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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
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Lent 2

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, maybe like me, you have found the words of the liturgy, the words of our lessons, the words of our hymns, to be that much more profound in light of world events.

Consider the words of the Kyrie we sing at the beginning of our service.

In PEACE, let us pray to the Lord.

For the PEACE from above, and for our salvation, let us pray to the Lord.

For the PEACE of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord.

Consider the words of the Lord's Prayer.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, THY KINGDOM come, THY WILL be done. DELIVER US from evil. For THINE is the kingdom, the power, and the glory.

Consider the words of our psalm this morning.

The Lord is my light and my salvation. Though an army encamp against me, my heart will not fear. Though war rise up against me, my trust will not be shaken. Subject me not to the will of my foes, for they rise up against me, false witnesses breathing violence. This I believe—that I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living!

Consider the words from our reading from Paul's letter to Philippi.

For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is their belly; and their glory is their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consider the words of our opening hymn today.

Though nature's strength decay, and earth and hell withstand, to Canaan's bounds I urge my way at your command.

The goodly land I see, with peace and plenty blest; a land of sacred liberty and endless rest.

Now, what is my point, sisters and brothers in Christ?

What is my point? What is my point about the words of worship having a more profound effect on us?

My point is there is a powerful movement afoot that is speaking to us, that has been speaking to us here in worship but it that much more evident of late.

Indeed, here is a powerful movement that is at work, that has been at work.

There is a powerful movement stirring.

A powerful movement that has been stirring since time immemorial.

There is a powerful movement that is at present very much on the move.

And it is a movement more powerful than tanks and armored vehicles.

It is a movement more powerful than helicopters and fighter jets.

It is movement more powerful than stinger and javelin missiles.

It is a movement more powerful than artillery fire.

It is movement more powerful than plutocracy and autocracy, more powerful than oligarchs and despots.

It is a movement more powerful even than democracy and freedom.

The movement is the very power of God.

And, Friends, this power of God has been set loose in this world, and the world will not be able to overcome it.

The power of God has been released into the world, and the evil in the world had better be on its guard.

The power of God has been unleashed into the world, and God will not be thwarted.

And it is this, this message, that the power of God will not be thwarted, it is this message, that there is a movement afoot, it is this message that we hear in our gospel lesson today.

PAUSE

What do we read in today's gospel lesson? But that some Pharisees came to Jesus to warn him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.

Has ominous parallels with the refugee crisis emanating from Ukraine, doesn't it?

Get away from here, for Putin and the Russians want to kill you.

Get away from here.

But notice that in the face of threats... Notice that in the face of death...our Lord Jesus does not back down.

Listen to his strength. The text says, "Jesus said to them, 'You tell that fox for me, "Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet, today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem."'

"Go and tell that FOX for me." This is pretty much the closest our Lord gets to using derogatory language.

Go and tell that FOX for me.

But Jesus is saying here to the Pharisees, "Listen. I am not backing down. I am not turning tail. I am not giving up, nor giving in. I will not be made to be afraid."

I will not be made to be afraid.

Indeed, FEAR is what this gospel text is all about.

The Pharisees in this text, who are presented elsewhere in the gospels as opponents to Jesus, seem here in this text actually to be supporting Jesus.

Yet, maybe the Pharisees are still depicted here as opponents to Jesus, that they are inadvertently opposing Jesus even though they are trying to help Jesus, because the Pharisees are trying to deter Jesus from his mission.

Regardless, Jesus will have none of it.

Jesus will not be deterred by FEAR from his mission.

Jesus will not give in to the fear and anxiety of the Pharisees.

Yes, FEAR is what this gospel text is all about.

And fear, sisters and brothers in Christ...

Fear is the number one weapon of the devil.

Fear is the devil's weapon of choice.

To be sure, fear is the way the devil conducts his war against the power of God, against the movement of God in the world.

For more than anything, the devil wants us to be afraid.

And we have been exposed to a goodly dose of fear beyond all measure as of late, right?

If we listen to the news...

If we are even remotely attuned to world events, we can't help but be exposed to the fear tactics of the devil.

Whether we are concerned about the economy, rising gas prices, rising inflation...

Whether we are concerned about the war in Ukraine, and its impact on Europe and the West...

Whether we are concerned about the future of democracy in the world...

Whether we are concerned about the threat of nuclear weapons and what that might mean for the existence of the human species...

All of these things have the power to instill great fear into us.

All of these things are the work of the devil who wants nothing else than to make us afraid.

PAUSE

Now, Martin Luther provided several suggestions to combat fear.

He provided several options for when we feel tempted by the devil, such that the devil would make us want to be afraid.

One of the ways to cast off the devil, so said Luther, was to laugh at him.

For FEAR is simply that which wants to gain control over our lives. Fear wants to immobilize us, such that we are afraid to do or say anything.

So if we can recognize fear for what it is—that it is only that which wants control of our lives...if in fact we can come to even laugh at the devil and his fear tactics, well then we can reduce fear to its proper perspective.

Another way to confront fear, so says Luther, is by confessing our sins and making the sign of the cross.

If we remember that we are baptized into Christ and that nothing can separate us from the love of God, and if we can clear our conscience of whatever may be working on us, we tend to be able push fear away.

Luther also said, that another way to confront the devil and drive away fear is by being with other Christians. Christian community helps to reduce fear.

And, service is another way to confront fear. Helping others in need humiliates the devil, because by serving others we become the love of God in action.

And, as I shared with our Adult Sunday School class last week, another way to banish the devil from us and to banish fear is to break wind, because just as we as people don't particularly care to be in the company of others who pass gas, apparently neither does the devil.

I also think that tactic goes back to the idea that laughter banishes the devil, because breaking wind has the power to make us laugh.

These are just a few of Luther's suggestions when it comes to combatting fear.

PAUSE

But I want to get back to where I started this sermon and remind us of the movement of which you and I and all the people of God are a part.

I want to remind us that God is already conquering fear in the world because God in Jesus Christ is powerfully at work in the world.

Where, you might ask, do we see God at work in the world in these days?

We see God in the people of Poland, and Slovakia, Moldova, Romania, and Hungary, who are receiving the Ukrainian refugees.

We see God in the unification of Europe and the United Nations.

We see God in the many people who stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and who oppose tyranny.

The power of God is on the move.

The power of God is stirring forcefully in the world.

The power of God is alive and well, and it will push back the power of fear.

And this power of God is none other than the power of hope.

This is what the people of faith have proclaimed for millennia.

This is what we hear in our scripture readings today.

The psalmist declares it.

The apostle Paul proclaims it.

Our Lord Jesus embodies it as we see in the gospel.

And this is what is speaking again to our spirits today.

It is the power of hope.

I think this is why the words of worship may seem to have a more profound effect on us as late, in light of world events.

You and I and all the people of God are part of a powerful movement, and we are reminded of that every time we come to worship.

Indeed, I often remind myself that my job as a pastor, my calling as a clergy person is to bring the hope of God to others.

That is in fact what we are all called to do as people of God, we disseminate, we broadcast, we give out the hope of God.

This is the work of the church in a world full of fear.

That is why we come here, to be reminded of that truth.

That is why we are moved by the words of worship, because they give us hope in the face of fear.

And that is what the movement of God is about.

Yes, the movement of God in the world is more powerful than anything else because nowhere else in the world to do hear and receive the power of hope so clearly.

So yes, God is on the loose, God has been unleashed, and God will not be thwarted, because Christ has broken the chains of sin and death, and his mission in the world will not be stopped.

Thanks be to God. Amen.