

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

At the opening and close of our Tuesday morning Bible study we participate in the prayer office of Matins. This is a service of solemn morning prayer celebrating the dawn of a new day that is unfolding the future of the day ahead and the life of the world around us. We don't know what challenges or blessings are going to be afforded us each day nor is this prayer office a guarantee that things will proceed in a manner that is pleasing or rewarding...it is simply a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessing of a new day. In some ways, it is a prayer for the endurance of our faith to see us through this gift of a new day. At the close of our prayer office, we hear this plea or prayer:

Lord God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>1</sup>

With these words from our prayer office, we are praying for God's guidance. Moreover, Jesus has even taught us to pray for *God's* will to be done. So, we pray fervently for God's will and guidance, but it's our will that ultimately, we follow. And if things do not go according to our standards and measures, then in our minds, God has disappointed us, has abandoned us, or God has simply let us down. We venture through the paths of our lives that we set out on and we face unseen perils...but when things start to hit the fan or when things we build up, adore, and then construe as good and righteous crumble before us, then we become confused about our faith.

We become confused because we think we know for certain what God deems good and right. We know for certain that God will find favor in *our ways*. Even though we pray for God's will to be done, and we pray these words, you have called your servants to ventures of which *we cannot see* the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, nonetheless, it's our will that we want God to carry out, it's our outcomes that we seek and not God's.

But if we look closer at the Gospel lesson today, we find the only real promise in this lesson is that we will be hated by all because of the name of the Lord...and today Jesus teaches us to say, it is well with my soul. But is it? Really?

We confess with our words and I suppose that we even convince ourselves that God is in control, nonetheless, deep within that thread of sheer honesty that may exist within us, we still believe, with all the strength that is in us, that we can endure this hate, this "destruction" of what we build by appealing to what is best in the world we build. We believe that we - ourselves and our churches - should attract because we have drawn on the conclusion that what we do and build with our lives is good. And if we can attract or convince others then we can save our temples. But once again in that thinking we are centered in ourselves and our sensibilities.

Look closer at Jesus, he does not attract. He lays claim. He takes. He doesn't give us options, in the hope that we choose him and his side. He has chosen. And he has not considered our goodness in his choosing, but has come to us precisely and only because of our sin. He has not attracted us,

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<sup>1</sup> *Lutheran Book of Worship*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1978, "Morning Prayer" *Matins*, page 137

but has sought us out because we turn within ourselves, our comforts, our understandings and take more comfort in what we know rather than what He is and what he is teaching us.

Yes, we will be hated, hated even by ourselves because deep down we know without a doubt that Jesus is right...we are self-centered, we are self-righteous, we are sinners. But when Jesus says we will be hated and that our temples will come down, we quickly turn to ourselves and introduce an element of choice and uncertainty about what Jesus "really" means and then we twist it to our liking so that we can defend our temples...ourselves. Even when Jesus tells us not to prepare a defense in advance, we do. Even with the promise that He will give us words, the given words will either be rejected or be so intertwined with our words that His words will become unrecognizable. And yet, we will take our things to Jesus assuming our things we build and understand will save us.

Our illusions, our judgments, and even our Christian sensibilities are undergirded by symbols and artifacts within our world, these things appeal to our assumptions about God and even faith...and all of these things we bring to our defense before our Lord...even knowing that they will all be thrown down. Even when we are told that they will not stand, nor will they defend us. These are the illusions we have built up for and about ourselves...these are the things of this world that we present but these are not the things that Jesus wants...these are the things that he has destroyed so that he may claim each of us in a resurrection *FROM* these things.

We are not chosen by what we have done, built, or assumed about ourselves; God has chosen to save us all from these things by His only Son. To say we have no sin is to say...we don't need to be saved from the wonderful life we have built for ourselves. But we can rest assured...all that we have built up for ourselves will not remain standing when all is torn down...all we have judged as good and right by our standards and sensibilities will not save us or remain standing...*ALL* will be torn down *ALL* will perish...but we will not...not one hair on our heads will perish.

But sadly, even knowing this, we still want to pretend that we will not be hated by this world. So, to avoid this hate, we set out to do the very thing that initiates and instigates this hate...we build our protection from our hatred and judgments, we even build a false sense of who Jesus really is to make him more appealing to the world, and in turn, we turn against the world and the people in it with our harsh judgment. And when we stand to testify, we merely criticize and judge with our words and understandings and wonder why the world hates us.

But this not what we are being taught today, we are not being taught that our faith will exclude us from the world, or lift us out of this mess we call our world, nor is Jesus teaching us about ways to interpret or even predict the end of this world so we can avoid it or stop it all together. Jesus is encouraging us to turn from the temporal, turn from our manufactured securities to a more spiritual resource, a more promising Word as a resource to cope with and to endure the adversity and hardship of this world. We are being taught that our faith is our endurance that is born in our trust in God's Word of promise made to us in Jesus Christ and through the waters poured over us in our Baptism.

In Baptism we hear this...Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. We are marked with the cross, we are anointed with a faith and an

endurance for the hardships, the challenges, the humiliation, all the things that “the cross” represents, we are promised a faith that will see us through the things, like hatred, that this life presents. And in that faith, we cling to the promise of our Baptism.

This Baptism does not assure us pleasure or power, does not endow us with an entitlement of wealth and ease. In our Baptism, we hear after the anointment of the cross of Christ that it is through this Baptism, God makes us members of a priesthood we all share in Christ Jesus, that we may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming Word to all the world. Here is where we vow to testify...where we are given the opportunity to testify...testify to the promise of redemption and salvation through the one who has chosen us.

We do not testify with words that say that you have a chance if you operate the way we do, that God through Jesus Christ will choose us because we did this or that or that we have built this or that. We testify to the promise that God through Jesus Christ has chosen us. There are no chances in the promise God makes to us through Jesus Christ. No chances with Christ. He is sure.

And what’s more, he is sure about you, He is sure about me, and Christ is sure about them out there too. He is so sure about us that he has risked everything on it – all things, in heaven and on earth. He is so sure about us that he has staked himself on it, staked God on it, delivered himself into the hands of evil – our hands. He is so sure about us that he has carried us with him into death and hell and now carries us all in his wounded and bloodied hands. He is more sure about us than he is about anything in this old world, even about the temple of things we build and deem good and just.<sup>2</sup>

God has given us the word and the wisdom of His saving Word incarnate, Jesus Christ...that word and wisdom will not be torn down, it is the word that will remain and will raise us out of the rubble that we find ourselves in right now. You and me, not what we have built, nor what we assume about ourselves and judge to be good about this world, you and me is what God gave His Son to die for. All the grandeur of this world will be thrown down but not one hair on our heads will be overthrown or perish. Through Jesus Christ, God has claimed us and has made it known with his very life that we will be carried from this life into death and even hell but we will not perish, we will live with Him in his Kingdom that knows no end.

We do not do this by our own power or by the things we have built up and established in this world...they have all been destroyed but our souls will not. But God has chosen to save us from these things by giving to us, His love, His grace, and His forgiveness, all made manifest in His Son Jesus Christ who has chosen us. We will not perish...we will be raised up by His glorious temple...through God’s Word Jesus Christ. May this be our testimony....oh, our testimony may be hated, but you don’t need to worry about that...we don’t need the world to like it or us, we are eternally loved through Jesus Christ. May we now...

<sup>1</sup> Sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things.

<sup>2</sup> With his right hand and his holy arm

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<sup>2</sup> This sermon has been inspired and reflects many of the words and thoughts from the preaching of Rev. Adam Morton pastor at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster, PA. Pastor Morton preached on this Gospel text at the worship service held at the meeting of the Lancaster Conference of Lutheran Pastors November 12, 2019.

has he won for himself the victory.

A victory that says, by our faith and endurance, God has gained our very souls.

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*