

Sunday, October 16, 2022, The Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity “Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice”

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

Today the sermon is going to be a bit different.

Normally when a sermon is written and preached to a congregation of believers, it expounds or explains a portion of Holy Scripture, the Word of our God.

Today the sermon is also based on the Word of God, on the Scriptural truths as found in that hymn, “**Dear Christians, One and All Rejoice.**”

-This hymn which Luther wrote, gives in its verses the whole plan of God’s wondrous salvation.

-This hymn speaks of God the Father’s love in sending His only begotten Son to be our Savior.

-This hymn declares that the Son, obeyed His Father’s will and in the fullness of time was born of the virgin Mary.

-It proclaims that this God-man would be our ransom, He would take our place, He would die in our stead, and that He would overcome the grave, sin, hell, and Satan.

-This hymn declares that this Redeemer would be our Rock and Castle that He would abide with us through all the days of our earthly sojourn, to encourage, to strengthen, to guide and to bless.

-And finally, this hymn speaks in triumphant, victorious tones of the Life, the victory and the eternal blessings which will be ours when we behold Him, in everlasting day.

And thus, we pray that God the Holy Spirit will bless our study of His Word, as we consider, “**Dear, Christians, One and All Rejoice**”

-Is not the **first verse** of this hymn, a wondrous, triumphant hymn of praise to our God and Lord, we sing in part, “**Dear Christians, one and all rejoice, With exultation springing, And with united heart and voice and holy rapture singing,**

-Is that not what Christianity is all about?

-Is that not what being a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus calls us to do?

That is what we heard in the Gradual from Psalm 98 which we spoke a few moments ago, “*O sing to the Lord a new song! For He has done marvelous things. His right hand and His holy arm have gained Him the victory*” (Psalm 98:1).

Then Luther goes on, **Proclaim the wonders God has done. How His right arm the victory’s won. What price our ransom cost Him!**

Jesus even tells us what we are to proclaim. For example: at Easter we heard and throughout the year we remember that Jesus appeared to His disciples *and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46–47)* With these words, Jesus tells His people to proclaim His suffering, death and resurrection by proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name.

Stanzas 2 and 3 of this hymn proclaim the terror of sin: ***Fast bound in Satan’s chains I lay, Death brooded darkly over me, Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me.*** Notice how Luther even brings out the teaching of original sin straight from Psalm 51, a psalm of David, after he had committed the sin of adultery and murder: “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*”. (Psalm 51:5)

These words teach us that we not only commit sins, but we were conceived in sin from our mother’s womb. As we grow in knowledge of Christ and in the Christian life, the understanding of our sin also grows. So, Luther continues with: ***But daily deeper still I fell; My life became a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me.***

-What are we to do?

-What can we do to lift the burden of sin and guilt from our shoulders?

-Yes, how are we make amends with the God we have so grievously offended?

Do we hope in our own good works?

The Holy Spirit speaks through the Apostle Paul: “*By works of the law **no** human being will be justified in His sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*” (Romans 3:20)

So it is, that Luther begins **stanza 3** by reminding us that we cannot work our way out of our sinful condition: He said, “***My own good works all came to naught, No grace or merit gaining; Free will***

against God's judgment fought, Dead to all good remaining. Luther even reminds us of Paul's words to the Ephesians: *"You were dead in trespasses and sins."* (Ephesians 2:1)

By the time we come to the end of **stanza 3**, Luther has preached the Law, the Law of God in all its sternness, in all its severity, and so he has fulfilled Christ's instructions to proclaim repentance. If we rightly understand our sin, we should be terrified, but do not despair. In **stanza 4** Martin Luther will begin to preach the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ, he proclaimed the sweet Gospel.

The English translation which begins **stanza 4** are two of the most beautiful words in the English language: **"But God."**

The first words of **stanza 4** are amazing: ***But God had seen my wretched state Before the world's foundation, And mindful of His mercies great, He planned for my salvation.*** With these words, Martin Luther is telling us that God already planned our salvation before He even said, "Let there be light," on the first day of creation. (Genesis 1:14)

How can the Reformer say that? Listen to these words from the Apostle Paul's greeting in his letter to the Ephesians. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places even as He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and blameless before Him."* (Ephesians 1:3-4)

Yes, when God began the work of creation, He had already planned out our salvation, how in love, He would send His only-begotten Son, in whom we have redemption. God had a plan of salvation in place for you and for me ... personally ... individually ... before He even said, "Let there be light." (Genesis 1: 14)

So, what is this plan? Well, Luther continues: ***He turned to me a father's heart; He did not choose easy part But gave His dearest treasure.*** Here we see that God turns to us with the heart of a father ... full of love ... ready to make the hard sacrifice for His family. I wonder if Luther was thinking about the words that the Holy Spirit inspired John the Apostle write: *"Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so, we are".* (1 John 3:1)

Stanza 5 is simply an expansion of John 3:16: *"God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* (John 3:16) God the Father said to His beloved Son: ***It's time to have compassion. Then go, bright jewel of My crown, And***

bring to all salvation; From sin and sorrow set them free; Slay bitter death for them that they May live with You forever.”

-It not the word “salvation” especially when it speaks of the salvation we have in Christ, a most wondrous, glorious Word. The Reformer reminds us and says and **bring to them salvation**. Salvation means freedom! Salvation means delivery! Salvation means new life in Christ now and in eternity.

Stanza 6 is Christmas. It is all about the Son of God taking on flesh and blood in order to save humanity. ***The Son obeyed His Father’s will, Was born of virgin mother; And God’s good pleasure to fulfill, He came to be my brother. His royal power disguised He bore, A servant’s form, like mine, He wore To lead the devil captive.*** It is just as the Apostle Paul told the Galatians: “*When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*” (Galatians 4:4–5)

We know the Christmas story well! It is the fulfillment of many a promise of our gracious God.

There in Bethlehem’s manger bed lay the wonder of the ages, Jesus Christ-true God, begotten of the Father from eternity and also true man born of the virgin Mary. When Luther says “**His royal power disguised He bore, A servant’s form like mine He wore**”, he was probably thinking of Paul’s words to the Philippian Christians about Christ, “*Though He was in nature God, He did not consider equality with God as a thing to be displayed, but He emptied Himself, by taking the nature of a servant*” (Philippians 2: 5-6).

Now, in **stanza 7** we hear, “**Stay close to me, I am your rock and castle.** The rock and castle language comes right out of Psalm 46:” *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.*” (Psalm 46:1–3)

Luther continues, ***Your ransom I myself will be; For you I strive and wrestle;*** These words proclaims that Christ will be our ransom as our Lord says of Himself, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to served, but to give His life as a ramson for many*” (Mark 10: 45)

We continue, ***For I am yours, and you are mine, And where I am you may remain;*** Here is Luther unpacking the words of Jesus in the Upper Room: *“In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”* (John 14:2–3)

Stanza 7 continues, ***The foe shall not divide us.***” This phrase agrees with the words that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write, *“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:38–39)

Stanza 8 begins with Good Friday ... ***“Though he will shed My precious blood, Of life me thus bereaving, All this I suffer for your good; Be steadfast and believing. Life will from death the victory win; My innocence shall bear your sin; And you are blest forever.***

This is simply the message of the entire Bible. This is simply God’s plan of salvation, which finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus.

So far, Luther has preached about our sin and our desperate need for a savior. He preached Law and Gospel.

-He has preached the role of the Father in sending His only-begotten Son to save us.

-Luther here was speaking of Christ says, **My innocence shall bear your sin.** He was echoing the words of Peter, *“because Christ also suffered once for sins in our place, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God”* (1 Peter 3:18).

Now, it is time for **stanza 9** to preach the Holy Spirit’s work of delivering our salvation to us. ***“Now to my Father I depart, From earth to heaven ascending, And heavenly wisdom to impart, The Holy Spirit sending; In trouble He will comfort you And teach you always to be true And into truth shall guide you.***

These words are a paraphrase of the very words of Jesus in the Upper Room: *⁵But now I am going to Him who sent Me ... it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you ... When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth, for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come.* (John 16:5, 7, 13)

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we receive comfort, the absolute assurance of salvation, and strength to share the proclamation of repentance and the forgiveness of sin by means of the truth of God's Word.

Finally, in **stanza 10**, reminds us of the instructions Jesus has left for His people. ***“What I on earth have done and taught Guide all your life and teaching; So, shall the kingdom's work be wrought And honored in your preaching.”*** These words remind us of the Great Commission at the end of Matthew, as Jesus ascended in triumph to His heavenly Father. For He said go and preach the Gospel to all people. (Matthew 28: 18-20)

My dear fellow redeemed, in a way, we have come full circle back to **stanza 1**.

-We are here to believe, hold fast to Christ Jesus as our Savior.

-We are here to proclaim the wonders God has done.

-We are to continue proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name for the salvation of immortal souls.

Luther ends this final stanza with a warning from Jesus. ***“But watch lest foes with base alloy The heavenly treasure should destroy; This final word I leave you.”*** These words are consistent with the warnings of Jesus: *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15) AND “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. (Matthew 24:4–5)* Here we are reminded of the warnings, that Jesus gave against heeding, or following false doctrine.

We have barely touched the surface of what this hymn teaches. Each stanza could be the basis for a full sermon. Nevertheless, this hymn fulfills the words that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to write to the church in Colossae: *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)* These words teach us that hymns are one way to teach and admonish one another so that the Word of Christ dwells in us richly.

Yes, may we as Christians, as His children rejoice, proclaim the wonders He has done, how His right arm the victory won.

And may God grant this for Jesus' sake. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen