

Bethel Lutheran Church

October 15, 2017

READING Isaiah 25:1-9

¹O LORD, you are my God;

I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things,
plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

²For you have made the city a heap,
the fortified city a ruin;
the palace of aliens is a city no more,
it will never be rebuilt.

³Therefore strong peoples will glorify you;
cities of ruthless nations will fear you.

⁴For you have been a refuge to the poor,
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,

⁵the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds;
the song of the ruthless was stilled.

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

⁷And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸he will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹It will be said on that day,

Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah moves toward the proclamation that God swallows up death forever. We have often understood that the “wages of sin” are death. What do you think of the view that says death is the cause of sin, and not the other way around? Hebrews 2:14-15 says that “Jesus freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by fear of death.” The work of ensuring that life can flourish is thus to be a participant in the divine defeat of death, thereby creating much greater space for the fruits of the spirit – love, joy, humility, kindness, etc.

PSALM Psalm 23

¹The LORD | is my shepherd;
I shall not | be in want.

²**The LORD makes me lie down | in green pastures
and leads me be- | side still waters.**

³You restore my | soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways | for your name's sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall | fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they | comfort me. R**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence | of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is | running over.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days | of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the | LORD forever. R**

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

Consider this metric version of the 23rd Psalm by a man named Isaac Watts:

"The sure provisions of my God attend me all my days; O may Your House be my abode, and all my work be praise. There would I find a settled rest, while others go and come; no more a stranger or a guest, but like a child at home."

Where does Psalm 23 lead you as you think about what is most valued? What perhaps needs to lessen or what needs to strengthen in your life as you think about life value?

READING Philippians 4:1-9

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

Not only does Paul speak of a peace that “surpasses all understanding,” but he associates peace with God’s very nature: “the God of peace.” More important, “peace” for Paul is not merely an individual experience, but often occurs among authentic community. For Paul, God’s peace is not an optional add-on, but part of the experience of authentic faith and spirituality.

Let’s be honest. Peace is not significantly valued in our culture. What if before you named a gripe or complaint, you were required to name two things for which you were thankful? Can you be a person who lives with a spirit of joy and thankfulness first even as you engage conversations around difficult subjects and issues?

GOSPEL Matthew 22:1-14

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

QUESTION FOR REFLECTION

One went to his farm. Another to his business. The rest killed the messenger. Finally, one ended up at the table without wearing the wedding robe and was tossed from the party. The common denominator? They all made light of God’s desire to show mercy and love. They didn’t think they needed it. This story likely isn’t as much about whether they were willing to show mercy as much as it is about whether they were willing to receive mercy from God. How can we do much of anything if we aren’t first receivers from God and yet we can too often be ready to bypass that element of life just as those in the story from Jesus did?

How do you see worship? Is it about what you think you want to be fed or is it about what God desires to feed you? Maybe we start to pack our own lunch in a lot of ways because we think we know better than God? Ultimately this leads to weeping and gnashing of teeth. We all need to receive mercy. It might not be exciting but it fills us for living.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord of the feast, you have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out your life with abundance. Call us again to your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

Please come forward to receive communion from the Pastor at your leisure. Everyone is invited to the Lord's Table. Children receive a blessing. Please inform the pastor if you need a gluten-free communion wafer.



In loving memory of Bud Radunz.
Bud would have celebrated his 80th birthday on October 4.
~Greatly missed by Marlene and family