

"The Great Reversal"

Isaiah 35:4-7a

September 6, 2015

15th Sunday After Pentecost

Many people enjoy talking about “the good old days”. We remember when times were happier and there seemed to be fewer troubles. We remember when prices were cheaper, although we forget that wages were lower, too. We remember when there didn’t seem to be so much evil and immorality in the world, in our nation, and in our neighborhood and that people generally led good clean lives.

We even remember “the good old days” in the Church. Attendance and offerings were high. So was respect for the Word of God and pastors who preached it. People in the Church, for the most part, agreed upon what was right and what was wrong. People strove to do what was good as they volunteered their talents and time for the mission of the church and as they tried to be good neighbors in their communities. Parents brought their children to church who then brought *their* children to church when they grew up.

Now things have changed and many people don’t feel so good about the church. Many are nervous and pessimistic. Attendance and offerings are down. There is lack of respect for the Word of God and those who preach it. Some Christians prefer to chart their own moral course today without listening to the Word of God or the preacher. Christians have allowed their lives to become so overbooked that they end up having no time to serve the mission of the church or their neighbor in their community. A new generation of people is not taking over responsibility from the generation that preceded it, leaving a burnt out older generation, many tasks left undone in the church, and concern about what will happen to the present generation. Many in the present generation are simply leaving the church completely citing shallow messages, repressive rules, exclusive belief systems, among other things. This raises the question: Is this a bad time to be the church?

It is not just within the church where people are worried. Many people look at the broader world and are down right scared. Evil seems to be on top. We worry about Iran, ISIS, and other evil

powers. All that is opposed to God seems to be winning. Acts of terrorism repeatedly happen and we seem powerless to prevent them. Policemen are shot and their killers defended. What was once rejected as various forms of sexual immorality are now the new sexual morality which we are bound by law to accept and celebrate. What was once called killing is now called choice. Evil is very powerful in our world.

The world itself is falling apart. Watch the evening news. Part of the country is in drought. Part of the country is flooded out. There are tornadoes here, earthquakes there, and hurricanes over there.

Even we ourselves are falling apart. We have various diseases, disabilities, and debilitating conditions which don't get better and may get worse. We suffer because of these diseases, disabilities, and debilitating conditions. We agonize as we watch our loved ones suffer with them, as well. And we all end up in death.

It may seem as if this is not a good time to be the church. There are difficult challenges in the church, difficult problems in the world, and difficult suffering in humanity. It is very easy to be anxious, worried, and afraid and just give up. It seems like things are going to stay the same or get worse instead of getting better. And it feels like God either can't or won't do anything about it. With those feelings gaining support, it's no wonder that people are leaving the church. Why stay? What difference does it make?

But the Word of God for today tells us why we don't have to be anxious, worried, or afraid. The Word of God calls us to think and live in a totally different way and with a totally different mindset. It says, "Say to those who have an anxious heart, 'Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.'" God is coming and things are going to change

The problem here is sin, but not sin in the way we usually think of it: moral failure. We usually think sin is just naughty things we do. Sin is much stronger than that. Sin corrupts all that is good and destroys all that it touches. Sin is not only the reason why moral evil exists in the world, but it is

also the reason why creation is damaged and broken. Sin has corrupted it. It is the reason we are damaged and broken. Sin has corrupted each of us for, as the Word of God declares, “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) Sin is so strong that we can’t fix evil. We can’t fix the world. And we certainly can’t fix ourselves.

God is coming with a vengeance to reverse the curse of sin. He will defeat all who oppose Him and punish all evil doers. The enemies of God and the evil they perpetuate cannot and will not stand. He is coming with our great reward (recompense) and salvation from all that plagues us. All of the effects that sin has on our world – drought, floods, hurricanes, tornados, and other destructive power will cease. All of the effects that sin has on us – guilt, shame, sorrow, pain, disease, suffering, and death – will all be done away with.

Ah, I know the skeptics will say, “Preacher, you’re just a dreamer. All of that sounds real good, but it sure doesn’t look like its happening or ever will happen.” Do you know what the best part of this whole “reverse the curse” thing is? It’s already started.

God has already come. Most missed His appearance since He arrived in a little cattle trough in the backwoods town of Bethlehem. Jesus began His ministry by preaching, not that the Kingdom of God WILL come, but that the Kingdom of God is here now.

Did you ever wonder why Jesus did so many miracles during His ministry? Of course, Jesus had mercy on people and desired to relieve their suffering so He did miraculous things to help them. But there was more to it than that. Our text says that, when God comes to defeat sin and evil and bring about righteousness and good, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” What did Jesus do? He opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He healed the lame and unloosed the tongues of the mute. God is coming. Vengeance is coming. Reward is coming. It’s starting.

It goes on to say that, when God comes to defeat sin and evil and bring about righteousness and good, the destructive power of nature would be reversed, creation would be freed from its bonds

to sin and death, and there would be no more suffering in the desert but only luxurious living as God reestablished the Garden of Eden. What did Jesus do? He stopped the storms and quieted the seas. He provided food in the desert where there was none. God is coming. Vengeance is coming. Reward is coming. It's starting.

To defeat sin and death, a perfect sacrifice for the sin of the world must be made and death must be overcome. What did Jesus do? He took the sin of the world upon Himself and offered His perfect life as the only sacrifice for the sin of the world. He endured death and the devil and won. He descended into hell to proclaim His victory there. He rose from the dead to show His victory here. God has come. Vengeance against sin has been rendered. The reward has been won. The curse has been reversed. It's here.

Martin Luther calls it "The Happy Exchange." Jesus gives you forgiveness in exchange for the condemnation you deserved. Jesus gives you His holiness in exchange for your sin. Jesus gives you His eternal life in exchange for your death.

You received that holiness when you were baptized into Christ. The Word of God says, "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27) When God looks at you, He sees only Christ's righteousness. The curse has been reversed for you.

You receive that forgiveness regularly when you confess your sin and hear God speak through the pastor, "I forgive you all your sins." You have no guilt or condemnation. The curse has been reversed for you.

You receive that life – or at least a taste of it – in the Holy Communion. Heaven touches earth as "with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven" we gather around the altar to receive the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we acknowledge in the prayer after communion, God gives us "a foretaste of the feast to come in the Holy Supper of [His] Son's body and blood." The curse has been reversed for you.

It's a great time to be the church. We have a great message to proclaim in what God has done, what God is doing now, and what God will do in the future. He has overcome sin, death, and

hell. He gives that victory to us now in His Word which we proclaim and His Sacraments which we administer. He will return with vengeance to eternally eradicate sin and all evil doers, restore creation and us to perfection, and to usher in the fulfillment of eternal life which is already ours.

It's a great time to be the church, despite how things look in our life and in the world at large. For here, in the church, we live by faith and not by sight. Faith is not some warm inner feeling or just Biblical knowledge. Faith is trust in the promise and mercy of God. Let not an ever-changing world and its constant problems divert your trust in a God who never breaks a promise and whose mercy is always sure. Everything God has promised, He will do. No matter what evil happens to you, no matter what suffering you experience, no matter what problems and difficulties are yours, rejoice. Live with confidence now and hope for the future. God has come, comes now, and will come again. A great reversal has begun and will be completed. The curse of sin, death, and hell has been reversed for the world, is being reversed in the hearts and lives of many through the ministry of the church, and will finally be reversed for all eternity. God has started it. He will finish it. You have His Word on it. Amen.