**Sermon Transcript Seventh Sunday of Easter Exaudi, 5-16-2021**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. I always find it interesting when the Gospel ends in something that doesn't exactly sound like the Gospel. So here we have Jesus saying, "Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he's offering service to God and they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. This is the Gospel of our Lord." Okay. So, what in the world and how in the world does that equal the Gospel of our Lord? Well, let us look and begin with the Old Testament lesson, Ezekiel, a prophet during the Babylonian exile. So, towards the end of the written Word in the Old Testament. Ezekiel the prophet who is telling the people of Israel, that Jesus is going to come, that there is going to come a time when God will place the Spirit of God in our own hearts, that He will forgive our sins. It is the hope that the Israelites were supposed to hold onto. It is the hope that they had faith in that that saved them.

And yet, why does God promise that He is going to send this miraculous salvation to the people? Because they were such marvelous and wonderful people, always obeying God and doing the right thing? No. Obviously we know that, from last week we had the reading from Numbers about the people doing what they were often wanting to do, grumble and complain against God. I mean, that's kind of the theme of the Old Testament. God shows them grace and love and mercy. He saves them from this thing or that thing. They wait a little while and they grumble. God is not enough. We're not happy. You're not doing what we want. I mean, that's a story which is joyful and comforting to me because I often grumble and complain at God too. So if God can still love them, then there's hope for me. So I thank God for the example of the Israelites, because God is faithful in spite, in spite of their unfaithfulness.

But yet He says, here I am, I am going to bring about the salvation of all people. I'm about to act, but not for the sake of you, for the sake of my Holy name. For your benefit, but not because you have been faithful because you have profaned the Name amongst the people. See Israel was supposed to be this light on a hill. They were supposed to be this people who had the Word of God given directly to them. And they were to shine forth the love of God to the nations. And what did the Israelites do with that? They grumbled and complained, and they chased after other gods on a regular basis. They failed miserably in their task, which again gives us hope because it is not our deeds and our actions in which we put our trust. It is not because we are good people and that we have somehow managed not to sin.

But it is because God desires, God promised that He would save His people. God promised that through the nation of Israel, He would act, and God fulfills His promises even when we fail to live up to our part of the bargain. God still fulfills His promises and what a joyous thing that is because He promises here in Ezekiel. He says, "I will come, and I will sprinkle clean water on you. And you shall be clean from all your uncleanliness and from all your idols, I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart and a new Spirit I will put within you. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes." Now sprinkle you with water and you will be cleansed. What does that sound like to you? It should sound like Baptism, that we are sprinkled with the waters of Baptism, but is it those little droplets of water that actually cleanse us from our sins?

No, it is the Word of God that is connected with the water that promises us through faith. He is giving us the Holy Spirit. In our baptisms, we are adopted into the family of God and adoption into the family of God means that our sins are forgiven and that we are righteous before God. Not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done for us. He has taken out our sinful nature in Baptism, He has drowned in the waters of Baptism and brought forth a new creation, a faithful creation that is God's. That God has placed His Spirit within us. Now we need to remember that fact, that we are the children of God, because God has chosen us and placed His Spirit within us. Because as last week we heard about the fact that we are called to ask God for all things. We're called to ask for the big things and the little things in life, everything we're called to ask for God about, and trust that He will give us all things.

Now this week, we have the word, hear, that we are reminded that God hears us. And why do we need to be reminded that God hears us? Because we have a very clear example in Peter, in John, and even in the Old Testament of persecution, of trials and tribulations. And yet no one here says that if you are facing trials and tribulations, if people hate you and deride you and insult you, that somehow you are out of place, that God no longer loves you, that God is not hearing you, that maybe you need to examine your life or do something different or else you're going to continue in this suffering.

No, what it says is that the suffering is given to you so that you might give glory to God, so that you might rejoice and be glad in His glory, not your own. See Jesus said at the end of the Gospel last week, "In this world, you will have tribulation." Period. Fact. You're going to have tribulation. It's a given but take heart. "I have overcome the world," is what He says. And here in the Gospel now He says, you're going to be kicked out of the synagogues. In fact, people are going to think they're doing the will of God when they kill you. But you can almost hear Jesus say, but take heart. I have overcome the world.

You see, it's not uncommon for a Christian to be in the face of persecution. Now, here in America, we've been blessed. We've had many years where it's been normal and common for everybody to confess Christ or at least know about Christ and be okay with it. But the rest of the world, there has been persecution. There's been martyrdom. There's even people who have died for their faith. And it doesn't take a big stretch of the imagination to see that that may happen here in our nation as well. Already, biblical truth is being accused of being hate speech, to preach what the Bible says about human sexuality and various other things is accused as hate speech now. Regardless of the fact that we say that God loves all people and forgives all sin, and that He died for the forgiveness of all, it's considered, or it's being, trying to be pushed as hate speech today. It's not a big stretch to think that eventually it will come down to being insulted for the name of Christ and maybe even to be killed for His Word.

Now, I don't say that in order to scare you or to make you feel afraid of what's coming. Because Paul, notice, he says, "The end of all things is at hand." Paul thought that the end of the world ... he fully expected the end of the world to come soon. He looked around at the world around him and he said, surely evil is succeeding and it's time for God to come back. Luther in his day said the same thing. Surely evil seems to be succeeding, it must be time for the Lord to return. And every generation has said the same thing. We all look at the world and look around us and say, surely evil is succeeding and it's time for God to return. But we don't say that with fear. We say that with hope that God would come quickly. And if He doesn't come quickly, then we pray for the strength and the perseverance to be faithful in the midst of trial and tribulation, and evil, that we might be joyful in our suffering.

Now that sounds like a stretch, I know, to be joyful in suffering. But we have been baptized in Christ. And in Baptism, it is more than just that symbol of water and the Word of God. It is a real transformation. We died to sin and death in our baptisms. In other words, we should think of ourselves as already dead to this world and alive in Christ. So therefore, we don't need to be afraid of death. We can look forward to our deaths because we know that in our death, we will see Christ and Him glorified and us glorified with Him. So what is it? Why should we be afraid of those that can kill us with the sword?

We're already dead in Christ, but alive to eternal life. So we don't need to be afraid, no matter what may come. And we need to be reminded of this because God ... This theme for this Sunday is hear. Hear my prayer, oh Lord. Give me that which You promised. And what is it that He promises? What is it that we truly need in this world? We don't need wealth and riches. We don't need a solid IRA and retirement plan. We don't need our health necessarily. It's nice. And we praise God for it. But the one absolute and most important thing that we need, that makes sense of everything else is this, that though we are sinners, have been redeemed by Christ, washed in the blood of our Baptism and brought into the family of God and therefore have no fear and have the hope and the certainty of everlasting life in Christ. Even though we may face trials and tribulations and sufferings, even though people may rejoice and think that they are doing the service of God when they insult us and persecute us and even possibly kill us.

“How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord.” I love this hymn. Verse four. "When through fiery trials, your pathway will lie." So, your pathway will lie through fiery trials. "My grace, all sufficient will be your supply." When you go through trials, you learn that the only thing you have to hold onto is your faith. The only thing that will sustain you, that will get you through the suffering and the trials and the tribulations and the hurt and the pain and the worry and the doubt is your faith, is the grace of God applied to you. "Even though the flames, but the flames will not hurt you. I only designed your dross to consume and your gold to refine." So, we see the trials as a means of God burning away all of those things that do not rely upon Him, teaching us to put our faith completely and utterly in His word, in His promises, because that is the only thing that is eternal. That is the only thing that will last, are His promises. And He has fulfilled every single one of them.

There's only one more left. For Him to come in glory and to take us to be with Him. In the meantime, let us be faithful that others might know, that others might know. So let us be self-controlled and sober-minded so that we might be able to love each other earnestly and cover over a multitude of sins to forgive one another, to not grumble and complain, but to love and to be gracious to one another so that they might see the grace of God in us and give glory to God and put their trust in Him. That is the task. That is the only task that we have, is to serve one another, to show the love of God in everything that we do and in all that we say, so that His name might be glorified, and He be praised above all.

So let us then trust in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, because we have been sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb and washed clean of our sins and He, His name and His glory will shine and act through us and in us. May His grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always now, in the midst of trial and tribulation, unto life everlasting. Amen.