

“Wrapped in a Robe of Righteousness”

Is. 61:1-4, 8-11

As I told you last week, if you want to know who Jesus Christ is, and what God’s plan of salvation has always been, read the book of Isaiah. Isaiah spent his entire ministry preparing people for the fulfillment of God’s plan of salvation. In today’s Old Testament lesson, Isaiah tells us what God will accomplish by sending His Son into the world, and we hear what God has already done for His people.

When the Lord’s Christ, His anointed One comes, He will preach good news to the poor. That is, He will preach the Gospel, the Good News of salvation to those who are troubled, to those who are afflicted with difficulty, to those who are in need of forgiveness. He will bind up the brokenhearted. He will proclaim liberty, freedom, to those in captivity. All of us need this Good News.

As we rejoice in the lights and festivities of this season, we are too often reminded that the dark captivity of depression, the prison of loneliness seems to get worse this time of year. There are

many theories as to why this happens, but the reality is that Satan does not want you to find peace and comfort in the light of the Gospel, in the light of Christ – the hope of the world.

Isaiah prophesies that the Christ will come and proclaim freedom to the captives and comfort to all who mourn. And intellectually we all know this. We have been singing hymns like “Comfort, Comfort Ye My people” all our lives. Yet, so many ask, “Why don’t I always feel that comfort?” when we have the joy of the Gospel and the hope of the resurrection right before us.

Martin Luther writes that Isaiah proclaims the Christ will come and will make the poor and afflicted very strong in the will of God, so that they may know that all things turn out for them according to the will of God.¹ Again, what does this mean? How am I made “strong in the will of God”?

God and God’s will are so very puzzling for us to figure out. But then, figuring out the complexities of God is something that we neither have the duty nor the ability to accomplish. We make a mistake when we try to understand God from the top, all at once. If we attempt to understand the fullness of His majesty and glory, we will be overwhelmed. In our contemplation of God, we need to begin with the things that we can understand. There was a baby

¹LW 17:330

born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

We kid ourselves when we believe that we can intellectually understand the fullness of God. Our inquisitive minds love to speculate about God's divine glory and majesty. And we have many questions.

However, the philosophical questions concerning God are relatively pointless to ask. As St. Paul says: "Who has known the mind of the Lord? [1Cor. 2:16]. It is not within our capability to know or understand why God has done the things He has done – why has He allowed, why has He tolerated the darkness of this sinful world for so long?

There are many serious questions we have about God. People have even asked many silly questions about God, such as: "Could God create a rock so big that He could not lift it?" or "How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?"

So many people get sidetracked and distracted from learning the important things about our Lord. Luther writes that we need to be content with what God has chosen to reveal about Himself. Do not be concerned with the hidden things of God. They are hidden for a reason.

Luther said: "When...we become involved in speculations

about divinity...we...become investigators of His majesty at our peril. As for you, be content with the God incarnate. Then you will remain in peace and safety, and you will know God. Cast off speculations about divine glory...You stay with Christ crucified, whom Paul and others preach.”²

As I said before, in our contemplation of God, we need to begin with the things that we can understand. There was a baby born in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. It is in the incarnation, in God becoming man, that we are able to approach an understanding of God.

We understand a child being born and wrapped in a blanket. We understand a child growing to maturity and becoming a man. We understand a man who bruises when you strike Him, who bleeds when you pierce Him, who dies when you crucify Him.

We come to an understanding of God only when we focus on the humility and weakness of Christ the servant, not when we attempt to philosophically speculate on the fullness of the glory of our Lord and Creator.

Martin Luther tells us: “We should busy ourselves...with..knowing and considering this man. Then you will know that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). So

²Ibid.

He set forth His weakness that we may approach Him with confidence.”³

If God only revealed His divine majesty and power, it would be too much. We would be terrified and overwhelmed. Therefore God chose to present Himself to the world in a way that we are capable of handling. He came in weakness as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The book of Hebrews states: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are -- yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need” [Heb. 5:15-16].

In the words of Isaiah, our Lord promises liberty to the captives and comfort to all who mourn. Then why don't I wake up every morning feeling free and joyful? Just like with understanding the fullness of God, we cannot see or understand the fullness of the comfort or the completeness of the freedom He brings us.

We cannot understand the fullness of God, yet He is here. We cannot understand the mystery of the Sacrament, yet the flesh

³Ibid.

and blood of Christ is here for you to eat and drink. You cannot understand the fullness of the strength that God has given you, yet it is in you. You cannot perceive the completeness of the change that God has made in your sinful heart, yet you are pure, righteous, and holy in His sight.

If you desire to understand God, witness His true loving character, and understand what He has done and continues to do for you. He sent His Son to stand between you and the judgment of the Law, the penalty of death which is the wage of sin.

Look to the prophet Isaiah and confess with confidence your faith in what Christ has done: "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." You cannot fully understand what it means to be clothed with the garments of salvation, yet you are wrapped in that robe of righteousness right now. Amen.