

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 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.’”

Right before the Gospel reading appointed for today is Luke’s account of Palm Sunday. Luke provides some vivid details about the crowd and what they said. St. Luke wrote by divine inspiration, “As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”

There’s rejoicing and crying out so much so that the Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke the people. The multitude can’t be stopped though and Jesus tells them that even the stones would cry out. The Pharisees rejected the promise of the Messiah who was before them, and nothing would stop the praise of God from being heard. Stones were a term used for Gentiles so Jesus is telling them that even if the Jews who were greeting their Lord were silenced, others would still cry out. Add to this the accounts of how creation itself cries out in praise of its Creator.

Having all this in mind, then, the beginning of today’s Gospel reading hits like a ton of bricks. Listen again to where the reading today begins, “And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, 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.’” The contrast is stark. So, why?

The rejection of Christ is destructive and brings about destruction. Jesus looks over Jerusalem and knows the rejection and destruction that will come upon her later. This city of peace would see the day when there would no longer be peace for them. Jesus said, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 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 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.”

Now, anytime we hear this account we have the advantage of history. We can look back on the time when Jerusalem was sieged, and the temple destroyed. One need only read the accounts of Josephus and other historians to hear of the great horrors, violence, and atrocities that would fall upon the people of Jerusalem. Why did this happen? The city was guilty of something. They did not recognize the things that make for peace. They rejected Christ. God’s judgment came upon them and even to this day they stand outside the Kingdom of God.

There’s a temptation for Christians, especially in the United States, to think more of the current nation of Israel and the city of Jerusalem than what God teaches us. I am not addressing and political issues or events. I am talking about Israel in general. Israel of today is not the Israel of the Old Testament neither is it the New Israel which is the Church of Christ here now and into eternity. The reading today from Romans 9 and 10 is very clear, “They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, 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.’ Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” This is the Jewish religion and her people. They are offended by Christ who is the rock. They stumble over him to their eternal damnation. Unless they repent, they will perish eternally.

We do see, however, who are the people of God now, this is the church. This is you and me. Yet Jesus cries over his church when she is offended by him and rejects the things that make for true peace. The very fact that Jesus weeps over

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this city of Jerusalem in Luke's Gospel should cause us to stop and take a serious look at ourselves within the holy church of God. The siege of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple was a horrific event in history. Later in Luke as Jesus was heading to the place of his crucifixion, women were weeping at the sight of Jesus going to die. Jesus looked and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.'"

Accounts of this serve as a warning to us of what happens when we turn our backs to God by rejecting his word and turn his church into something it is not. It's evidence of the devil working and our own fallen state when we see the great lengths, we will go to in this world to set aside the clear word of God because we wrongly think this will keep the peace, but we never give a thought or consideration to what offends God. Jesus calls us to think about these things. He said, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell."

Our lives as Christians too are to be seen in this way where we know the wages of sin and how when we are stubborn and unrepentant, we shun and mock Christ and his peace. We, who are the people of God, are called to live as his people not using our freedom as a cover up for evil. Daily crucifying our fallen flesh, we are to rise in that new life given to us in our baptism and walk according to God's commandments because they are good. Jerusalem bore the name of peace but was a hypocrite in her ways. Bearing the name of Christ in our baptism, we don't make a confession calling upon the name of the Lord and then go about our lives like in the Old Testament reading when it says, "Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 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?"

We are called to hear what our Lord says. God takes these things seriously. God's wrath is real and it's righteous. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. We are called to lament our sins and our unfaithfulness to him and his word. In the Small Catechism we confess about the close of the commandments, "God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them. But He promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore, we should also love and trust in Him and gladly do what He commands." Jesus says, "blessed is the one who is not offended by me." Hear God's word and repent of your sin. Fear God. Continue in your sin and know what your future will be. The law has promises attached to it too. See Jerusalem as your example of what happens when Christ and his word is rejected.

Dear Christians, the thing that makes for peace is the one who is your peace with God. The time of your visitation is here. Jesus is your Redeemer who has shed his blood to make atonement for your sin. "Peace" is a word of the atonement in the Bible. Peace with God is made by the death of Christ who is the perfect obedient, sinless Lamb of God. This is not hidden from your eyes as it was for the people in the reading from Luke rather your eyes have been opened and your Lord shines this brightly before you. You see the Lord weeping over the city, and you know where he is headed. You see him cleanse the Temple and know that he is the Temple, not made with hands, who was torn down and raised up again on the third day. You see him as the one who goes bearing the guilt of your sin to take upon the punishment you deserve. You see him as the one who weeps and doesn't simply throw up his hands in defeat and despair but who weeps and then will cry out in agony shedding his blood so that God's wrath isn't turned against you. Jesus makes peace, real peace between you and God.

See Christ crucified for you and see how God see you. The Father looks at you through Christ, your mediator. You have peace with him. As terrible as Jerusalem and her fall and destruction was, you know that you have been saved from an even greater and eternal fate. As much as the devil, the world, and your own fallen flesh may tempt and assault you in this world, your conscience is clear because you fix your eyes on Christ crucified. You have his word, and you know him through faith as you hear his word and receive his sacraments. This is where peace is found even now. The

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world may be raging around you, but this is the house of God where held before your eyes is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world. After the consecration of the elements in Lord's Supper, the pastor turns to face you and proclaims to you, "the peace of the Lord be with you always" and you sing out "amen" and receive that peace upon your own lips and tongue. Christ is yours and his peace is yours. You know that if God is for you then who can be against you? You know that indeed God is for you in Christ as you are baptized into him and his life, death, and resurrection. For you, dear Zion, Christ is no stumbling block rather he is the cornerstone. The terrors, fears, destruction of this world, and even death are an instant but the glory and bliss of life with your God and his saints is eternal.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, but he says to you, "Your sin is forgiven." He says, "peace be with you dear brother." What joy, then, to hear the voice of your Lord speaking this day and to know what you have in him. Yours is more than just some earthly city or nation in this world that can easily be here one day and gone the next, you have an eternal inheritance. You will rise from your graves and live in his new creation that will never be attacked and destroyed. That's what Jesus promises you this day as you gather here and behold your Lord. Lift up your eyes and see what awaits you as you walk through this fallen world. The gaze of the Christian, your gaze, is always on the horizon. Look beyond the ashes of this world which will come to an end and see in the distance the eternal city and Kingdom of God.

You know what the Lord has done and will prepare for you. St. John recorded that for you in his revelation from God, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"

What a day that will be dear Zion, people of God. You are God's people, the new Jerusalem is yours. That will be a day where there is no more weeping only rejoicing and eternal life. Be encouraged and hang on to these words. See that place is yours for you are the Lord's own and he looks at you and says, "all is finished, be at peace, now and forever."

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