

Sermon for The 3rd Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 13, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Ezekiel 17:22-24

Epistle Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1-17

Gospel Reading: Mark 4:26-34

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-17

Sermon Title: God's Promises are Sure

Introit: Psalm 92:12-15; Antiphon: Psalm 92:1

Hymns:

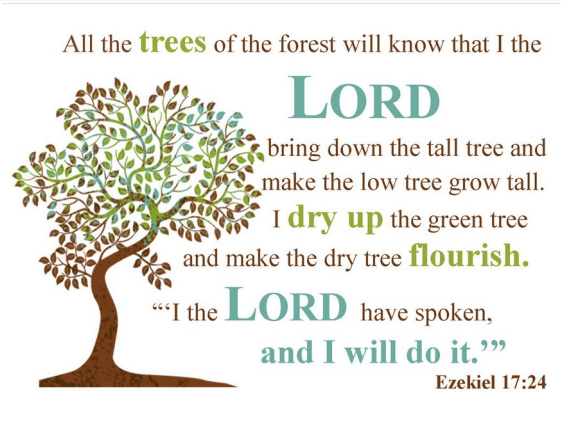
LSB 652 – Father, We Thank Thee

LSB 892 – Come, Ye Thankful People, Come

LSB 921 – On What Has Now Been Sown

Liturgy:

Divine Service III, p. 184



Songs:

Brothers sisters let us gladly

Lord Reign In Me

My Savior My God

Where I Belong

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1–17

We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

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

St. Paul wanted out. He wanted to leave this world. Life wasn't easy for him, and the thought of leaving all this pain and trouble behind sounded like a good plan. He was tired of the opposition, the persecution, of being in prison, whether that prison was a jail cell, or the prison of sin in which we all find ourselves. The man most people call the greatest missionary of all time, was at times frustrated, disappointed and looking to quit. Like so many of the patriarchs and prophets who came before him, he looked to God, and to heaven, and thought that's far better than what he was going through here.

You probably know what he was feeling. You have probably felt the same way, at times. You look at what is going on in the world, you look at all that is going on in your life, you look at all that is going on even in the Church – all the fighting, all the problems, all the pain all the trouble – and the thought of leaving this all this behind sounds good. Its tempting. Isn't it?

It is. It is tempting. That is exactly what it is. A temptation from the devil, dressed in pious white wishes. While thinking your wanting to leave this world and go to heaven shows your faith, in reality it does not. It reveals your doubts. Your doubt about what God is doing. What He is doing in you and through you, even in the frustration and disappointment.

Uncertainty about His promises. Uncertainty about His care. Questions about what He is doing in you and through you. Are a lack of faith. Be careful what we wish for. Our wishes are not always good. God and His promises are.

That's why, after talking about his groaning and longing, Paul says, "We are of good courage." Courage born of faith in the promises of God. That though we are tired, though we are weak, though we are frustrated, hurting and disappointed, none of those things changes the promises of God. Those promises give us courage and strength. Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow."

One of those promises is found in the parable told by Jesus. Jesus didn't use the word "promise" but the promise is there. The promise is this: the Word of God, scattered as seed on the ground, will grow. We may not see it, or know how, and it may take longer than we want, but it will grow. Even the smallest seed of God's Word can grow into the largest and strongest of trees. The seed that has been sown in your heart, and the seed that is scattered through your mouths, carries with it that promise.

If you want to see that more clearly look to Jesus. Was there ever a smaller seed planted in this world? Planted in a young virgin who nobody knew and nobody cared about. Was there ever a smaller seed planted in a backwater town to live and grow up as a carpenter's son, and who, when He began His public ministry didn't seem very successful. His twelve closest followers were not educated or reliable. The religious establishment was against Him, and for all His efforts He wound up on the wrong side of Roman law, and that got Him killed.

Yet from such a small beginning, the Church, the Holy Christian Church, has grown to survive threats, persecution and our own sinful stupidity, and has spread to every corner of the world. The tree of the cross has become the largest of trees, and people from every nation, race, and language have made their home in its shade.

I know what you're thinking, "That's Jesus. He's God. That's easy for Him. That was then, this is now." That was then and this is now, and right now the same Jesus working? The Word of God made flesh and planted in Bethlehem is the same Word of God which now comes and is planted in you in Holy Baptism. The same Holy Spirit that descended on Jesus at His baptism descended on you at your Baptism. The Word of God is growing in you.

It may be small, it may be slow, you may not feel it or realize it, but it is growing. It is growing and producing the fruit of faith in your life. It's Jesus! Just as sure and inevitable as His death and resurrection was for you, so His death and resurrection is in you. St. Paul put it this way:

We regard no one according to the flesh.

Meaning according to outward appearance, which includes how you regard yourself. He said:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away [*death*]; behold, the new has come [*resurrection*]."

As much as you may want to leave this life infected by sin and go to heaven, you have something even better. In Jesus, and Him in you, heaven has come down to you.

You can bet Satan does not want you to know that. He will constantly look for new ways to blind you to the work of God in the world, and in you. He wants to blind you to His Word and promises; to blind you so that he can lead you into despair. To think that you are useless, worthless, and that there is nothing you can do. You are too weak, doubt-filled, feeble and sorry.

Of course you are. That's Satan's ploy. Half-truths which are really no truth at all. He has been whispering that same lies into the ears of the faithful for thousands of years. To Moses, to Abraham, to Elijah, to Jeremiah, to Paul... to Luther. The half-truth is he's right, but half the truth is a lie. The kernel of truth to his lie is on our own we can do nothing, but we are not on our own.

The Word of God, which has been given to you, and is working in you and through you, is powerful, active, living and growing. It is not dependent on you, it is not your eloquence and ability. It is all, and only, the One whose Word it is. It is all, and only, the One who inhabits that Word, who is the Word made flesh, and who has promised to be in that Word. That One is our Savior, who is working so that all may come to the knowledge of the truth and be saved. How sad it is that even in the Church those who hear that Word dismiss it, disregard it, and relegate it to the back shelf.

We heard the assurance and promise of God through the prophet Ezekiel. He spoke of the great tree that God would plant and grow. The tree which is Christ, His cross and His Church. God promised it. God said through Ezekiel:

I am the Lord.
I have spoken.
I will do it.

... and He did. The promise is fulfilled in tree which is Christ, His cross and His Church.

Armed with that promise, we have the courage to face each day. To rest in the shadow and shaped of the cross. It is there we the live the lives and calling our gracious Father has given to us, in the confidence and trust that He is working through us. He is working in ways seen and unseen. He is working in ways big and small. Do not worry. Do not despair. When you have His promise you are on unshakable ground.

Armed with that promise, and living in that promise, the love of Christ controls us. That is good news. With those words there is freedom. These words do not burdening you, telling you: "You'd better make sure the love of Christ controls you!" These precious words tell you of a reality. A reality anchored in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The love of Jesus is the love that caused Him to come down from the throne room of heaven to live and die, in this sinful and sin filled world, for you. It is that same love that causes Him still to come here and fill this place, and to feed you with His Body and Blood, to forgive your sins, and to strengthen your faith.

That love, given to you, is the love that controls you. It is a love that causes you to get up, go out each day and live and die for others. To serve them in your calling. To scatter the seed of the Word with your mouth. To rest under the cross throughout the day, knowing that our Lord has promised to work through you, and through His Word.

We will do that, day in and day. It will at times be hard, painful and stressful. We will do that until the day when Jesus keeps His promise to come again, for you. To take you to heaven. We don't know when that day will come, but until He does, we cling to His promise, and rest in the shade of the cross.

You may be only a small seed in this great big world, but what great things God is doing, and can do, in you and through you. Do not despair. Rest in His promise:

I am the Lord.
I have spoken.
I will do it.

May God open our hearts and minds to that truth, that promise, in Jesus' Holy Name.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

