

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Hymns: 23, 383, 276, 381

The INTROIT

(Ps.48:9,10,1)

P: We have thought of Thy loving-kindness, O God;

C: in the midst of Thy Temple.

P: According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth;

C: Thy right hand is full of righteousness.

P: Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised;

C: in the city of our God, in the mountain of His holiness.

The COLLECT

Grant to us, Lord, we beseech Thee, the Spirit to think and do always such things as are right, that we, who cannot do anything that is good without Thee; may by Thee be enabled to live according to Thy will; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The FIRST LESSON

Jeremiah 15:19-21 (NKJV)

Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, But you must not return to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; And they will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you," says the LORD. "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible."

The GRADUAL

(Ps.31:2,1; 78:1)

P: Be thou my strong rock:

C: for an house of defense to save me.

P: In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust:

C: let me never be ashamed. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: Give ear, O My people, to My Law:

C: incline your ears to the words of My mouth. Hallelujah!

The EPISTLE

Romans 8:12-17 (NKJV)

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors; not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we

suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The SENTENCE for the Season

(Ps. 119:124)

P: Hallelujah! O Lord, deal with Thy servant according unto Thy mercy and teach me Thy statutes. I am Thy servant, give me understanding:

C: that I may know Thy testimonies. Hallelujah!

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 7:15-23 (NKJV)

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.’ Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Jeremiah 15:19-21 — “If You Return, Then I Will Bring You Back”

INTRODUCTION

I. IF YOU RETURN, THEN I WILL BRING YOU BACK

II. LET THEM RETURN TO YOU, BUT YOU MUST NOT RETURN TO THEM

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CONCLUSION

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Jeremiah 15:19-21 — “If You Return, Then I Will Bring You Back”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The sermon text is the Old Testament reading appointed for the Eighth Sunday after Trinity, Jeremiah 15:19-21.

Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth. Let them return to you, But you must not return to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; And they will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you,” says the LORD. “I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible.”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.

This strong warning is the warning that our Lord Jesus gives in the opening words of today’s Gospel reading. Centuries earlier, Jeremiah stood as a lonely prophet of the LORD, ordained by God to preach a stern warning to the people whom God had called to be His people. They did not listen, but gathered to the false prophets who proclaimed a false message of a false peace.

Jeremiah struggled with the ordination that was placed upon him by the LORD. He prayed to the LORD for vindication. He prayed that the LORD would show him to be a true prophet. He prayed that the LORD would keep him from faltering. Today’s text is the LORD’s answer, not only to Jeremiah, but to all who have received the Word of the LORD, and especially to all who have been ordained to the office of the Word.

I. IF YOU RETURN, THEN I WILL BRING YOU BACK

Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, Then I will bring you back; You shall stand before Me; If you take out the precious from the vile, You shall be as My mouth.”

The Hebrew words convey more than is easily translated. Often the Hebrew can be heard with more than one meaning, and often, all that can be meant by the words is what the LORD intends to be heard.

The word *shub* means *to turn*. It can include the meaning of *return* or *repent*. The tense of the word used in our text is future tense. “**If you turn,**” or “**if you will turn,**” is the literal

meaning. Moreover, the word for *if* can also mean *when* or *then*. Literally the opening words of our text say, **“If you will turn, even I will turn you.”** But they can also be translated, **“When you will turn, even I will turn you.”**

The key point that we need to hear is that the turning is actually the LORD’s doing. If a person is turned, it is by the working of the LORD through the Word. Whether it is a turning back to Him or a first time conversion in which a person turns to the LORD, it is the LORD who makes it happen.

The only turning that a person does according to one’s own choice or decision is a turning away from the LORD. So, our text says that if Jeremiah will turn by his own thinking and choices, the LORD will turn Jeremiah back in repentance. It also says that if Jeremiah is turned from his own choices to the LORD again, it is the LORD who has brought about this wondrous miracle of faith.

Jeremiah was struggling. He was tired of the abuse and the false accusations that other preachers and other members of the Church were bringing against him. Jeremiah cried out to the LORD. The LORD answered. The LORD’s answer is a promise that He will turn the heart of His servant so that the servant’s doubts and fears do not rule over his heart. The promise is that the LORD’s servant will stand before the LORD’s face. This is a promise of forgiveness and mercy, for no one can stand to the LORD’s face according to one’s own righteousness and works. No one can stand to the LORD’s face and claim to believe with true faith, unless it is the LORD who gives the faith by which the person comes to stand in the LORD’s presence. No one can bear up to the LORD’s gaze, unless that person is covered with the person of Jesus, applied with the blood of atonement. The LORD promises that His servant shall be made to stand to the LORD’s face.

In connection with this promise is the promise that Jeremiah, the LORD’s servant, will bring out the valuable or precious from the sifted or vile or invaluable and will be as the LORD’s mouth.

When this is heard with the full meaning of the Scriptures, hearing this with the intention that the Holy Spirit gives to it, this then is heard in connection with the prophecy of St. John the Baptizer,

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire: Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3:11-12)

The one who stands to the LORD’s face and speaks as the LORD’s mouth is the very Word of God Himself, Jesus. It is to the office of Jesus, the Word, that Jeremiah and all true preachers are called and ordained. For as the LORD promises, the true servant will stand and speak, and truly Jesus does this. When a preacher of the Gospel rightly divides the Word of God and proclaims it, Jesus is the one who speaks.

Thus, the weakness of Jeremiah did not matter and the weakness of today’s preacher does not matter. For when the Word is what is preached, no weakness remains. Therefore, the LORD’s promise to Jeremiah and to all true preachers of God is that He will be the one speaking through them, therefore they will be as the LORD’s own mouth. But as is declared in this promise to Jeremiah, this can only happen when the LORD turns the heart and mind of the servant to trust

not in himself and in his own efforts at faithfulness, but to trust in the faithfulness of the LORD and the Word of the LORD. Then the servant will truly be as the mouth of the LORD, and the message that is proclaimed will be God's own message of forgiveness, peace, and restoration.

II. LET THEM RETURN TO YOU, BUT YOU MUST NOT RETURN TO THEM

Therefore the LORD declares: **“Let them return to you, But you must not return to them.”**

Let them turn to you, but you will not turn to them. This is how it must always be. The servant of the Word stands toward the LORD's face, receiving from God what is to be spoken, and then speaks as the LORD's own mouth. The servant who is standing in the LORD's stead will never turn to the people, but will demand that the people turn to him. Why? Because the true preacher speaks for another. The true preacher speaks in the name of the LORD. The true preacher does not decide for himself what to preach and the true preacher most certainly never asks the people what they want to hear. No, the true preacher is not concerned with what the people find acceptable and pleasing to their ears. He preaches the Law in all of its offensiveness, and he preaches the Gospel in all of its narrowness. He speaks as the very mouth of God.

If the people are truly desiring to hear the Word of the LORD, they will turn to the preacher who speaks as the mouth of the LORD and not to other preachers who turn to the people. If forgiveness is what the people desire, then they will bow down and confess their miserable and sinful condition and look up to the one who has been ordained as the LORD's mouth and receive from him the holy absolution. Having heard the LORD's holy declaration they will rise up and come to the meal of Thanksgiving, administered by the hand of the LORD's servant. They will partake of the body and blood of their LORD, administered in accord with the pure Gospel. Moreover, they will not look back, nor to the left nor to the right. They will not gather with anyone where other practices are occurring, for they have been turned by God through the one who speaks as the LORD's own mouth.

And I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall.

The pastor is not to bend to the will of the people. The preacher of the Gospel is unmovable. This is by the LORD's decree. The LORD promises to all who are ordained with Jeremiah that He will make His servants to stand as a fortified bronze wall. They do not stand according to their own strength, but according the strength that the LORD gives to them. They stand according to the certainty of the Word of the LORD. They speak not their own message, but the message that has been given to them, the message of the Word, who is Himself God.

III. FOR I AM WITH YOU TO SAVE YOU AND DELIVER YOU

And they will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you,” says the LORD. “I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible.”

The hand of the wicked has already been rendered powerless and the grip of the terrible has already been broken. The LORD has defeated the devil even from eternity. The Lamb of God was given even before the world was created. Therefore, those who fight against the Word and the servants of the Word cannot prevail.

They will surely rise up and do their worst. But they cannot prevail. The Word of the LORD is all-powerful. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. He sacrificed Himself as the ransom that redeemed us all. He rose victoriously to stand to the LORD's face on our behalf. He comes to us through the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.

People often say that they wish that Jesus was with them. People often say that they wish that they could see or feel Jesus. They can. We can. Jesus is with us. He is present with us as we gather truly in His name according to the means by which He has promised to be with us. When the Gospel is preached without compromise and the Sacraments are administered in accord with the Gospel, He is with us to save us.

This promise is made especially to the servants of the Word. For they are the ones who seem to stand alone. The promise is that while they may appear to stand alone, they are not alone, for the LORD declares:

And they will fight against you, But they shall not prevail against you; For I am with you to save you And deliver you," says the LORD. "I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked, And I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible."

And when the people turn to such pastors, they find that God is true to His Word. The LORD is present through the means that He has ordained for His Church to be administered through the holy office of the Gospel. The LORD is present both for the preacher and for the people. He is present to save and to deliver all who gather in His name. He is present so that the preacher speaks as the mouth of the LORD and so that those who hear respond to what is preached and administered. Together they receive the LORD Jesus and all that He is. Together they receive the forgiveness of sins and the renewal of the Holy Spirit. Together they taste and see that the LORD is good and that His mercy endures forever.

CONCLUSION

This is what God has promised. His promises never fail. He accomplishes everything, just as He has promised. God does turn His servants so that through them we receive the grace, mercy, and peace of God in Christ Jesus. God does come to us and save us and deliver us as we gather into His holy name. He does feed us and strengthen us and keeps us steadfast in His body. This is what the LORD promises and this is what the LORD fulfills. It is not up to us to be strong. The LORD promises to make us to be strong. It is not up to us to believe. The LORD promises to give us the faith by which He turns us to believe the true faith. It is not up to us to convert the world. The LORD promises that He will bring those who will hear the Word. Our concern is simply to examine ourselves continually to be certain that we truly are discerning the body of the LORD so that we beware of the false prophets and gather only where the LORD is present through His Word and Sacraments. This really is not a hard thing at all, for the pure Word is Jesus. He is easy to recognize when He is the one to whom we seek to gather. He is clearly and unmistakably declared in the Holy Scriptures. He has given sure and certain marks by which His holy Church on earth is identified. God has turned us and when we turn He has promised to turn us back again. By His grace we are safe and shall be kept safe everlastingly. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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