

2013_11_03 All Saints | Sermon
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
Pastor David Pfeiffer

Steals on the Ear the Distant Triumph Song

Isaiah 26:1-4, 12-13, 19-21

INI

Grace and peace to you from Him who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 1:9). Amen.

All Scripture is God-breathed. Those words which were inscribed some 2700 years ago, but still touch our ears and life today, which promise things to come, are from

Isaiah 26

1-4

¹ In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: “We have a strong city; *God* will appoint salvation *for* walls and bulwarks.

² Open the gates, That the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in. ³ You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed on *You*, Because he trusts in You. ⁴ Trust in the Lord forever, For in Yah, the Lord, *is* everlasting strength.

8-9

⁸ Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You; The desire of *our* soul *is* for Your name And for the remembrance of You.

⁹ With my soul I have desired You in the night, Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek You early; For when Your judgments *are* in the earth, The inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.

12-13

¹² Lord, You will establish peace for us, For You have also done all our works in us.

¹³ O Lord our God, masters besides You Have had dominion over us; *But* by You only we make mention of Your name.

19-21

¹⁹ Your dead shall live; *Together with* my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew *is like* the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.

²⁰ Come, my people, enter your chambers, And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past.

²¹ For behold, the Lord comes out of His place To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity; The earth will also disclose her blood, And will no more cover her slain.

Steals on the Ear the Distant Triumph Song

Let us PRAY: O Lord, You are our fortress and might; grant that we may so find shelter from all our sins and sorrows as we take refuge in Your promises today. Amen.

In Jesus name, who is our Mighty Fortress, dear fellow saints,

It is a song without a name. It is sung by singers without a name. They are as countless as the sand on the sea shore – yet this choir sings with such harmony that you can only hear one voice. With one voice they fill the halls of God’s city: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

After our sermon we will be singing a hymn familiar and beloved by many. #463 in the Lutheran Hymnal goes by the title: “For All the Saints.” It is the tune which I’d like you to take note of. The beautiful tune which was wedded to the beautiful words of this hymn is: “Sine Nomine;” – translation: “no name.” The title for this tune was chosen in order to draw to mind that picture from Revelation 7 of the countless host of believers assembled before God – “a great multitude which no one could number.” The saints have “no name” because this distant song is not about individuals. This is about the communion of saints; this is the fellowship song that joins both those who rest in heaven and those still struggling on earth. They have no name, because they are not interested in singing about themselves; Instead, in that day they will sing of God - the One who appoints salvation for walls and bulwarks. In the midst of your struggles and suffering, this song steals on you ear; It is the distant triumph song.

1. A distant song steals the ear of suffering Israel

Can you hear it? Or does that picture of Revelation 7 seem just too far away? After all, we’re on earth; we have to live in the present. And as is so often the case – we get stuck in the past. The past: the could of’s, the should of’s, the would of’s... “But I could have ... I know I should have ... if only I would have.” Regret, sorrow, doubt. Things could be different. Things should be different.

Isaiah’s original audience knew such regret, such sorrow. These were dark days for the people of Israel. As Isaiah pens these words, Israel is a nation bound for captivity. Isaiah prophecies of how this people, God’s people, will be given into the hands of their enemies. They have utterly rejected God’s call to remembrance and brought on themselves most devastating consequences. It would come at the hands of the world’s great super power of those days. God would use the Babylonians to enact judgment against His own nation, His own people. Not long after Isaiah’s prophecy, the

Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar will invade the city of Jerusalem, destroying the walls, burning the Temple, and taking God's people as his prisoners.

It would be easy for Israel to be stuck in the past. The mistakes. The irresponsibility. The regret. As it says in v.13, "they have had other masters." This would be proved not just in their captivity to the Babylonians, but also in their captivity to the sinful flesh. Idols have invaded place where God wants His name alone to be remembered. Their present sorrows are bound in past regrets. Things could be different. Things should be different. The days grew darker.

The church calendar has chosen November 1st as the day in which to commemorate "All Saints Day." This comes at a time of the year where the days are growing shorter. We set our clocks back and 5pm means sunlight is coming to an end. The days are growing darker. The seasons are changing. Trees are fading. Cold winds are blowing in. With the events of Reformation and All Saints Day our focus begins to shift. It is not just the stores that are trying to turn your attention to Christmas; it is the church year also.

For those believers caught up in the judgment being brought on the nation, this was a time to turn the ear to the west. As they were being held in what we know as present day Iraq, they would look back to the west and think of that sweet land of rest; they would think of these promises of Isaiah and a golden evening would brighten in the west. There, in the lowly stable, dawns a yet more glorious day. Stealing on the ear, an distant angel sings: "Peace on earth, good will to men."

For the days are dark and this song seems so far away from us. The could of's, the should of's, the would of's.

We turn to Bethlehem; to the stable. What the world would suppose to be so weak, so dirty, so unhelpful; God would reveal as your Rock, your Fortress, and your Might. What the world would call "Sine Nomine" God would call a name which is above every name. From within the darkness drear comes the One true Light.

1 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks.

That stable would prove a shelter for God's nation. Jesus would come forth in humble, human form, and emerge from the grave with the everlasting strength of Jah, the LORD. Enduring all our past regrets, suffering in our present sorrow, He would create

a new future for the saints of old and for you. Things could be different. Things would be different. And things are different.

In Christ things have changed. God has cast your past regrets into the depths of Christ's cross and brought forth in His resurrection a new day with a new song. The song of the saints is not so far off as you might think. In causing His name to be remembered, God has opened the gates and brought you in. He has raised up walls all around. Walls which drown out the past regrets, the present sorrow, the doubts for the future. His name which is no longer nameless. His name which is above every name. We remember the name of Jesus and His walls of salvation enclose about us. Within the walls of Jesus saving righteousness you can hear it. You have heard it. That distant triumph song makes your heart brave. "And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph song."

2. A distant song calls the faithful to the rest of the promised resurrection

You would think that the qualifications for sainthood would somehow involve good works. So much of has been misconstrued, so much misinterpreted. So many think salvation comes about by our works. But what is that tune that steals on the ear? "Sine nomine" – they have "no name." That choir of countless singer sings with such harmony that there are no individuals. The saints are not out to make a name for themselves. To be a saint, is no different than believing in Jesus; from the greatest to the least, the assembly of the saints are those who have had their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb. As Paul also writes: "God has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." We have no name but Christ.

How many unknown, unheard of, faithful believers come and go, never to be granted a place of honor in the world; never thought of twice; unknown, without a name?

How many will remember the name of Jeffery Cameron? How many can remember how to spell his name? Even though Melissa has told me more than once, I still can't remember it is Jeffrey – r-e-y or e-r-y. As I looked back at the obituary and the service folder for His victory service I realized I had it both ways. Of course, Jeff would be the last person to point out such a mistake. He was not one out to make a name for himself. And now he has joined the countless host who sing a tune entitled: "sine nomine" – "without a name."

This day is not about honoring the saints or their works. For as verse 12 says, "God has done all our works in us." And as Paul writes to the Philippians, it is "God who works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philip. 2:13).

It was God who worked in Jeff a faith that did not question or complain about his struggles. It is God who has made a name for Himself. Jeff never had it easy. Growing up, he moved from one place to another quite often. Both his parents died by the time he turned 11. He would face heart complications that were on the brink of ending his life at age 44. Jeff was one whose life could have ended with thoughts stuck in the past. But God was of a different mindset. Just before this story was all over, God had in mind something for the future. Through a heart transplant God would preserve Jeff's life another 5 years – 5 years; just enough time to meet a wife, to learn about Jesus, to be would be gathered into the fellowship of Christ's body, to see the birth of 3 boys, to see them baptized, to teach them about Jesus, and to see this countless and nameless number extended; another 5 years. Jeff and his family is not nameless to God for they bear the name of His Son, Jesus.

Can you hear Jeff singing that distant triumph song?

Well, perhaps you need to come a little closer. The writers to the Hebrews writes that we who believe in Jesus have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly of those whose names are registered in heaven." In Christ, the gates to this heavenly assembly have opened, and as we hear and believe His Word, we are there. But you can come even closer. Those who approach the Lord's Altar today will get this opportunity. To be closer. As Paul writes, we who break this bread and drink this cup are "one body" – one communion (1 Corinthians 10). We are joined to His body and blood; and where Christ is, there is the assembly of all who believe, alive or dead - they all live in Him. Here you commune with Jesus; here you commune with Jeff. Here you join angels and archangels and all the saints heaven. "We feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia!"

The life of a saint, is a life of struggle; it is a life of sorrow; it is a life of faith. An ear always turned toward Bethlehem. So Jesus said in Matthew 5 – "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

For the days are growing dark and God will enact His vengeance against sin; He will "come out of His place" to bring the promised judgment upon the earth. It is time to take shelter in our Lord's stable.

“Come, my people, enter your chambers, shut your doors. Hide yourself.” This is what faith is all about. It is to experience these present trials and hide in His promises. It is to be caught up in the midst of the Babylonian captivity of the world, and find shelter in the empty tomb of Christ. There in our own promised resurrection, a triumph song is penned by Isaiah:

19 Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; For your dew is like the dew of herbs, And the earth shall cast out the dead.

This is the answer to the question why? Why the sorrows? Why do we suffer? Death has not yet been destroyed. It still stings us with could of's, should of's, and would of's – unthinkable tragedies that could strike at any moment. It brings questions that cannot be answered. And so the song of triumph is still bound to that last day, where our present struggle meets eternal joy.

For now, it comes by faith. That perfect peace of paradise is yours; but only by trusting in the Lord's promise. For now, we hide ourselves in these walls of salvation; knowing that God will bring us to that day; that day where the song will be sung in fullest measure. Soon enough, dear saints. Soon enough those past regrets will never be thought of again. Soon enough those present sorrows will never be felt again. Soon enough we will awake and sing together with all the saints. Soon enough. “Soon, soon, to faithful warriors cometh rest. Sweet is the clam of Paradise the blest. Allelujah! Allelujah!” For you who still struggle, who are caught in that warfare still – may that song steal on you ear and make your heart brave – the distant triumph song. Amen.