

"Will This Be Our Grandchildren's Church?"

Jeremiah 26:1-6

13 November Anno Domini 2005

2nd Last Sunday - Series A

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the LORD our God; that is, in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Baptized,

The last three Sundays of the Church year present a course of history that bespeaks the situation in this fallen world as the 2nd Advent of Christ draws nigh. In last week's Gospel Reading, Jesus warns of the coming of "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Matthew 24:15). This desolation is the "ignorance of the Gospel" (AP XXIV, 45). In today's Old Testament Reading the theme is God's departing response from the congregation when there is such continued ignorance of His Good News. The corresponding reading for the Last Sunday of the Church year speaks of the scattered Christians throughout the world who have no man as a faithful pastor and who have no church to attend where they may hear the Word preached in its truth and purity, or where the sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution. The focus is on the Lord gathering His own people from these dispersed places throughout the world. The Lord willing, we will address this next week.

Today, on this Second to Last Sunday of the Church year, please listen to the verses – of the Old Testament Reading once again under the theme of . . .

. . . *"Will This Be Our Grandchildren's Church?"*

"In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this Word came from the LORD, 'Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the House of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a Word. It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings. You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My Law which I have set before you, and to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, then I will make this House like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth."'"

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Let's begin with Shiloh. Following the Exodus with Moses, Joshua led the people. "The whole congregation of the people of Israel assembled at Shiloh, and set up the Tent of Meeting there; the land lay subdued before them" (Joshua 18:1). Here was a place where the LORD would be graciously present with His people wherein He gave the faithful His good gifts of forgiveness, eternal life, salvation, peace and hope. The House of God was at Shiloh. Not long afterwards the

corruption of the church officials and the priests took place and we are informed via Holy Writ that they set up a graven image “until the day of the captivity of the land” and “as long as the house of God was at Shiloh” (Judges 18:30-31). It was in the Temple of the LORD at Shiloh, when “the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the Temple of the LORD, where the Ark of God was,” that “the LORD called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ and he said, ‘Here I am!’” (1 Samuel 3:3). Here the prophet spoke of the corruption and of what would follow. Finally, the Holy Spirit informs us, through the psalmist, that God “forsook his Dwelling at Shiloh, the Tent where He dwelt among men, and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe. He gave His people over to the sword, and vented His wrath on His heritage” (Psalm 78:60-62).

Thus far the LORD being graciously present with the congregation at Shiloh. The LORD departed from Shiloh and His Church was no longer there, or its day of gracious visitation has ended. And though they may have continued to assemble until the day of their destruction, they did so apart from the Presence of the LORD. Gone is gone and Shiloh, as it once was, is no more. Thus Jeremiah the prophet conveys the Word of the LORD to those in Jerusalem, “Thus says the LORD: ‘If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My Torah – My Instruction – My Doctrine which I have set before you, and to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, then I will make this House like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.’”

On to Jerusalem. Jesus, the Word Who is the LORD, continues by speaking to the Holy City where His Temple was located, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23:37-38). They did not know the day of their visitation. The House of Prayer had become a den of thieves (Luke 19) as corrupt religious leaders brokered power to coerce more money out of the faithful, a theme and practice taking place even unto this very day.

Thus ended the LORD being graciously present within the Temple at Jerusalem. The LORD departed from Jerusalem and His Church was no longer there, for the time of His gracious Presence had come and they did not know it that it had ended until the day of destruction. Once the gracious Christ is gone; He departs for another place and people. And though they may have continued to assemble in the Temple until it was destroyed, they did so apart from the Presence of the LORD. Gone is gone and the Holy City, as it once was, is no more. Thus Jeremiah the prophet conveys the Word of the LORD to those in Jerusalem, “*Thus says the LORD: ‘If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My Doctrine which I have set before you, and to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, then I will make this House like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.’*”

On to Asia Minor as the Word of the LORD went forth. Pastor and people congregated in the Name of the LORD God, Who was now graciously present with the Church there. Both bishop and congregation were about the pure preaching and teaching and confessing of the Word, as well as the administering of the Sacraments as Christ instituted them. Within a couple of generations, it was no longer so. They did not continue steadfastly to devote “themselves to the Apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the Breaking of Bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Therefore, in His letter to the Church at Ephesus, the Incarnate, Crucified, Risen and Ascended Jesus Christ had written:

“I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for My Name's sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev. 2:2-5).

They did not and the lampstand was removed from the Church at Ephesus; that is, the LORD departed from Ephesus and His local congregation, as it once was, no longer there. Gone is gone and Ephesus, as it once was, is no more. Gone is gone, and Ephesus now has the Turk.

The lampstand came to Rome, but gone is gone and Rome now has the Pope. Germany and Sweden had it, but now it has been removed. Gone is gone, and they now have state churches filled with worldlings and infidels. England had it, but gone is gone and England now has a druid.

The Word of the LORD came to the United States of America. What better place, with the liberties upon which this nation is founded for the freedom of the Church to flourish? The men, women, youth and children made Godly and excellent use of this liberty to begin congregations wherein the Word of God was taught and preached in its truth and purity, and the Sacraments administered properly. Thousands of Lutheran congregations were founded, particularly in the Midwest. Here the LORD was graciously with His people and they entered into His Presence to receive the gifts that He bountifully desires to have showered upon His Church.

One of our synodical grandfathers wrote of the blessedness of his day:

“When our Lutheran Zion was transplanted to this Western Hemisphere, she numbered but a few pastors and some hundred souls. But, lo! to-day she has thousands of pastors, who are fighting the Lord’s battles, and over a million souls. From this marvelous growth of our Church it is apparent that the Lord loves the gates of His Lutheran Zion. We praise the Lord for the wonderful visitation of His grace. Despite the fact that we are clearly living in the latter days, in the days of infidelity, of scoffers, and of love waxing cold, we experience that God’s Word is preached in our midst in such purity as has been seldom attained since the time of the apostles. While the rule in earlier centuries was that whoever preached and practised the truth with all his heart was hated, persecuted, and soon found himself in a very small minority, we have experienced the exceptional grace that such preaching and practise have been attended by a phenomenal success, so that the Lutheran Church of our country has outstripped all others in rate of growth. Men who immigrated to this country, their minds imbued with error, were here led to a knowledge of the truth as it was restored at the time of the Reformation. Then God used these men as instruments for the upbuilding of a great Church, which holds, confesses, and proclaims Luther’s doctrine in all its purity. And unto this day God is granting to the testimony of Luther’s doctrine pure victory after pure victory. The world stands in need of just such a Church.”

“The strength of a Church lies in its faithful adherence to the Word of God. And this is the grand privilege we have enjoyed. By God’s grace we have the knowledge of the full Gospel truth. May the Lord always keep us in His truth!”

Thus far our faithful, synodical grandfather, Pastor Pasche in the year 1926.

Current president of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Rev. Gerald Kieschnick, has declared on at least three occasions: "This is not your grandfather's United States of America." He is quite correct, and we may most certainly say that today's LCMS is not your grandfather's Synod.

Today the Lord is removing His lampstand from congregation after congregation throughout the United States as desires of the people supplant the gifts of God's grace; namely, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. That same light is now shining more often in Sudan and Kenya. Here in the United States, where once many small town congregations across this land were united in doctrine and practice, now there are empty husks of what once were churches with lampstands within. Today there are major cities where you are not able to find a church that uses the historic liturgy of the Church. Young pastors right out of seminary are going to places and being pressured by congregations and lay leaders, from day one, to violate their ordination vows and their consciences. Other men, who are called to be pastors, are either clowns, or CEOs, or entertainers, or hirelings, or men who simply don't care, deceiving faithful congregations and hastening the day when the gracious presence of the LORD in that place is no more. Gone is gone as the Word of God, which is the basis for true personal repentance and congregation repentance, is denied.

Unconditional subscriptions to the Word of God and the Lutheran Confessions are now being set aside and replaced by mandatory, unconditional subscription and obedience to the resolutions of synod in convention and to the by-laws as the tie that binds. The Scriptures, which include the Great Commission of Matthew 28, must bow before the Greater Commission; namely, the Commission on Constitutional Matters, which is appointed by the synodical president. Do I exaggerate? Listen. In the minutes of the CCM meeting of October 2005 the following opinion is given:

“Accordingly, in response to the current question, a member of the Synod or any groups within the Synod that advocate the withholding of funds from the Synod are subject to admonition for activities that militate against the essential unity intended by the structure of the Synod as provided in its Constitution and Bylaws.”

Notice that it is put forth to us that “the essential unity intended by the structure of the Synod” is defined on the basis of members giving money. The essential unity is no longer on the basis of the Word of God. In the August 2003 *The Lutheran Witness* President Kieschnick writes to the synod: “Get Out Your Checkbooks!”. Ought not the faithful be encouraged to get out your Scriptures? The CCM points to the writings of man and empowers those seeking your funds, opining in effect, “Get out your by-laws and write out your checks!” Ought not the faithful be encouraged to get out your Book of Concord? – to get our your The Lutheran Hymnal and sing Hymn #292?

Two other opinions of the CCM are included in your bulletins today. One of those opinions of the CCM states that it is not in harmony with the Constitution and Bylaws of the Synod for any member of the Synod . . . to teach publicly, publicly advocate, or promote any position contrary to the position of the . . . contrary to the position of the . . . Word of God? . . . NO! . . . contrary to the position of the Synod! That, dearly beloved, is certainly not Lutheran, nor is it Church.

Perhaps you are wondering why the sermon today is so harsh and so critical. In the next weeks and months we here at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church will have some serious, difficult issues to discuss and decisions to make. So today, while I am no Jeremiah and I consider my afflictions cheap in

comparison to the prophet, I do desire to stand with him in the preaching of the Word and abide by the Prophetic Word of God, which says,

“Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the court of the LORD's house, and speak to all the cities of Judah which come to worship in the House of the LORD all the words that I command you to speak to them; do not hold back a Word. It may be they will listen, and every one turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the evil which I intend to do to them because of their evil doings. You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD: “If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My Torah which I have set before you, and to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you urgently, though you have not heeded, then I will make this House like Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse for all the nations of the earth.”””

Dearly beloved, the LORD God does not force you to receive His gifts of forgiveness, eternal life and salvation because of Jesus' sin-atonement Death and death-defeating Resurrection. The One True God does not impose His means of grace on anyone, for that would not be grace. He does not throttle a non-Christian to have faith in Him and He does not forcefully bind you to Him. The Holy Spirit will depart from you if you reject the Lord and His Gospel. If this happens then Christ will no longer be graciously present with you, and if you or I, through our own fault and neglect, gradually slide into such a fallen condition, God's departure may not even be noticed. That's a scary thought and one that ought to cause sober pondering and continued repentance.

Also, how the LORD God is with the individual who departs from faith, is also the way the One True God is with a congregation that is abandoning the Christian faith. The Lord does not impose and force upon a congregation the believing, teaching and confessing of the Gospel – that the sinner is justified by the grace of God through faith in Christ's Person and Work. If a congregation abandons this Good News and sets aside the Lord's means of grace and ministry of the Word, there will, according to that same Word of God, come a time when the LORD, Who is present everywhere, is no longer graciously present with those people.

We pray and we work that this would not be so today or tomorrow, for gone is gone. Will the generations yet unborn be able to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen? Will our children's infants be able to be baptized in this font? Will the congregation be able to make the confession of sins and hear, as you have heard today, that you are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit? Will the Body and the Blood of Jesus, that was given and shed for you for the remission of all your sins, be administered here. In short, “Will This Be Our Grandchildren's Church?” May God, in His mercy, grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the Sanctuary by the Blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His Flesh, and since we have a great Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:19-25). Amen.