SERMON TRANSCRIPTS

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2023

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So again, we are in the season of Advent. We are in the season of waiting for the coming of our king, the advent of our king. And so this is a joyous time, but it's also a somber time. I mean, we have the lights, we have the trees later on where that poinsettia is, and we think about the presents and all the carols and everything, all the joyful things that are going on right now as we prepare for Christmas. And we get excited, the Angel Chorus singing, Peace on earth in goodwill towards men, glory and Excelsius Deo, all of these things that we look forward to and are excited about. And it's wonderful, it's beautiful, it's exciting, and yet it is also a time of reflection. Like the time of Lent, the time of Advent is a season of the church where we reflect upon what does it mean that the Savior of the world, God himself, had to come and become flesh here on Earth?

Why did he have to do that? And he had to do that because of our sin, because of our failure to live up to the standards of God. And Isaiah has that theme as he's writing here in this section. Now, this section of Isaiah is called the suffering servant. It's a section from 52 to the end of Isaiah, and it really does focus upon the nature of the Messiah as the suffering servant. By his inequities, we will be healed and those types of things that comes from Isaiah. Here towards the end, Isaiah has a lament. A lament for the nation of Israel because remember Isaiah's writing just before the Babylonian exile. So the Israelites, though they are prosperous as far as their physical wealth goes, they have abandoned their God. They are going through good works as if it was their right. They're expecting God to act because he's always acted for them in the past. And rather than worshiping him and putting their trust in him, they think that they deserve it by their own good deeds, that they are righteous people. And Isaiah is lamenting because God seems to have abandoned Israel.

Nobody calls upon his name and he hides his face from them. And yet we know that this is a God unlike any other God as it says in Isaiah that no one has heard or perceived by the ear or eye has seen a God besides you who acts for those who wait for him. God acts for us. And that is what our hope is. That is what the promise of God's word says is that God does it all for us. And yet here, Isaiah is lamenting because God doesn't seem to be doing that.

The people are abandoned, partially because they have abandoned God. And so their deeds, rather than being righteous and holy deeds, their deeds have become like polluted garments. Now, that's just a very polite way of saying something very disgusting. The Hebrew says it much more colorfully than the English does. They've cleaned it up a little for us here. But basically, the deeds that we do that we consider good, if we do not do them to the glory of God and for Thanksgiving for his salvation, they smell in the nose of God. There are no good to us or for him. He desires for us only to serve him out of Thanksgiving and praise for what he has done for us. The fact that he waits, that he acts for us to put our trust in him. To do anything less than to say, "God, you did not do it all." I need to participate, kind of tries to put us on equal footing with God.

But we need to recognize, God has done it all and we need to rejoice in that. Because he has promised even in the midst of calamity and tribulation, and there is going to be that time. I mean, Matthew or Mark here records Jesus words and he says, "Be aware of what the fig tree tells us. When the leaves start coming out and it becomes tendered, you know that the time is near. You know that the end is near." Well, what are the signs of the end of the world? War and rumor of war, famine and pestilence, people marrying and giving into marriage. I mean, these are signs that every generation has before them. And so we are called to be awake, to be aware, to not slumber, to not pursue our own personal wellbeing, but to seek after the will of God and trusting that he will be with us because he has given us every good gift that he has promised. The fruit of the spirit, salvation, life everlasting, all of those gifts of God and gift of the Spirit are ours right now. We're not waiting to receive the gifts. We already have them.

Now we may need to learn how to live in them and to use those gifts. Like any talent or any skill, we need to practice it in order to get better at it. But the gift is ours. God has given it to us already and therefore, we can stand firm no matter what comes because we recognize that it is all to the glory of God. Now, this becomes a little bit harder when things aren't going well, when it seems like we're being stretched or weighted down. But here it says, "You are the potter, we are the clay." And if you think about clay, if you've ever tried to craft something out of clay, you have to stretch it and squeeze it and mash it and pull it out to get all the impurities out and the air bubbles out, and it's got to be uncomfortable. If I were that clay, you're getting pulled and then you're getting smashed. You're pulled and smashed as you're working the clay to make it malleable, to make it useful. And that's what the scripture is telling us. God is pulling us and mashing us, pulling us and mashing us to make us malleable to his word, to make us able to hear his word and adapt to it and follow it.

And sometimes he forms us and then he pushes us back down again and reforms us better than the last time. And so we need to recognize even in the midst of trial, God is still with us and he doesn't leave us. God is still giving us all the good gifts. They just don't feel so good at the time. But they are good in his eyes because when we go through trial, when we go through tribulation, we learn that we cannot rely upon ourselves and our own effort. Because that doesn't satisfy. In our trials and tribulations, we learn that the only way we make it through is by the Word of God. The Word of God that promises peace. The word of God that promises hope. Not a hope like I hope I win the lottery, which is never going to happen, but a hope that is based on the reality of the Word of God who has shown himself to be faithful time and time again. And if he is faithful and has been faithful in the past, he will also be faithful today and forevermore. And that is what we can hold fast to. That is what we need to be aware of, and that is why we are called to be awake, not out of fear of the coming of God, but to be awake in anticipation,

To be awake and ready. So that we might see our master come and rejoice. This is not something to be afraid of. When Jesus says, "Stay awake," or when Paul says, "Stay awake," what it is, is us being fed and nourished by the word. Do not abandon his word, for in his word, we have life. In his word we have hope. In his word, we have a sure and firm foundation that we will not be shaken from. And so let us rejoice in his righteousness. Let us be confident that our sin is forgiven by him and that we are free in Christ.

May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always, now and forevermore. Unto life everlasting...