

Trinity X

While young Martin Luther was attending elementary school in Eisenach and later in Erfurt, the city of Florence was disturbed by the preaching of a fiery Dominican by the name of Savonarola. He rose to fame by predicting that judgment of God was about to be unleashed on the wicked Florentines. Within a year King Charles VIII of France came with his army rampaging through the countryside on his way to lay claim to the kingdom of Naples. Savonarola's sermon was remembered and he was given a free hand to lead the moral reformation of Florence. You can imagine how well that went. Given control, this fiery preacher abused it. By February of 1497 he demanded that all the "vanities" of the wealthy Florentines be gathered into the square and burnt. This is the origin of the term "bonfire of the vanities." Within 16 months it was Savonarola and some of his henchmen whose corpses were being burnt in the main square.

But we should not think that the people of ancient Florence were that much different than we are. Some of the most urbane and educated and liberal folk of the day were in those pews, including Lorenzo de' Medici, often styled "The Magnificent" and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola whose Oration on the Dignity of Man was hardly a moralizing and reactionary document and was ten years old as the bonfires burned in Florence.

There was something in the air about this time which led preachers to predict the imminent end of the world and an outpouring of God's divine wrath. In the 1530's when a mature Luther preached the sermons of which a selection is reprinted below, he was preaching the same sort of fire and brimstone and the imminent and inevitable judgment of God.

We don't live in such a time when these messages are well received. There are always a few who will gravitate toward this and we safely quarantine them under the label "fringe group." They are hardly the mainstream folk to whom we preach. Of course, there is another sort of apocalyptic prophet hanging about these days, and they have a little more traction with people. These are of course the folks who cast worried glances toward collapsing ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland. They predict not a fiery conflagration but the inexorable inundation of our coastal cities and the spread of deserts as the planet heats up. At least they remain somewhat consistent – this is not a judgment wrought by some other god; the judgment which this age fears is that of the god which is made in its own image – ourselves!

The readings today force us to content with the idea of divine judgment and the consequences of our behaviors. Jeremiah preaches his famous temple sermon. Paul addresses the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews, and Jesus weeps for the Holy City which he sees is about to be laid waste. Luther reflects on the fate of Jerusalem, has clearly read Joseph's gory account of it, and wonders what God has in store for the Germans who have despised God's Word by tolerating the abuses of the bishops and, when they are finally free of those abuses, turning their freedom into a license for spiritual laziness. Sometimes you could not win when Luther preached.

What shall we do with all this? We could side step the whole issue and squeeze some Gospel out of these texts and ignore the judgment. But is that preaching the whole counsel of God as Paul mentioned in the Acts text last week? But how will we not become a Savonarola or one of the many others who have proclaimed the judgment of God and been carried off into the various

fates reserved for heretics, a judgment of another kind? We will preach Law and Gospel, in all their terror and sweetness. For the Law without the Gospel, as Paul notes for us today, does not bring us to the Law's end, only to a miserable and despairing place. Who will rescue us from this body of death? Praise be to Christ! (Rom 7)

Collect of the Day

O God, You declare Your almighty power above all in showing mercy and pity. Mercifully grant us such a measure of your grace that we may obtain Your gracious promises and be made partakers of your heavenly treasures; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

My father used to have a fellow would say, while shaking his hand after the services, "Pastor, I hope they were listening." My father was never quite sure who the "they" were but he was rather sure that he was hoping this fellow was listening. I am reminded of this with this prayer. We declare that God's almighty power is declared in God's mercy and pity, but do we start by thinking about God's mercy and pity shown to us? The prayer seems to be there. It immediately asks God for a measure of grace so that we might obtain his promises and be made partakers of heavenly treasures.

Well of course we are already Lutherans and therefore on the right side of God's gracious promises and partakers of his heavenly grace, right? We are praying for those other guys, right? Therein lies a terrible arrogance, when we forget that we are asking for a measure of that grace for ourselves first, not them, or at least not only them. First for us. Because we need it. In the words of the Psalm today, we are stupid and foolish. We would reject the heavenly gifts and treasures and pursue a righteousness of our own manufacture which is shabby and which will let us down.

The readings will be about God's chosen people who have rejected and thereby earned God's wrath. The implication which Luther draws out for us is that we are tempted to think the same thing of ourselves, to forget that we are the wild olive branch grafted into the olive tree. We imagine that we are secure in our status with God (Baptized and confirmed a Lutheran!) and therefore have a license to do what we will or, better yet, simply do very little at all. .

Thus, we need God to answer this prayer deliver on that promise. We need his mercy. Yes, of course, so does the other guy, but I need it and dare not imagine that it can skip over me.

Readings

Jeremiah 8:4-12

“At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall be brought out of their tombs. ² And they shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven, which they have loved and served, which they have gone after, and which they have sought and worshiped. And they shall not be gathered or buried. They shall be as dung on

the surface of the ground. ³ Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts.

⁴“You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD:

When men fall, do they not rise again?

If one turns away, does he not return?

⁵ Why then has this people turned away
in perpetual backsliding?

They hold fast to deceit;
they refuse to return.

⁶ I have paid attention and listened,
but they have not spoken rightly;

no man relents of his evil,

saying, ‘What have I done?’

Everyone turns to his own course,

like a horse plunging headlong into battle.

⁷ Even the stork in the heavens

knows her times,

and the turtledove, swallow, and crane

keep the time of their coming,

but my people know not

the rules of the LORD.

⁸“How can you say, ‘We are wise,
and the law of the LORD is with us’?

But behold, the lying pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie.

⁹ The wise men shall be put to shame;
they shall be dismayed and taken;

behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD,
so what wisdom is in them?

¹⁰ Therefore I will give their wives to others

and their fields to conquerors,

because from the least to the greatest

everyone is greedy for unjust gain;

from prophet to priest,

everyone deals falsely.

¹¹ They have healed the wound of my people lightly,

saying, ‘Peace, peace,’

when there is no peace.

¹² Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?

No, they were not at all ashamed;

they did not know how to blush.

Therefore they shall fall among the fallen;

when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,

says the LORD.

¹³ *When I would gather them, declares the LORD,
there are no grapes on the vine,
nor figs on the fig tree;
even the leaves are withered,
and what I gave them has passed away from them.”*

I am not sure why these readings are listed in this order. If you want to read this reading, you should really start with the second one below. We will assume that you have. Jeremiah's temple sermon strikes at the heart of the problem in the final days of Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar took them away into exile. Their very religion had become their source of their corruption. They counted on being the place where the temple was located and that God would intervene to save his holy house. Never did they imagine that God had sent the Babylonians to crush the very religion which they practiced.

The people had committed their eternal well-being to this assumption on their part. The wealthy had built their tombs in proximity to the temple, figuring that this would keep their graves safe. Jeremiah envisions a day when their bones will be scattered in the sun. We don't put a great deal of stock in what happens to our bodies after death. Indeed, many will have their ashes scattered after cremation. Thus this doesn't really shock us like it did Jeremiah's generation. For them, to this was a horrible fate. One had truly arrived when one's descendants properly mourned and cared for your grave. To have your bones exposed like this was a sign of divine judgment. Jeremiah notes the irony that they will be exposed to the very natural elements which those people worshiped, the sun, stars, and moon which comprised the pantheon of the pagans who surrounded them and whose worship had seduced them.

Beginning in verse 4 we get the impassioned and bitter lament of God. He is flabbergasted that they keep turning to evil when he has repeatedly and lovingly set them on the right path. They hold fast to deceit, they love the darkness. The Lord's particular fury is reserved for those who lead, those who speak "Peace!" when there is no peace. Their wives will be given to others and their fields will be divided among the conquerors. Because they were not ashamed when they worshipped this starry host, they will be counted among the fallen. Their confidence in the temple and their trust in a God who cares more for a building than the covenant, is completely misplaced. They have utterly misread the covenant. God was always much more interested in the care of the widow, orphan, and sojourner than he was in the rites of sacrifice. They have turned the covenant upside down and now God is about to upend their world.

This passage, along with the one which follows, is paired with the Gospel very carefully today, so we will develop the sermons there. Jesus is clearly drawing on Jeremiah's sermon and words when cleanses the temple there of the money changers and vendors.

OR

Jeremiah 7:1-11

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter

these gates to worship the LORD. ³ Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

⁵ “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, ⁶ if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

⁸ “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? ¹¹ *Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD.* ¹² *Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it because of the evil of my people Israel.* ¹³ *And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer,* ¹⁴ *therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.* ¹⁵ *And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim.*

This passage from the beginning of Jeremiah’s sermon provides the reason for the later words which form the first reading. Again, if you are reading this one make sure you go up and read the conclusion to this bitter sermon by Jeremiah.

Here Jeremiah notes that the people of Jerusalem, especially their leaders, have completely misread the covenant of God. They imagine that the sanctity of the temple will protect them. They have some reason for this. A few generations prior, in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah, the king had been besieged by the Assyrian and God had rescued them by slaughtering 185,000 of Sennacherib’s army. You can read about this in Isaiah 36-37. But what they missed was that Hezekiah came in penitential prayer to the LORD. The people of Jerusalem are not assuming that posture nor are their prayers spoken in that faith. They are using the assumption of God’s protection as a license to idolatry and the very behaviors which the covenant proscribed. The legal system has been corrupted. The vulnerable in society are being stomped on, and the worship of the Lord has been mixed and perverted with the worship of other gods. And still they count on God’s promise to preserve his temple. Their own religion is the problem!

As with the first text, this makes the most sense when preached in conjunction with the Gospel lesson and we will be developing sermons there. Thematically, however, I cannot fathom why the reading was cut at verse 11 and did not continue into verse 12 which Jesus is quoting in the Gospel reading. If you are printing the readings in your bulletin, I would recommend that you extend this through the end of the paragraph, verse 15.

Psalm 92

¹It is good to give thanks to the LORD,
to sing praises to your name, O Most High;
²to declare your steadfast love in the morning,
and your faithfulness by night,
³to the music of the lute and the harp,
to the melody of the lyre.
⁴For you, O LORD, have made me glad by your work;
at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

⁵How great are your works, O LORD!
Your thoughts are very deep!
⁶The stupid man cannot know;
the fool cannot understand this:
⁷that though the wicked sprout like grass
and all evildoers flourish,
they are doomed to destruction forever;
⁸but you, O LORD, are on high forever.
⁹For behold, your enemies, O LORD,
for behold, your enemies shall perish;
all evildoers shall be scattered.

¹⁰But you have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox;
you have poured over me fresh oil.
¹¹My eyes have seen the downfall of my enemies;
my ears have heard the doom of my evil assailants.

¹²The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
¹³They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
¹⁴They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
¹⁵to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

This Psalm helps us deal with an idea in the OT reading which might be a little problematic for us and hence we need to treat it. While Jeremiah critiques his people quite properly for turning the promise and love of God into a license to sin, the other side of his equation, namely that if they would start to worship God along, take care of the widow, orphan, and sojourner, and execute justice in the courts, then they would be alright with God. This sounds to me like it would lend itself to a problematic conclusion, namely that God is somehow rewarding good behavior with his favor.

But the psalm helps with that. It is good to sing God's praises. It is good to do these things. Not because they earn something from God but because he has made us glad by his handiwork, because he has worked salvation.

Notice in the psalm that the psalmist is the recipient of God's good work, never does he speak of God responding or reacting to what the psalmist has done, always the psalmist is noting God's good deeds and reacting to what God has done. The Lord has anointed him with oil, raised his horn, etc.

It is the last line, however, that I think is the most important. God is the psalmist's rock, there is no unrighteousness in him. The psalmist knows full well that the line between good and evil runs right through his own heart. He cannot see an evil man but that he also sees something of himself. That line does not run through God's heart.

Romans 9:30-10:4

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

¹ Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Here Paul is reflecting on the very words of Jesus over Jerusalem and the frustration of Jeremiah's sermon. The righteousness which the Lord demands is a strange thing. As the psalmist says above, the fools just don't get it (vs 6). The folks of Jeremiah's day thought it was when they worshiped God they were in his favor. They had the temple, they had the rituals, and they had the sacred calendar down. But the courts were corrupt and the vulnerable were oppressed. They did not see that this was a problem. I am reminded of a preacher I once knew who kept every rubric assiduously while his parish collapsed around him. There was no reasoning with him that the widows needed visiting or the delinquent should be called upon to see why they were not in church. He had a liturgy and sermon to prepare for Tuesday's observance of the feast of St. Bartholomew and, even though it would be attended only by two, he was determined to make it a high liturgical event complete with a skillfully crafted sermon. There is nothing wrong with well-crafted observances of the feast of St. Bartholomew. But liturgy at the expense of the people whom it is to serve is idolatrous.

In Paul's day his fellow Jews sought to keep the whole law carefully. They tithed their mint and read their Torah, but they did not see that the righteousness which the law demands was always a gift of God, not a thing to be earned by the works of man. They had missed the psalmist's point above that his praise was always for the works of God.

Paul notes that they pursued the law zealously, but they never got to where the law was supposed to bring them. The reason is that they did not pursue this out of faith, but out works. You don't even need to read Luther to know what he would be saying right now. Paul says that they have stumbled over the stumbling stone. The stone is in fact Jesus and the truth that his death and resurrection are the real answers to the questions which the Law poses. The Ten Commandments describe him perfectly and every lamb sacrificed on a Jewish altar was a bright arrow pointing us toward him. Every king, every prophet, and every priest was a prefiguring of Jesus. For us likewise, every sacramental action, every good deed, every pastor, teacher, doctor, nurse, and other worker of good, even those that are not Christians, is a reflection of Jesus and God's will expressed through Christ for the sake of humanity. Christ is all and in all (Eph 1:10, 21, and 4:6). It is just too easy for us to assume that we alone are possessors of God's goodness. It is too easy for us to think that we got something right, even faith, and to imagine this makes us somehow different from the other because we are different instead of because God has done something. It is just so easy for us to stumble and fall into that same idolatry of Jeremiah's day, of Paul's day, of every day.

The preacher attracted to this text will need to take on the smugness which pervades too many Christian assemblies and which flourishes in the hearts of too many Christians, including preachers. The Jews of Paul's day imagined that they were the physical descendants of Abraham and had the covenant. If they kept the rules, maintained the covenant, they were the chosen people. They really did not think that they were earning the favor of God. Jewish rabbis read the Torah and heard God say that his love to them was gracious (Deut. 7:7, et al.) But they imagined that somehow their keeping of the Torah is what kept them in God's favor. Paul doesn't see the difference and he is right. There really isn't one. In both the crude works righteousness of the pagan and the more sophisticated works righteousness of the Jewish rabbi, God is reacting to what I do. He is a sort of divine vending machine into which I put something and out comes something I want. But I would challenge the modern Lutheran preacher to assess honestly how we preach and what we say. Are we that different? How easily our people and the preacher himself lapses into the notion that God sees and notices that I have memorized my Catechism, I have the proper faith, I have the right liturgy, or confess the proper creed (with or without the dreaded "catholic church" in the third article.) We expend our energy to make distinctions God does not recognize and fail to live as he would have us live, trusting utterly in him. How do I know this? Just look at the giving records of every parish in the LCMS or Christianity in North America – we average about 2% of income. The Mormons with their legalism put us to shame. Does the love of God motivate us to do less or more? We claim to trust in God, but we are hedging our bets with 401K's and IRA's. We claim that God is our joy and treasure but we invest in our cars, electronics, and won't put up with a home that doesn't have three baths and neighbors of whom we approve. Jeremiah would not have a difficult puncturing us as religious gasbags as he did the Jerusalemites of old. We have submitted to God's righteousness but only on our terms, a submission which is in name only and no submission in fact.

Paul, however, knows another way. He speaks of a righteousness that is ours by the faith of Jesus (see the textual notes for Romans 3:22 and 26 and Galatians 2:16; also Romans 4:16 for the same construction but this time applied to Abraham.) I use that strange construction because

it smashes the idea that even our faith is really our own. It too is the gift of God. The righteousness which the law demands and which we cannot attain, because we are simply stupid to quote the Psalm, that righteousness is ours in Christ who is the end/telos/goal of the law.

Sermon Idea: Christ is our Righteousness (That the Holy Spirit would disabuse the hearer of any self-idolatry and replace that with the faith of Christ)

This sermon will confront fideism, the misplaced faith in faith which afflicts much of North American Protestantism. (If you want to read a very insightful paper about this, look here: [http://www.academia.edu/185285/Why Luther is not Quite Protestant The Logic of Faith in a Sacramental Promise](http://www.academia.edu/185285/Why_Luther_is_not_Quite_Protestant_The_Logic_of_Faith_in_a_Sacramental_Promise)) Indeed, from the Puritan insistence of Sabbath attendance, to the holiness bodies embracing temperance and rules against dancing and card playing, to the glossolalia of the Pentecostals, American Christians have been searching for the proof of faith for a very long time. They all say that we are saved by faith alone so we had better know if we have faith, right? At times this has bordered on ridiculous. The Church of God of Anderson, In. had fierce debates about whether a person of faith could use lipstick if she was a woman or wear a necktie in the case of a man. We chortle at that, but if the question is whether one has faith and therefore the favor of God, these might not be small questions. And are conservative Lutherans really any different as I have heard some suggest that the man who wears lipstick is no true Christian and does not have faith. Are you really equipped to say that?

But isn't this ultimately asking the wrong question? Is the question really whether I have faith or not, but rather isn't it about whether Jesus has died for my sins and given me his righteousness? Faith is not something I detect or measure, any more than my marriage is measurable or the fact that I am a son and a father. I can see some evidence, it is true. I spend a great deal of time with my wife and children. I grieved when my parents died, but those are not the relationship, simply one sort of evidence of it. Faith is what we call it when God is my shepherd and I am his sheep, when Jesus is the vine and I am a branch, when I am dead and he is the resurrection, when I am lost and he is the finder, when I am a child and he is my Father,...this could go on but you are getting the point.

But this changes a great deal. Faith is no longer something I have and others do not, but it is something I am and, if I am honest, which God has done to the whole of humanity in Christ. I cannot smugly sit in my pew and assume that the fellow driving by the church parking lot on Sunday is different from because I got something right. If I am here, it is a great gift of God working in me, to overcome my sinful nature, to infuse into me a desire to worship, or at least enough guilt about skipping church. It is not that I am really that much different from the fellow who turns into the race track on Sunday morning or the woman who sleeps in after a Saturday night out with her friends. We are all sinners, we are also all the people for whom Jesus died.

Paul yearns for his fellow Jews of the first century to know this truth. They rely on the keeping of the Torah to assure them that they are the chosen children of Israel. Lutherans too often rely on the recitation of Solas and Catechisms to know if they are part of the true church. Rather we need to listen to the Solas and the truth of that Catechism, but most importantly, we need to listen to that Jesus who speaks to us through those Solas and Catechism. For it is his relationship with

the Father, his faith, which is our salvation – not our faith. We have been incorporated into Christ when he was born into this world, when he died our death, suffered our pain, and was laid in our tomb. We were incorporated into life when he rose and we rose with him.

Here the preacher might take a little excursus into the practice of infant baptism. There is a powerful thing to be said for baptizing a helpless infant, who cannot confess, who cannot reason, who cannot do any of the things we associate with faith. He/she is utterly helpless. And God does it all. And in so doing, God really does it all. The perfect righteousness which the law demands is given to us.

Or

I Corinthians 12:1-11 (This reading falls in Series C on the Second Sunday after the Epiphany)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Verses 1-3 speak about the Main Thing. The main thing is that all of us who are in this room worshiping Jesus can do so because we are filled with the same Holy Spirit. The first thing that Paul points to here is unity, a unity which is not born out always in my opinions or what I think we ought to do, but is born out in our confession of Christ which all of us make simply by walking through those doors.

Paul then goes on to speak of the opposing tension to that Main Thing which is true of all of us. Diversity is good. Just because we have the same Spirit does not mean we are all the same, and that is good as well. One Spirit can work in lots of different ways, and those ways are given for the “Common Good” in verse 7. We can delight that the other person is different than I am, that

they have different ideas, that we are not the same. In fact, this person's gift and my gift may complement one another really well. But this is all for the common good, that is important here.

Paul then catalogues some of the different gifts possible, but this is no way a complete list. He doesn't intend it to be. One is wise, another heals, another works miracles, another prophecies, and another can speak in tongues. This vast variety is the fruit of the same Spirit who gives out these gifts as he wants to give. This is His church, not my church, not your church, this is His creation. When I am the owner of the church, the other who is different than I am becomes a personal threat and it completely soaks up my joy.

The beauty of the model which Paul proposes here that this is the Spirit's work, that he has lots of tools in his tool box in addition to the tools he has given me is that now the ideas and the ministry get multiplied. They are not all channeled through one way to see things, but they are empowered by one very potent holy spirit.

This can be taken to an extreme, the brakeman on all this is the common good statement in verse 7. Eighty five people all pursuing different agendas will not really serve the common good. There is a place and a point at which we have to ask that common good question and even be able to submit my ideas and plans to those of the "common body" of Christ. Remember, it is not my church, but his. That does not mean I get fatalistic about this either. I am part of his church, he has given me gifts to use and to use joyfully in the service of that church. Do I care what goes on? Absolutely, but I am not the owner of what happens. It is a fine line between apathy and fatalism, a tension between two extremes into which we can easily fall and will fall repeatedly, which is why this is his church and not my church.

As long as we are striving as a body to be in his mission, furthering his kingdom we are engaged in this. Paul paints a picture of the church here in which we are given to watch and see what the Spirit is doing, and sometimes to be really surprised by it. Not surprised that we are surprised, but expecting surprise, if you can think about that it that way.

Paul speaks today of Spiritual gifts. In light of the fact that the Gospel lesson is so compelling and the OT too, I am thinking I will not do much here. There are so many who treat this, I will let them have a stab at it right now. If you need a sanitized and salutary treatment of this, I commend you to the CTCR document on spiritual gifts. You can download a PDF of an official position at: <http://www.lcms.org/graphics/assets/media/CTCR/spiritgifts.pdf>

Luke 19:41-48

⁴¹ And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side ⁴⁴ and tear you down to the ground, you and your

children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

⁴⁵ And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, ⁴⁶ saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.”

⁴⁷ And he was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, ⁴⁸ but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words.

Luther

1. Children should pay close attention to this Gospel lesson, so that they learn from it how to fear God.

2. For Christ spoke these words with a deeply troubled heart, and he wept bitterly over the fact that this beautiful city would soon be horribly and so totally destroyed, that not one stone would be left on top of another. He says, Oh Jerusalem, if you only knew and would believe the extreme misery and despair that will soon come over you, then you would not feel so secure, but you would consider how to have peace with God. You would howl in despair and plead with God to have mercy on you.

3. Although our Lord is talking about the city of Jerusalem, he is also warning and threatening all those who have God’s Word but disregard and despise it, take it for granted, and do not trust it, just as if God would simply overlook all such sins. No, the punishment will take place, and it will come as surely as God lives. That is why we must guard against every sin, but especially against the sin of despising God’s word, when he is present and speaking to you. To put it another way, Do not just listen to what says and then fail to improve the way you live, sinning the same way you did before, regardless of what anyone says or does. The punishment for that sin will most certainly come, even if it may be a long time in coming. No one who despises God’s Word will escape punishment.

5. We should learn from this example how great God’s wrath is and that we must constantly guard against despising God’s Word. We dare not use the expression we hear so often: Oh Well, God wouldn’t get that angry; he wouldn’t punish anyone so severely. God wants you to remember how he punished the Holy City, Jerusalem, which was his most precious treasure on earth, by destroying it so utterly, that not one stone remained on top of another, all because he people refused to obey his Word and change their wicked ways. Therefore, don’t make the mistake of thinking that God will overlook it if we continue to commit that same sin.

6...Josephus tells us that that at the time of the siege and conquest, one million people were either killed or died from the plague, and that 97,000 of them were taken as prisoners. They were so despised and looked down upon, that 30 Jews were sold for a penny. The Romans so despised them, that they would hardly let them eat with the dogs.

7. That is the deplorable and pitiful punishment God sent down on his people, completely destroying these people, whom he loved so dearly, whom he so miraculously led into the Promised land, to whom he was like a father, who spoke and dealt with them with such loving care. But when they despised his Word, and refused to obey him, he brought down on them this horrifying wrath and destruction.

20. That is why our dear Lord Jesus warns Jerusalem so earnestly, weeps, and says to, Beware, Jerusalem! You think that because God has not punished you till now, he will never do so. But you are dead wrong. The punishment has been delayed, not because there won't be any, but so that you will be punished all the more severely, because you refuse to accept his personal visit to warn you. Now, if you want to take advantage of this opportunity, then stop your sinning immediately, obey his Word, and change your ways, and you can still be saved, but if you don't do that, God will have to utterly destroy you.

(The Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils, Vol 2. Trans.: Eugene Klug. Baker Publishing, 1996. pp. 365-74.)

This passage falls immediately after the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday and before that the story of Jesus' encounter with Zacchaeus in which Luke gives something of a mission statement for Christ: "I have come to seek and to save the lost." Between those two events he tells the Parable of the 10 Minas. All three of these elements, Zacchaeus, Minas, and Triumphal Entry, are important to understanding this passage for they speak of Christ's love for his people, even the very lost people and the great gift that has been given them. Pairing this with the Romans 9-10 text above and the Jeremiah text draws out the theme of God's enduring and patient love for the Jewish people frustrated by their equally enduring and persistent rebellion. If you pair with the I Corinthians 12 text you will hear this passage slightly differently, as Jesus laments that the gifts given to Jerusalem and her inhabitants have been spurned and abused. What should have brought them peace has been a source of conflict, murder, and violence.

For the modern hearer of these words, Jesus' lament over Jerusalem sounds familiar. Every president since 1960's has tried and failed to find some solution to the violence and tensions in the Middle East. Pres. Carter's Camp David Accords, Pres. Clinton's Oslo Accord, and many more efforts lie crushed under centuries of grudges and animosity. Periodically the Israelis send in the tanks and bulldozers, leveling the Palestinians' homes; the Palestinians make bombs and rockets and target Israelis in a seemingly never-ending and escalating series of retributions. The minority Christian community has taken it on the chin and largely fled, finding refuge in the U.S. Soon, thanks to all the violence, the streets of Bethlehem and Jerusalem may be entirely devoid of resident Christians. The communities of Jesus' followers have persisted there for 2000 years and soon will be either exterminated or exiled.

If you want to see another way, look up Daoud Nasser and the Tent of Nations in Bethlehem. Daoud is a member of Bethlehem in Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. The Nasser family owns a farm on a hilltop near Bethlehem. The Israelis only recognize ownership claims which were

documented by the Turks who governed Palestine until the end of WWI. Daoud's grandfather bought the farm in 1916 and the family still has the documentation, which means the Israelis cannot confiscate the property by their own law, despite the fact that this is a very desirable piece of property. They have done everything to force the Nasser family off the land. They have cut the power, cut the water, and conducted multiple military raids under the pretense of police actions. At every turn Daoud has simply turned the other cheek. He has gone solar to power his farm. He has dug cisterns to store water. Because he cannot get a building permit, they live in caves on the property. When the military breaks down his gate he comes unarmed and tells the soldiers that they are his guests and must have tea with him, thus disarming them. He has turned his farm into a center for peace and reconciliation. There is a very sympathetic telling of Nasser's story in Tyler Wigg-Stephenson's little book: "The World Is Not Ours To Save" (IVP, 2013). The book is worth reading just for his account of his experience at an anti-nuclear weapon rally in San Francisco with Patch Adams.

For the exegete and theologian this passage has another delight. Jesus is clearly drawing on the story in Jeremiah, the Temple Sermon of Jeremiah which nearly gets Jeremiah killed. If you are attracted to this, I highly recommend that you read the whole of chapters of Jeremiah's sermon and the oracles which flow out of it. Jeremiah is speaking for a very unhappy and frustrated Lord at this point. The emotional content is fierce and can be difficult to read. The passages we are hearing in both options are set within a larger context. That emotional content is necessary for appreciating what Jesus said. I think Luke assumes we know the Jeremiah story and thus is referencing it but doesn't feel he needs to develop just how agonizing this was for Christ or just how inflammatory it was when he drove out the money changers and declared that the house of prayer had become a den of thieves. He is effectively saying that the Jewish people of his day were no better than the Jews of Jerusalem whom God had exiled in the days of Jeremiah. All of Second Temple Judaism was built on the idea that they were not going to repeat that mistake. They would be faithful to the scriptures and God. The Synagogues were built for the express purpose of keeping them from being subject to God's covenantal wrath. Jesus is saying the whole Jewish project of the day had failed. You can see why they wanted him out of the picture after this.

But for the preacher, this has to also touch on the exposed and mysterious heart of God. One does not get angry with people you do not care about. You don't lament the anonymous drug addict in another city unless that person is not anonymous, unless that person is your friend, your sibling, your child, or someone else who was dear to you. Jesus' lament over Jerusalem and its "children" is revealing not only his anguish but also his love.

Of course that means we also see everything that he does here in that light. He is going to Jerusalem, fully aware that they will kill him on that Friday we call Good. He will suffer terribly, be rejected by friend and foe alike. Justice and the law will not serve him as it does Daoud above. He will hang for hours on a cross in agony and be hastily buried. He knows all this when we braids those cords into a whip. He knows he is pushing buttons, angering the people who will fill Pilate's square by the end of the week crying for his death. And he goes anyway because he loves them. If you have ever loved someone who is mentally ill, an addict, or someone so totally caught in sin that they cannot escape, you know what this is like. I once heard a really difficult

presentation by police officers and some women who had been rescued from the sex trafficking syndicates in Portland, of which there are many. The police spoke of their great frustration. They could rescue these young women, get them off the street and into a safe place. But the young women would break the windows and crawl out to reunite with their pimps and re-enter that miserable trade. These girls had been so conditioned that they could not see how they could be safe without the protection of the man who was profiting from their misery and so they went back. I have heard similar stories from those who work to free women from the sex trafficking of Southeast Asia. They will get a girl out only to find that she has run away from the school or shelter to the streets once more.

Is that how Jesus sees us? Does the violence and carnage that his the Middle East today simply bear out his bitter words and does it make his sacrifice all the more amazing?

Sermon Idea: Peace on God's Terms (That the hearer would rely on God to make the peace and give the life which we yearn for.)

Jeremiah and Jesus speak of a peace which seems to be within the reach of their audiences. Jeremiah speaks of a community which executes justice, cares for the vulnerable, and worships God aright. But he is speaking of a sort of life of which these things are but the markers and not the life itself. Paul, in Romans 9-10 has us reconsider the folks who strive so hard to keep those Torah commandments. The Law, for all its goodness, cannot bring us to that peace. And yet, that peace which passes understanding, that peace does those very things.

Here we are into a deep mystery which our world struggles with and every generation of Christian must navigate. It is not easy, but it is also true that while God's love is not for sale and cannot be bought, the folks whom he calls and loves do the things he commands.

We cannot earn this peace through our deeds – if anyone knew that it was Martin Luther, but so too the Apostle Paul. Both of them tried that route and both them came to ruin on the cruel rocks of legalism. They were brought to peace through God's Son, Jesus Christ, one on a road to Damascus, the other in the intensive study of Paul's letters to the Romans and Galatians. So the first thing to say about this peace is that it comes from God, a gift, not a purchase.

I think most of our folks will be on board with us so far. We rather like gifts and no one is terribly interested in some terribly difficult task which we must accomplish to earn something we probably feel we already deserve. Which is going to expose our real issue here. God's peace does not make life easier or less productive, it makes it more so. It does not absolve us from keeping the law, rather it empowers a greater attention to it and a fervent desire for it. With a free and merry spirit (Formula of Concord IV) we don't do less because the compulsion is lifted from us, we do more.

The tithe is ten percent of our income. God demands it all, every penny. Yes, of course the government takes its taxes and the grocer needs something too for the food we eat. The bank or the landlord gets their check and the mechanic will need something for fixing the car, but God demands that every one of those dollars spent be spent for him. You will still pay the taxes, the bills, and the rest of it, but it all has become a part of our lives lived for the God who has given

all to us. The same for the time and the talents and the rest of it. Even going to bed becomes taking care of the body he has given me.

Of course, there are some things this precludes. The abuse of this body, the taking advantage of the vulnerable, and the trusting in something other than God to be my salvation. There are lots of ways we can do that, by the way. The preacher will want to ask how it is that his flock is prone to this. Do they rely on their bank accounts or God? Do they find their joy in things or the one who made those things for them to enjoy? Do they slouch along, blandly and corpulently serving only their own needs while their neighbor suffers want? Will they stand idly by

This is the not the peace which God gives, which Jeremiah offered or to which Jesus fervently urged the people of his day. This is another sort of peace altogether and it will not last. The real peace which passes understanding comes when Christ displaces the old man, pushes our ego aside, and occupies the center and essence of our being. Here is what the old Jerusalemites could not see, what Paul's Jewish cousins could not see, what Jesus' longed to be for Jerusalem.

The world wants to tell us this is all wrong. Real human joy and fulfillment comes when we are the autonomous exercisers of our own will. But Jesus knows just how corrupt and problematic that will is. He is human after all. So he takes that place in our lives and in so doing redeems our will and the rest of us as well, giving the real peace which passes all understanding (Phil 4:7)