

Crumbs – Good News for the Diaspora!



Illustration: The War Against Gibeon

A Devotional for the
Week of the Seventh Sunday after Trinity.

SUNDAY.

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

– 1 Peter 2:9.

Here on earth there is a generation, a people, that is gathered from among all nations. It is God's chosen generation. All its members are spiritual kings and priests, who rule over devil, world, and flesh, and offer themselves a sacrifice to God. It is a holy nation, because it has the righteousness of God, and serves God with holy works. It is a peculiar people, a people purchased by God to be His own forever. It shows forth and proclaims by word and deed the excellencies of God, and spreads abroad the glory of His name. This is the generation, the people, which God has called, which by His almighty call of grace He has called out of the darkness of sin and unbelief into His marvelous light, the light of His grace which is in Christ Jesus, the light of faith in Christ Jesus.

This generation, this people, is *the whole Christian Church* on earth, the true Christian Church, which the Holy Ghost continually calls by the Gospel, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. This is the *one Holy Christian Church* on earth, *the communion of saints*, the communion of those who are sanctified through faith in Christ. This is the generation, the people, which makes a joyful noise, and is glad, and sings: "Know ye that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture." (Psalm 100:3.) This generation, this people, is born through grace alone, and lives by, of, and to grace alone. It can tell and sing of nothing but grace. And what wondrous grace has been bestowed upon this people What a blessed people this is

And you, O Christian, belong to this people!

PRAYER. – Thanks be to You, Heavenly Father and eternal God, that by Your precious Holy Spirit You have also called me to Christ, my Savior, and have made me a partaker of His salvation in

faith, so that I belong to that chosen generation which is Your holy nation and peculiar people in time and eternity. I pray You, Lord, to graciously bestow on me the gifts of Your Spirit, that before all the world I may show forth the praises of You who so graciously have called me out of darkness into Your marvelous light. Amen.

Hymn 249, 1. 4.

COME, God, Creator, Holy Ghost,
And visit Thou the souls of men;
Fill them with graces, as Thou dost,
Thy creatures make pure again.

Thou with Thy wondrous sevenfold gifts,
The Finger art of God's right hand;
The Father's Word Thou sendest swift
On tongues of fire to each land.

MONDAY.

Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. – Acts 7:51.

When, through the Word and Spirit of God, one has come out of darkness into light, and so belongs to God's chosen people, this is in no respect and in no manner due to one's merits or conduct, but only and solely to God's pure grace. We now ask: Is God willing to do all this with every one who hears the Gospel? Yes; most assuredly! "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezekiel 33:11.) "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:4.) "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9.)

Why, then, are most men not converted? Because they obstinately resist the Word and Spirit of God, because they refuse to be converted. Jesus said: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37.) And Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, said to the Chief Council of the Jews: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost"

Truly, whosoever does not come to God's people, and therefore is lost, is lost solely by his own fault. And so many are lost who are called Christians and are hearing the Word of God! But for the fact that you belong to God's people through faith, you must thank God alone.

PRAYER. – Merciful God, who am I that through faith in Christ You have made me a member of Your people which You will save? It is not because I desired it, but because it was Your gracious will that I should be Your own. It is due, not to my choosing, but to Your choosing, O Fount of Grace! Continue to give me Your grace; complete Your work within me; keep me in the noble order of those who are Your own, and take me to the mansions of eternal bliss! Amen.

Hymn 344, 3.

It is Thy work alone
That now I am converted,
Thy power o'er Satan's work
In me Thou hast asserted;
Thy mercy, that doth reach
Unto the clouds, O Lord,
Did break my stony heart
By Thine own mighty Word.

TUESDAY.

Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it. – Ephesians 5:25-26.

The one "Holy Christian Church" of which we speak in the Third Article of the holy Christian Creed is the "communion of saints." that is to say, all Christendom on earth, or the sum total of those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, and in such faith are sanctified to God. Hence only believers truly belong to the Church, but all believers without distinction. They are the Church which Christ has loved, for which He gave Himself, which He sanctified by the Gospel and through the Holy Ghost in faith. This Church is not a visible congregation or organization, whose names and full membership might be given, but an invisible, spiritual congregation, which the Lord only knows, names, and counts, since only the Lord can tell with certainty who believes in Christ and therefore belongs to Him. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." (2 Timothy 2:19.)

The Church is the kingdom of God, Christ's Kingdom of Grace. And "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21.) Faith, which makes us members of the Church, the kingdom of God, is within us and is known to the Lord alone. And so the Church is but one. There is but one kingdom of God. It is but one body and one Spirit." (Ephesians 4:4.) The Church is *holy*. Christ has sanctified it through His righteousness given unto it, and through His Spirit, who incorporates it with Him. So it is "holy and without blemish" before God through grace. (Ephesians 5:27.)

It, furthermore, is a Christian Church. It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians 2:20.) And this Church and congregation listen, dear Christian! – is the beloved bride of Christ, to whom, to whom alone, all eternal promises are given. Now examine yourself, whether you are in the faith, and if, therefore, you belong to this Church. Prove your own self! (2 Corinthians 13:5.)

PRAYER. – I believe in You, my dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I am Yours; I belong to those Who are Yours, to Your Church. But I cry to You: Help my unbelief ! O You great Shepherd and Bishop of my soul, keep me, and let me be and remain Your own unto my dying breath, and then take me home, yes, home to You, into Your secure dwellings. Amen.

Hymn 274, 2.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Shield Thy poor Christendom, that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.

WEDNESDAY.

For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. – Isaiah 55:10-11.

Where on earth is this one holy Christian Church, this congregation and people of God, to be found? Wherever and only where the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed; for according to God's promise His Word never fails to bring forth fruit. See God's own promise at the head of this lesson. If you know of any place where the Word of God is preached, where people gather to hear the Gospel of Christ, then you may and should be altogether certain: here is the Church, here are believers, here is a part of Christendom, here are some who belong to God's people.

For though many among those who hear and read the Word of God be hypocrites and ungodly, yet the Word of God never returns

void to God; there must be at least a few who believe the Gospel, a few who are converted, and who will be kept steadfast in their faith by means of this Word. God has promised it, and you must believe it.

So if you belong to a congregation in which the true Gospel is proclaimed, you should say: I am among people in whose midst there are children of God, in whose midst God begets children and nourishes them to eternal life. And though you observe much weakness and many abuses there, and though conditions be such as to make you think that there are but very few true believers in that place, you must believe God's promise and say: There surely are children of God in this place. And instead of complaining and grumbling, or even withdrawing and fleeing, you should rather be active, and do your utmost to cure the weakness and to correct every abuse.

PRAYER. – I thank You, O Lord, that You have brought me where Your Word is proclaimed pure and unadulterated, and the Sacraments are rightly administered, hence, where there is a communion of such as are Your children through faith in Jesus Christ. Let me always remain Your dear child. Grant me grace to be watchful on my part, and strengthen those who are on the point of losing their faith. Amen.

Hymn 475, 1. 2.

O CHRIST, our true and only Light,
Enlighten those who sit in night;
Let those afar now hear Thy voice,
And in Thy fold with us rejoice.

Fill with the radiance of Thy grace
The souls now lost in error's maze,
And all whom in their secret minds
Some dark delusion haunts and blinds.

THURSDAY.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind. – Matthew 13:47.

Not only is the Gospel preached, but there are also those who profess the Christian faith, and come together to hear the Gospel, Of course, one can see these people, and count them, and draw up a list of their names. The whole number of those who profess the Christian faith and go to hear the Gospel is called the visible Church. The whole number of those who at one place and in an organized body profess the Christian faith and are gathered about the Gospel, is called a local Christian congregation.

But in this visible Church, and within the local congregations, there are also hypocrites and ungodly people besides the true Christians. Only the Lord knoweth them that are His. If it becomes manifest that one who professes to be a Christian is a hypocrite and ungodly, then, according to Christ's precept and established order, he must be put away from among the Christian congregation and declared a heathen man and a publican. Such is God's will.

But beyond this we cannot distinguish between believers and hypocrites, and consequently cannot excommunicate. It is because we do not know the state of any man's heart. The Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, the Church of Christ on earth, is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind, both good and bad fish. And when the net is full, they draw it to shore, and sit down, and gather the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. This sorting in the Kingdom of God shall be done on the last day, not now. At the end of the world the angels shall come forth at God's behest, and sever the wicked from among the just. And then the wicked shall be cast where there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, I thank You that through Your Word and Holy Spirit You have given me the true faith, and have made me a true member of Your Church. Keep me, I beg You, in true faith to

my end, that at the great sorting on the last day I may not be cast into hell, but be received into heaven. Amen.

Hymn 552, 5.

O Jesus, who my debt didst pay,
And for my sin wast smitten,
Within the book of life, O may
My name be also written!
I will not doubt; I trust in Thee,
From Satan Thou hast made me free,
And from all condemnation.

FRIDAY.

If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

– *John 8:31-32.*

There are so many denominations on earth, with various doctrines and various creeds! To which of these denominations is a Christian to belong? To the one which has, teaches, and confesses the entire doctrine of the Word of God in all its purity, and in which the Sacraments are administered as instituted by Christ. It is quite clear that such is the Lord's will. The Lord said to His disciples, and He says it to all Christians : "If ye continue in my Word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

True disciples of Jesus should have, and desire to have, nothing but Jesus' Word, Jesus' doctrine, and no other. Then, and then only, do they know the truth, the truth which Christ has brought from heaven for the salvation of poor sinners. And this truth shall make them free of the darkness of error and unbelief in which they are by nature, and give them the true knowledge of all that they possess in Jesus, and make them partakers of all this through faith. When, therefore, our Lord gave His disciples that great royal command to go and make disciples of all nations by teaching and baptizing them, He

said: "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:20.) Always, to the end of the world, the disciples of Jesus are to keep, and to adhere to, what Jesus commanded His first disciples, what He taught them.

Be very careful, my dear Christian, to belong and adhere to a denomination which has, teaches, and confesses all the doctrines of the Word of Christ in unalloyed purity. Then you have the truth, which saves and makes you free.

PRAYER. – My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I desire to be Your true disciple. I desire to have and to hear Your Word only, no word or doctrine of man. O Lord, I implore You, let me always find a place where Your Word is taught and preached in its truth and purity. Let the fullness of Your truth shine forth on earth, that the darkness of error may not prevail. Amen.

Hymn 110, 2.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness,
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

SATURDAY.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them. – *Romans 16:17.*

The denomination which has, teaches, and confesses all the doctrines of God's Word in unalloyed purity, is called an orthodox church. To this we must adhere, and contribute toward its maintenance and propagation according to our ability.

Any denomination, on the other hand, that does not have, teach, and confess all the doctrines of the Word of God as we find them in the Bible, is called heterodox. Such denominations cause

divisions and offenses among Christ's people by departing from the doctrine which we learn from the Word of God. These the disciples of Jesus must avoid; for so the Holy Spirit teaches us to do.

Listen, Christian, how this is! You must curse false doctrine. (Galatians 1:8-9.) Hence you must carefully beware of false teachers as destroyers of your soul, and must not believe them, but must try, or prove them by the standard of God's Word, and you will find them to be liars. (Matthew 7:15; 2 John 4:1; Revelation 2:2.) Heterodox churches, where false teachers hold sway, you must avoid; you must come out from such a church if you have belonged to it; you must be separate; you must avoid it. (2 Corinthians 6:14-18.)

Heterodox Christians, however, you must not judge or condemn, but in charity you must believe that they are merely deficient in this or that point of Christian knowledge. For consider, if some of the saving doctrines are still taught in a heterodox denomination, then there may be, in fact, then there still must be, some children of God among them. And you must rejoice that it is even so. But as far as you are concerned, if you would be a true disciple, you must continue in His Word and in the church which has, teaches, and confesses His Word in all its purity.

PRAYER. – Lord Jesus, grant me Your Holy Spirit, that I may become sure of what is the true doctrine of Your Word, that I may prove every doctrine offered me by teachers and preachers by the standard of Your Word, guard against being seduced to believe false doctrines, continue in Your Word, always confess it by word and deed, and may thus be a helpful and useful instrument for the propagation of Your kingdom here on earth, until You shall take me home, into the realms of eternal joy and bliss. Amen.

Hymn 110, 1. 6. 7.

LORD Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the even-tide;
Let not Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

Those haughty spirits, Lord, restrain,
Who o'er Thy Church with might would reign,
And always set forth something new,
Devised to change Thy doctrine true.

And since the cause and glory, Lord,
Are Thine, not ours, do Thou afford
Us help and strength and constancy;
With all our heart we trust in Thee.

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