

**"God's Promise for You, Your Children and Souls Near and Far"**  
**Ezekiel 34:11-16**

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2nd Last Sunday, Series A

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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church of Emmett, Idaho

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,

Last Sunday the sermon focused on the truth that the LORD is graciously present with congregations where the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered – where justification of the sinner by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus' Person and Work are proclaimed and properly administered in Baptism, Absolution, sermon and Supper. When the church believes, teaches and confesses this Good News of the sin-atonement Death of the Incarnate Son of God and the death-defeating Resurrection of the Son of Man in her hymnody, liturgy and life, then the lamp stand of LORD God Almighty remains lighted and the Holy Trinity is graciously present in that sacred place and holy time.

Where and when, in the course of time, there is the ignorance of this Gospel, there is the "abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel." Martin Luther wrote that "Those who intend to obtain righteousness by their own efforts do not say in so many words: 'I am God; I am Christ.' But it amounts to that. They usurp the divinity and office of Christ. The effect is the same as if they said, 'I am Christ; I am a Savior. I save myself and others.' ... I cannot tell you in words how criminal it is to seek righteousness before God without faith in Christ, by works of the Law. It is the abomination standing in the holy place. It deposes and deifies the creature" (Commentary on Galatians 3:10).

When and where this happens the Jesus removes the lamp stand. He is no longer there with the congregation. This has taken place, as we heard last week, at Shiloh, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Rome, Sweden, Germany, England and is happening here in the United States. When this happens who are those left behind? The answer? Among the many people there will also be a few faithful Christians. From the ruins of Shiloh to the shores of Presque Isle there are individual souls living without Word and Sacrament congregations. Who are they and what's to become of them? Listen again to the Old Testament Reading for today and ponder . . .

. . . *"God's Promise for You, Your Children and Souls Near and Far"*

*"For thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of*

*clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the Shepherd of My sheep, and I will make them lie down,' says the Lord GOD. 'I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.'"*

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Dearly Beloved, we believe, teach and confess that God "has a unique community in the world. It is the mother that begets and bears every Christian through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit reveals and preaches that Word, and by it He illumines and kindles hearts so that they grasp and accept it, cling to it, and persevere in it" (Large Catechism, Third Article). This little holy flock gathers in various places and is most certainly scattered here and there across the face of this earth. Six centuries before the Incarnation of the Son of God, it was true, when, in the days of Ezekiel, he wrote the Word of the LORD God to what was left of the faithful children of Abraham.

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church here in Emmett, Idaho is one of the various places where the little flock is gathered and we ought to be most grateful to the LORD for it being so to this day. May God grant that the abomination of desolation not be the condition of this congregation. That being the situation, we must admit that there are also Christians in places where they have no "justification-by-grace-through-faith-in-Christ" congregations. These God-fearing souls, who trust in Christ crucified for their sins and who hope in the Resurrection to Life, live throughout the world.

Who are these Christians? There are many of them. Some of them are members of my family; likely some are members of your family as well. In addition, there is the woman in Sweden from whom I've not heard for awhile. She is the only Christian in her family and she seeks to have the Word of promise and hope in Christ. We pray that she is well and that, through this sermon downloaded from the internet, she will know that the LORD is with her, keeping her in His nail-pierced hands and that she is remembered by us and that we . . . she, you and me . . . pray the "Our Father" together.

There is the family of the faithful in Kirkuk, Iraq – whose names ought not be published in order to protect them from the real and present danger to them from those who hate Christ and His Christians. In the diaspora is a college student, suddenly away from home, who must choose to endure the secular silliness of a clap-happy, huggy-bear campus ministry, or to stay in the dorm room on Sunday. The scattered include a vicar who is enduring a year in his vicarage assignment at a congregation ablaze in the contemporary worship and praise bands of American evangelicalism – whose vicarage supervisor promotes this religiousness. The vicar wonders if he will pass his vicarage and ponders the possibility of being placed in such a congregation when he receives his Call into the one Ministry of the Church. There is the chaplain whose supervisors prohibit him from including Jesus in his public prayers and encourage him to join in unionistic and syncretistic services like what took place in Yankee Stadium in on September 23, 2001. There is the grandma who listens to her "Sacred Meditations" or "Daily Bread" on CD because it's the only way for her to hear the Word of God and to be fed on the Manna from above. Consider the soldier posted in Afghanistan and requesting email copies of funeral sermons. There are many, many more and one day, you might even find yourself among that number.

The winds of war and the itching ears of man destroy many congregations and that may plague us here in the years to come, or it may happen at the place where you find yourself one day if you move away. Nothing new. In the Prophet Ezekiel's time, the Assyrians, the Egyptians and the Babylonians scorched the earth with their armies and battles. It came to pass that "the Babylonian army marched against Judah, and on March 16, 597 [B.C.], Jerusalem surrendered. Not only King Jehoiachin, but much of the nobility, including Ezekiel, as a member of a priestly family, was exiled. Not surprisingly, the deportees were settled in old Chaldean territory in southeastern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq)" [Ezekiel, Hummel, 2005, pages 19-20].

After last Sunday's sermon one of you dear members of Our Redeemer congregation said that her home congregation had fallen victim to the false doctrines of the times and no longer is Lutheran; that is, no longer Christian. Indeed, while the Lord's Church may no longer be there, His individual people may very well be there, for, "the saying is sure: If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:11-13).

This means that God's Word is true and certain – both His Law which always accuses the old sinful adam, and His Gospel which comforts with forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Surely the Lord will provide for His little flock gathered here and there, as well as those faithful souls scattered there and here. Indeed, sometime prior to 571 BC Ezekiel received the Word of the LORD God and wrote the same to the exiled:

*"For thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the Shepherd of My sheep, and I will make them lie down,' says the Lord GOD. 'I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice.'"*

This is the Good News, not only for the Old Testament Christian Church of Ezekiel's days of the Diaspora, but also for the Apostolic Christian Church following the sacrificial death of Christ and the triumphant Resurrection of the same. Indeed, the Word was proclaimed, "*Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the Name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him*" (Acts 2:38-39).

Beloved James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ wrote a greeting to the twelve tribes in the Diaspora (James 1:1) and the Apostle Peter wrote "*to the exiles of the Dispensa in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His Blood: 'May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to*

*an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:1-5).*

And what Word is there for you and your children – both those near and those far away – this day? It's the very same Word of hope, promise, salvation, comfort, peace and life from the LORD God as Ezekiel, James and Peter were moved by the Holy Ghost to write, and that you and I have heard repeated in this sermon.

For that soul in Sweden, please know Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who laid down His Life for you. He suffered your death that you would have His Life. He took yours sins upon Himself that you would be clothed in His righteousness. For those Arab Christians in Iraq, please know that the entire Holy Trinity knows who you are and what you are going through. May His peace, that surpasses all understanding, abide in your souls and give you the assurance that nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. For you, dear university student, recall what you have learned and confessed, that you believe that Jesus Christ, true God, Begotten of the Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is your Lord and that He has redeemed you, a lost and condemned creature, delivered you from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with silver and gold but with His holy and precious Blood and with His innocent sufferings and death. And please include your home congregation in your prayers – petitioning on our behalf for faithfulness to God's Word, endurance in what we believe, teach and confess in the Lutheran Confessions – that you may have a Church here to come home to.

For you, beleaguered vicar, may this be a learning experience for you, granting you resolve and determination not to fall to such departures from preaching the Word in its truth and purity, or to begin tweaking the administration of the Sacraments from the way Christ instituted them. May you know, even if you now don't hear the words of the historic liturgy of the Church, that you, along with lonely pastors and faithful parishioners in the little flock throughout the world, are forgiven of all your sins in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. May the same consolation in God's Word be yours, faithful chaplain, as you remain steadfast in doctrine and practice despite the pressures from your military and/or ecclesiastical supervisors.

And grandma (or grandpa) – whether you be alone due to the painful separation of a spouse, or suffering the painful separation of a congregation that has abandoned the faith, please know that the LORD Jesus is with you and sends His holy angels to watch over you, and thus you may pray to our Father Who art in heaven, "I pray Thee that Thou wouldst forgive all the sins which I have committed this day and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul and all things. Let Thy holy angels be with me, that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen." Then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

And you, dear member of our armed forces, rest assured that whether you live or die you belong to the Lord. He has redeemed you. He has called you by name. You are His. In your prayers, include us here, that we may be as faithful in defending the faith and fighting errorists, as you are at defending the nation and fighting terrorists. Please let us know if we may help you in some way or send you something.

And now for you, dear souls at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. What more can be said, for surely all that has been said applies to you as well. We surely are blessed to be here and have this holy time

and this holy place wherein God is graciously with us. But, for those who have confirmed the faith, who are prepared, who know why they come and what they hope to receive, there is something that many others, dispersed and scattered through out the world, are not able to have this day; namely, the LORD's Supper. There are those who must go without Supper, even as they long for the very Body and true Blood of Jesus the Christ in the Sacrament of the Altar. They experience a similar situation today, as exiled Ezekiel and the faithful endured during the time of their separation from the Temple. Indeed, those faithful souls, in the various Babylonian Captivities of the Church throughout the centuries, have a holy hunger that, if not today, perhaps tomorrow and most certainly on the Day, will be satisfied.

Therefore, in these latter days and on this final Sunday of the Church year, listen once again to "God's Promise for You, Your Children and Souls Near and Far" . . .

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