything over his pride and his rage. God cursed him from the ground, forever dashing his hopes of being the snake-slayer his mother wanted him to be. Because we are not immune from committing horrible sins the way he did, let us say to our God “Lord be merciful to me a sinner” and let Him take charge of our destiny. And when we do, He shall not spurn us. After all, remember that Abel offered up the firstborn lamb for his relationship with God. So too was Christ the firstborn Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world,⁷ offered up for our sake. While Abel's blood cried out to God for the grievous crime committed on him, Christ submitted to a grievous murder to that His Blood would say to us “you are forgiven.” Believe in Him, and you shall receive a different mark than Cain received – instead you benefit from the sealing of the Holy Spirit given to you in Baptism, granting you eternal life forevermore. With this faith, let us hold on to our Savior, just as righteous Abel.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁵ Romans 7:14-25

⁶ Matthew 23:29-31

⁷ Genesis 22:8, John 1:29

Sermon for August 23rd, 2026
TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

Isaiah 29:17-24

17 Is it not yet a very little while
until Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field,
and the fruitful field shall be regarded as a forest?

18 In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and darkness
the eyes of the blind shall see.

19 The meek shall obtain fresh joy in the LORD,
and the poor among mankind shall exult in the Holy One of Israel.

20 For the ruthless shall come to nothing
and the scoffer cease,

and all who watch to do evil shall be cut off,

21 who by a word make a man out to be an offender,
and lay a snare for him who reproves in the gate,
and with an empty plea turn aside him who is in the right.

22 Therefore thus says the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob:

“Jacob shall no more be ashamed,
no more shall his face grow pale.

23 For when he sees his children,
the work of my hands, in his midst,
they will sanctify my name;
they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob
and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.

24 And those who go astray in spirit will come to understanding,
and those who murmur will accept instruction.”

Psalm 146

1 Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD, O my soul!

2 I will praise the LORD as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.

3 Put not your trust in princes,
in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.
4 When his breath departs, he returns to the earth;
on that very day his plans perish.

5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,

6 who made heaven and earth,

the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets the prisoners free;
8 the LORD opens the eyes of the blind.
The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down;
the LORD loves the righteous.
9 The LORD watches over the sojourners;
he upholds the widow and the fatherless,
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
10 The LORD will reign forever,
your God, O Zion, to all generations.
Praise the LORD!

Romans 10:9-13

9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Mark 7:31-37

31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33 And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. 34 And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.” 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, “He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

Our text for meditation this Twelfth Sunday after Trinity is on our Epistle reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Faith is the lifeblood of Christianity. Without faith in Jesus Christ, there is no point to what we do, think or say as Christians. We do not gather together for the Divine Service because it is a nice community activity, we are gathered together because we believe in the Savior. If someone wants a “community activity” only, they can get it at a sporting event or a knitting circle. We do not engage in evangelism as a mere form of socializing, we do it to serve Christ who wants more souls saved. The Bible is not some ancient document we study for mere historical curiosity, but we study it *because we believe what the Word says*. Without real and authentic faith our religion is nothing more than kabuki

theater, a cover for whatever social program a bad actor might want to carry out.

Attempts to Separate Christianity and Faith

Such bad actors have arisen in history, men who tried to separate faith from Christianity, as though they were draining blood from someone's body. We cannot forget infamous cult leaders like Jim Jones, who preached Christianity until he was comfortable revealing to the “peoples' temple” that he never believed. For Jones, the church he founded and the doctrine he taught were nothing more than a way to push marxist politics.¹ In more respectable circles we find men like Paul Tillich, a “Lutheran” theologian who not only denied any real existence to God Himself, but also wanted the Church to be more of a therapeutic social program... and also a club for pushing socialism.² Another “Lutheran” theologian, Rudolf Bultmann, determined to make the Church into an existentialist ethical think tank after he “demythologized” the Scriptures.³⁴ His excuse for trying to take the supernatural out of the Bible? Well he was worried that Christians would be laughed out of the social sphere for believing in things like the Resurrection of our Savior, miraculous healings, or a six-day creation of the universe.

Jones, Tillich and Bultmann are just three examples among an ocean of false teachers just like them. What was the fruit of their efforts? In Jim Jones' case, his “peoples' temple” turned into a marxist commune in Guyana, where after he had his men assassinate a politician, he panicked and had his entire cult commit suicide: the fruit of his mission was 900 dead bodies in the jungle. Unlike Jones, Tillich and Bultmann both saw a great deal of success in their faithless efforts, to the point where their textbooks were required reading in many Lutheran seminaries. But what is the fruit of their unbelieving projects? Empty churches. The liberal “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” adopted much of Tillich's teaching and became something of a social club; now they are dramatically declining like one.⁵

More on Tillich and his ilk. If you ever drive by empty Lutheran churches in America or Europe (and these empty churches are everywhere), they are by and large the graves of congregations which listened to Tillich's ideas and separated faith from Christianity. They were no longer about simple faith in Jesus and obedience to His Word, instead relegating Jesus to being a mascot for soothing existential angst. Making people comfortable was the aim of every service, and the only sins to be condemned were “oppressor” sins and bigotry. Gone was any drive to evangelize, to raise up children in the Lord, or to strengthen one's fealty to Scripture. So even to this day we see the cycle repeating endlessly in the liberal old guard churches which haven't shuttered their doors yet:

1. A congregation finds itself in steep decline, because their previous minister did not teach them to evangelize.
2. The old minister retires, and a new minister is appointed who promises to fix it.
3. He/she then proceeds to preach social dogmas like tolerance, charity, and open borders.
4. The Gospel isn't preached and evangelism is still not done.
5. Then the church closes.

Many young men have commented to me that when they visit their local churches, this is the situation. Either the church is full of old people and they are the odd man out, or it is closed entirely and the website wasn't updated. Typically I try to help them set up a congregation with the Catacomb Synod, but there is always a bit of mourning at the sheer loss that our world has faced. What was once

1 <https://minds.wisc.edu/items/07cf03b6-5e0d-48d7-94a0-dc12f0b3fc0e>

2 <https://aeon.co/essays/my-grandfather-paul-tillich-the-unbelieving-theologian>

3 <https://philosophydungeon.weebly.com/rudolf-bultmann.html>

4 While Bultmann believed God exists and that Jesus “reveals” Him, he denied that Jesus rose from the dead, died for our sins, etc.

5 <https://lutherancore.website/2026/01/12/what-we-can-all-learn-from-the-elcas-dramatic-decline/>

a grand Lutheran presence in the world is now a pile of ruins with relatively few living congregations. But my friends, it didn't have to be that way with them, if only they had authentic faith in our Lord! And thankfully, it doesn't have to be that way with us either. If we hold on to legitimate trust in our Savior, then we shall find ourselves saved, blessed and thriving.

The Centrality of Faith in Salvation and Blessing

God saves and blesses those who confess and believe. The outward form of worship – what we *confess* – must come from hearts that are truly entrusted to Jesus Christ. This is true both on the individual and congregational levels. If a Christian wants to be saved, then he believes and confesses that Jesus Christ our risen Lord is his Savior. If a church wants to continue on, then they must be *full* of those individuals, that as one body they confess and believe with true hearts. Then there is a continuation, a lampstand among those Christians which does not go out. While some days remain harder than others, the congregation stands firm in the presence of the Holy Spirit who keeps them firmly established. By the Grace of our Lord, there are churches to this day which demonstrate by their continued faith and operations that His Word is firm on the matter.

I mean it when I say blessing by the way. St. Paul did not stutter when he said that God bestows His riches on all who call on Him. Yes, our Catechism says that God gives to everyone their daily bread whether they pray or not,⁶ and Christ teaches us that God sends His rain on the just and the unjust alike.⁷ The nonbeliever receives blessing as a demonstration of God's love for them despite their sins, and each blessing is an earnest call for them to repent and believe in the Gospel. But when a *Christian* receives blessing, it is even more. Every blessing God gives you is a foretaste of the even greater things to come. Not only does God love you and provide for you, but He bestows *His* personal riches upon you, promising an eternal inheritance which shall never perish nor be stolen. The nonbeliever gets blessed as God says to him “you should be Mine;” the believer gets blessed as God says to him “I rejoice that you *are* Mine.”

St. Paul spends much of Romans teaching the marvelous truth that Gentiles inherit the same promises, blessings, and eternal life as the Old Testament saints. As the Apostle says, “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all.” No longer is covenant with God something that only the Jews could receive, for now that Christ has gone to the Cross the centrality of faith comes to the forefront. The God who gave us Gentiles life and breath and food and family and all good things *also* tells us that we may enter into eternal life with Him – *without* having to get circumcised, do pilgrimages, make animal sacrifices, or hide ourselves whenever we get a boil on our skin.⁸ Jews who convert to Christianity are liberated by faith from the strictures of the Old Covenant; we Gentiles find that we never had to bother with it in the first place, being brought to Christian freedom immediately by faith.

This means my friends that we are justified before God by faith alone, no matter who we are as Christians. Everything in Christianity springs from that, for it is the very faith which inspires us to live the Christian life in the first place. Why go to Church and receive the Sacraments? Faith in Christ. Why read the Scriptures and obey the commandments we find therein? Faith in Christ. Why do we pray without ceasing, take the Sacrament, confess our sins, forgive our enemies, control our appetites, help the poor from near to far and gather as one body every week? None of that happens without faith in Jesus my friends. Everything we do flows from it, until we are with our Lord in the New Heavens and New Earth.

⁶ In the explanation on the Fourth Petition: <https://bookofconcord.org/small-catechism/the-lords-prayer/>

⁷ Matthew 5:44-46

⁸ These are all, of course, requirements for ancient Israelites as found in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Conclusion

This is why every attempt at “secularizing” Christianity or separating it from faith fails. Without a firm belief in the Word, held in honest fact without any “demythologizing” or political substitutions, there simply is no Christianity. Bultmann was wrong; our religion does not need to be “rescued” from the doctrines that the Scriptures teach. Yes, we believe that a Jewish Man from 2000 years ago turned out to also be God, that He died to pay the penalty for our sins and rose again so that we could live forever. So what if that makes an atheist balk? We have eternal life and the atheist doesn't. So what if we're “missing out” on some goofy political organizing trick? That's certainly better than ending up like Jim Jones's cult. No my friends, such things are entirely foolish. Faith is the lifeblood of Christianity, and that it flows through the veins of our souls is the simplest proof that we are alive – and eternally so.

Now the Peace of our Lord, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sermon for August 30th, 2026
THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

READINGS

2 Chronicles 28:8-15

8 The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. **9** But a prophet of the LORD was there, whose name was Oded, and he went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, “Behold, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, he gave them into your hand, but you have killed them in a rage that has reached up to heaven. **10** And now you intend to subjugate the people of Judah and Jerusalem, male and female, as your slaves. Have you not sins of your own against the LORD your God? **11** Now hear me, and send back the captives from your relatives whom you have taken, for the fierce wrath of the LORD is upon you.”

12 Certain chiefs also of the men of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood up against those who were coming from the war **13** and said to them, “You shall not bring the captives in here, for you propose to bring upon us guilt against the LORD in addition to our present sins and guilt. For our guilt is already great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel.” **14** So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. **15** And the men who have been mentioned by name rose and took the captives, and with the spoil they clothed all who were naked among them. They clothed them, gave them sandals, provided them with food and drink, and anointed them, and carrying all the feeble among them on donkeys, they brought them to their kinsfolk at Jericho, the city of palm trees. Then they returned to Samaria.

Psalms 32

1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

2 Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

5 I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

7 You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

9 Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,

which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

10 Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Galatians 3:15-22

15 To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. **16** Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. **17** This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. **18** For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. **20** Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Luke 10:25-37

25 And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" **26** He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?" **27** And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." **28** And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

29 But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" **30** Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. **31** Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. **32** So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. **34** He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. **35** And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' **36** Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" **37** He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

Our text for meditation this Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity is on our Old Testament reading.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction

Imagine having a sibling who shamed the family. He left the house at a young age then did drugs, sold drugs, and overdosed on drugs. He regularly calls your parents to scream at them for things they didn't do, alleging some sort of imaginary abuse that makes him feel justified in his rebellion; these conversations are regularly scheduled over when he believes your parents should send him money. Over the years he has been in and out of jail, gotten in plenty of fights, and slept on the streets.

He has a number of illegitimate children that he has sired with his drug addict girlfriends; most of these kids are now in foster care, because he doesn't provide for them. Why would he? He can't hold down a job because he always shows up drunk or high, or argues with management.

Meanwhile, in this hypothetical situation *you* are the good child. You didn't run away, you went to college. You didn't do drugs, you stayed clean. You worked hard to get your own place to live and you waited until marriage to lay with your spouse. You attend Church service every Sunday and do your best to honor your parents. You'll be the first to admit you weren't perfect, but that's just what a good son does – he admits his faults regularly. Your father calls you to get help with his weekend projects and you dutifully spend the whole Saturday getting his projects done.

Now imagine there is yet another argument. Your parents host a family get together, and on the way, you get a speeding ticket from a police officer. You get to the family dinner, still feeling the sting of the ticket, when your good-for-nothing failure of a brother walks into the house. Whiskey is on his breath and there are stains on his raunchy T-shirt (you know, the shirt with scantily clad women on it). He's looking for a fight and slaps you across the face for no reason. Finally after all these years, you snap and decide to fight back...but he wins. You lay there for a few minutes, bloody and sore with a broken jaw, when suddenly a hand picks you up. It's a policeman, who proceeds to put you in handcuffs and have you arrested. Your mother called the police when your brother arrived, and when they get there they recognize you from the speeding ticket they just wrote. Assuming you're the one at fault, they haul you off to jail.

Judah's Loss and God's Justice

How would you feel if you went through such an ordeal? You would probably feel angry at the injustice of it all. Sure, you had your transgression and you paid for it, but this sibling was *so much worse!* What kind of justice is it to have the garbage brother go free while the one who was *trying* to do right gets beaten up and taken away by the cops? So it was with Israel and Judah. While much of the Old Testament is dedicated to outlining the sins of Judah, Northern Israel was far and away the more wretched of the two kingdoms. Having split off from Judah after King Rehoboam refused to cut taxes and forced labor,¹ the Northern ten tribes of Israel quickly abandoned any semblance of faithfulness to God. They worshiped the baals and ashtoreths. They filled the land with oppression and bloodshed. They deliberately set up idols in new temples, complete with golden calves. Of course, Judah certainly had her sins, including periods where wicked kings arose and brought idolatry into the land, but this was offset by occasional repentance and a priesthood that was faithful most of the time.² Not once did the Northern Kingdom truly repent of their abominations. The closest they got was when God sent Elijah to cleanse the land of baal worship, but even that did not get rid of their golden calves.³

So after Israel defeated Judah in war, it must have been severely jarring. Yes, Judah's king at the time, Ahaz, was an evil man; he surpassed Northern Israelite kings in many ways with his idolatry, child sacrifice, and more. But why would God give them into the hand of their wicked brothers? For crying out loud, Israel was so bad that they put a man named Menahem on the throne, who was known to kill every pregnant woman in cities he laid siege to by ripping their wombs open – and Menahem died *peacefully*.⁴ And the current king of Israel, who was waging war on Judah? That was Pekah the son of Remaliah, who was waging this war in an alliance with Rezin the king of Syria, a country that didn't even pretend to worship the true God.⁵

So Israel was worse than Judah, but in this moment they had a triumph, and a brutal one at that. It was only by the word God spoken through Oded the prophet that Judah was spared the total annihilation of mass exile, slavery and execution. It was traumatic enough as it stood to see their young

1 1 Kings 12

2 51% of the time is still most of the time, after all.

3 1 Kings 18

4 2 Kings 15:16-22

5 2 Chronicles 28:5-7

men die *en masse* in war, but for the surviving men to see their women, sons and daughters taken off by the northern tribes to be prostitutes and bondslaves was heart wrenching.

Imagine being one of the survivors left in the land of Judah. You know that your nation has her sins, but to see these paganized apostate cousins of yours take your daughter, how unjust that must feel! And then comes the waiting, the pacing, the anxiety of it all, like being the good brother sitting in a jail cell with a broken jaw. Oh and it was certainly like jail, for the Northern Tribes took as much spoil as they could carry. Judah was left impoverished, starving, mourning her dead and worried sick over the two hundred thousand captives just taken. We can only imagine their relief at seeing these captives return unharmed... relief that was burdened with poverty and perplexity that God had delivered them into the hands of worse men than themselves.

There is a problem of perspective here. The children of Judah could only see that they had been bested by Israel and Syria. All they could do was pick up the pieces and wonder at what our Lord was doing, questioning if He would make it right. They didn't see that God would send a prophet to bring back their loved ones. Further, they *didn't* know that God planned on extinguishing their enemies entirely, punishing their evil in the most devastating fashion. The war started in 732 B.C. Assyria would come and destroy the Syrians entirely that same year. Northern Israel was led into the Assyrian Captivity – which never ended – in 722 B.C., just ten years after the events of our reading. The discipline of loss that was levied on Judah was nothing compared to the wrath that was poured out on Israel; God had no intentions of letting those apostate tribes get away with their sins. In the *moment* it seemed like all was lost as Judah received her women and children back as widows and orphans. But God was not going to allow such injustice to go unnoticed or unpunished.

There was also a restoration for Judah. After the death of Ahaz, Hezekiah rose to the throne. Under his reign, Judah became faithful to God once more, received blessings and wealth, and became strong to withstand the Assyrian invasion long enough until our Lord delivered them. Not only did God deliver harsh justice to Judah's enemies, He also restored the people themselves! Their direct experience vindicates David's hymn, which sings “His anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime.”⁶

Conclusion: the Problem of Perspective

We have the same problem of perspective, don't we? We do not see where the Lord is acting in the world. We do not understand what He has planned. We might wonder to ourselves why He permits disaster or why it feels as though He disciplines us harder than others. Lacking the foreknowledge that He has, we will find ourselves lost if we do not *trust* Him with our future. But that is what He asks of you. He asks you and I to trust that He knows what is going on when we don't. He asks for us to trust that He intervenes to do good things in the midst of disaster to help us in our walk with Him. The children of Judah had no clue that God sent Oded to bring their families back, nor they did not understand that their enemies would fall and that Hezekiah would ascend to the throne for the sake of reviving their nation.

In the midst of these trying times, imagine what He must be doing to avert all sorts of disaster on our end! The hypothetical man with the rotten brother might balk at his situation, but he can take comfort knowing that our Lord shall work it all together for his good.⁷ So must we, for such is the essence of justifying faith – entrusting one's future to Jesus, even if things on the ground look awful. He proved His care for our best interests by dying for our sins on the Cross; let us trust Him in *all* things.

Now the Peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

⁶ Psalm 30:5

⁷ Romans 8:28