

Wednesday in Reminiscere, the 13th Day of Lent
February 20, 2008

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University Lutheran Chapel
Minneapolis, Minnesota

✧ Jesu juva ✧

DEAR CHRISTIANS ONE AND ALL REJOICE – STANZA 4
John 12:27-36

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tonight we will contemplate the fourth stanza of Dear Christians's One and All Rejoice. Luther artfully puts several thoughts together in this stanza. He moves the hymn from a contemplation of our sin and ability to attain His acceptance through our works and efforts to the Father's gracious acceptance of us through Christ. This has always been the Father's will, that we come to Him through His Son. We speak about God's promise to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, the promise of sending one who crush the devil's head, as the protoevangelium, the first Gospel. But the Gospel was in the mind of God before Adam and Eve had ever sinned, before they were even created! Luther puts it so nicely:

“But God had seen my wretched state
Before the worlds foundation;
And mindful of is mercies great,
He planned for my salvation.”

The sending of Jesus to save us from our sins was not an afterthought. It was not God's “Plan B”. As we heard earlier tonight Jesus knew full well why He was on earth. And points to His impending crucifixion as a sign He was indeed the promised Messiah, God's own Son. “Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour.” And then He goes on to speak about His being “lifted up form the earth”, which the people rightly understood to be speaking about His death, for they protest saying how can this be if you are the Christ who is supposed to remain forever. And in this being lifted up, this dying in order to draw people to Himself, God is glorified. And so rather than praying for the Father to rescue Him, He prays: “Father, glorify Your name.” To which God the Father audibly answers before them all: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” And how? Through the giving of His Son for the sake of having mercy on all humanity.

St. Peter tells us in his first epistle: “you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ... He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.” Likewise St. John calls Jesus: “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”, not that Jesus was actually slain before the worlds were made, but that this has been God's will from before all time. And this in light of our salvation, St. Paul says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world... In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Luther says that in His eternal good will toward us and the enactment of that will by sending Christ, God the Father displays His fatherly heart toward us. Writing on the creed, Luther says in the Large Catechism:

“In these three articles God himself has revealed and opened to us the most profound depths of his fatherly heart, his sheer, unutterable love. He created us for this very purpose, to redeem and sanctify us. Moreover, having bestowed upon us everything in heaven and on earth, he has given us his Son and his Holy Spirit, through whom he brings us to himself. As we explained before, we could never come to recognize the Father’s favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father’s heart.”

And this thought is picked up in the hymn:

“He turned to me a father’s heart,
He did not choose the easy part
But gave His dearest treasure.”

When we look at our selves, at our lives, at our sinfulness and failures, we wonder how God could ever accept us. Your own conscience accuses you. Your own heart condemns you. And you think God must surely be your enemy and bring His wrath upon you. But we should only go so far when listening to the testimony of our own hearts. Pay attention to what your heart shows forth in terms of sin so that you may repent of it, but then look not toward your conscience and heart, but to God the Father’s heart. And see how His heart is laid open to you through the giving and sacrificing of His Son, and how His heart is laid open for you.

He did not choose the easy part, but gave His dearest treasure, and thus gained your salvation. So how is God disposed to you? With a Father’s love, for through Christ you are now become His children. And His Fatherly heart will not be closed to you, for Christ has opened it by opening His own, through water and through blood. And His will, which has been since before the world began, does not change. Your sins are forgiven, and you are His. Amen.

✠ Soli Deo gloria ✠