

"The Scattering of Man and the Gathering of God"
Jeremiah 23:1-4

10 August Anno Domini 2003 -- Trinity 8/Pentecost 9 B
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho
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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

The Second Law of Thermodynamics is all about entropy. Now an introductory sentence like that in a sermon to the people of God might bring about several "what" reactions, like: What is this going to be, a science lecture? What does this have to do with Law and Gospel? Or, the thoroughly Biblical question, What does this mean?

Well, let's start at the beginning. Entropy is a word that means something along the lines of "disorder." A few examples might be helpful. Scientists tell us that the universe is going from order to disorder. Parents tell us that their children's rooms rapidly go from order to disorder. Our bodies tell us that the older we get, the more our bodies and the various systems therein, deteriorate - resulting in clogged pipes, clouded eyes, fuzzy brains, brittle bones and well, you get the idea. All of this means the entropy or disorder of our bodies, the rooms in a house, indeed of the entire universe is always increasing.

Positive entropy means decay - the greater the entropy the quicker the way to utter chaos. You see, positive or plus entropy is all about scattering that results in death. Minus entropy, on the other hand, is reversing the scattering by bringing order out of chaos - that is, negative entropy is about gathering that brings to life and sustains life.

There are also theological applications to the realities of positive entropy and negative entropy. These truths deal with the soul of the individual and the essence of the Church. Today, on the basis of the Old Testament Reading assigned to the Church and using the three articles of the Creed to give the sermon structure and order, you pray that you will hear a Law-and-Gospel sermon titled ...

... "The Scattering of Man and The Gathering of God"

Before the reading of the text we need to have some background from the Word and foundation of the dogmas of the Faith. Doing so will help us understand the precise message that the Lord God would have His Church of all ages hear concerning sin and grace.

The first article of the creed is about creation. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth." The LORD God, in and by His Word, teaches us that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the water" (Genesis 1:1-2). Contrary to what is currently permitted to be taught at universities outside and shamefully within the Concordia University System, God created the heavens and the earth in six, consecutive, 24-hour

days. Man, in his reason, tells you evolution is the truth. God, in His Word, tells you He is the Creator. He created the dust of the earth and then gathered some of it, forming it into a man and breathed into that clay the Spirit of Life. Thus the man became a living soul. According to the Bible on the sixth day "God saw everything that was made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31) - no disease, no decay, no death. Beautiful negative entropy!

When Adam sinned and the Fall of man took place, God's good creation was subjected to destructive entropy. Sin results, as God had said, in being dead and also dying. Adam and Eve were soul-dead even as they were physically dying. From that moment of the original sin, all things began to decay. Of creation itself the Scriptures declare that "We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves" (Romans 8:22-23). The Bible states and the historical experience of man demonstrate that all creation is going from a state of order to one of disorder. Before the Flood people lived hundreds of years. Since then our life-span has decreased.

Though everything and everyone is decaying, there is something, or rather, Someone sustaining this universe. Regarding not only the decay, but also the sustaining power, Soviet nuclear physicist and former atheist, Dotsenko, said in an interview ...

"One of the most fundamental laws of nature that interested me was the law of entropy, concerning the most probable behavior of the particles (molecules, atoms, electrons, etc.) of any physical system. This law, put simply, states that if any system is given to itself it will decay very quickly, inasmuch as particles composing any system have a tendency to run wild. It means that all the material world should have turned into a cloud of chaotic dust a long, long time ago. I thought about this, and it dawned upon me that the world is being held in existence by a non-material power that is capable of overruling this destructive entropy. ... I started to pray and to worship God."
["From Communism to Christianity" in Christianity Today, Jan. 5, 1973, p. 4-11.]

Thus, even over some 10,000 years - in which decay would have led to a chaotic cloud - we have to acknowledge that, by virtue of on-going life on this planet, there is Someone sustaining this creation. The Bible reveals to us and we therefore believe that that One is the LORD God. God the Father holds back the spiraling effects of entropy. Should He withdraw His sustaining hand there would be absolute darkness and complete chaos. We thank and praise God for His merciful hand. In other words, ...

"I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true."

The Second Article of the Apostles' Creed is the Good News of the LORD in wake of the reality of the transgressions against God. Sin has gone out and, if it had its way, would have lead to chaos, death and hell. To reverse this, God the Son, Who was at work in creation, was Incarnate in order to gather unto Himself all the sins of the world. Thus Jesus of Nazareth draws all transgressions of all people upon Himself. To let there be the Light of Life, He suffered the darkness of death ... to let

there be the Water of Life, He thirsted on the cross ... to let there be the new heaven and the new earth, His lifeless clay was buried as the Seed of the World. On the third day, the Redeemer rose again from the stony heart of death's tomb.

We thank and praise God for His gracious hand. In other words, ...

"I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious Blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own, and live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true."

The Third Article of the Apostles' Creed is the Good News of God that the Holy Spirit, Who was at work in creation, proceeds from the Father and the Son. Through the means of grace ... that is, through Baptism, the Word of the Gospel, which is the Word of Absolution, and the Sacrament of the Altar, the Holy Ghost works faith in the hearts of individuals where and when it pleases Him. Thus, concerning the Holy Spirit, ...

"I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all sins to me and all believers, and will at the Last Day raise up me and all the dead, and give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. This is most certainly true."

What does this have to do with the Old Testament Reading for today? How is the comparison of the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the Gospel of God drawn from that text? Well, before that text is read, consider this. The Lord entrusts His Word of Law and Gospel concerning sin and grace to His under-shepherds ... to qualified men called to speak the Word of God to the people of God. They either don't do this or they do. Thus, there is either a scattering unto disorder, discord and hell in the Second Death, or there is the gathering into order, concord and harmony in the Kingdom of God.

The Lord wants His Word to be taught and His doctrine to be learned and His psalms to be sung and His Scripture verses to be memorized and His doctrines taken to heart - His Word that crushes the Old Adam in us and His Word that comforts the new man who daily comes forth in the gracious waters of Holy Baptism. This is gathering. "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Jesus would not have His Church or anyone of His children therein, go without such teaching. Indeed, as in the Gospel, "As He [Jesus] landed He saw a great throng, and He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things."

There are two types of shepherds in the Church. First, there are those who increase the disorder in the congregation by teaching the lie, or neglecting the truth, or both. They scatter the people of God and destroy the harmony of the Word. They fall under the warning woe of the LORD God. Beware of these shepherds. Second, there are those shepherds who teach the Word of Truth and encourage the faithful to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the Scriptures. They invite the faithful to confess

their sins and hear that they are forgiven in the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. As this continues to take place, the LORD gathers His people in the blessed confession of the Church where there is the hymning of the Truth in the Divine Service and the witnessing of the faith in the world.

So, we are now ready to hear the sermon text for this day. Please listen to the inspired and inerrant Word of the Holy Spirit, written down Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah, the 23rd chapter, verses 1 through 4, and ponder ...

... "The Scattering of Man and The Gathering of God"

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for My people: 'You have scattered My Flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of My Flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their Fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, says the LORD.'" Amen.

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God. Amen.