2020 Reflections
Epiphany

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Martin Luther’s Morning and Evening Prayers taken from
the Small Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther

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A Short Form for Daily Reflection
Adapted from Luther’s Small Catechism

Make the sign of the holy cross and say

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Read the Psalm for the Day (A table of daily psalms can be found in Lutheran Service Book, page 304).

Read “Today’s Reading” if there is one listed.

Read the Daily Lectionary selections.

Read the Reflection for the Day.

Say the Apostles’ Creed.

Pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Pray one of these little prayers:
In the Morning:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee to keep me this day also from sin and all evil, that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the Evening:

I thank Thee, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day, and I pray Thee to forgive me all my sins, where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me, that the Wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In the morning go to your work with joy, singing a hymn, as the Ten Commandments, or what your devotion may suggest. If it is evening, then go to sleep promptly and cheerfully.

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The Epiphany of Our Lord
January 6, 2020

Today’s Reading: Matthew 2:1-12

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (Matthew 2:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Being on the defensive all the time is exhausting. It feels like our Christian faith is always on trial. Explain the unexplainable. Find a loving God in the midst of an evil world. Love sinners while calling sin what it is. Answer, while you endure being called small-minded, backward bigots who would rather cling to a myth than face reality, and who use an imaginary God as an excuse for all of it.

It leaves us looking for a Herod long before we’re willing to look for a Jesus. It sounds terrible, but it’s what the Theology of Glory suggests. If someone has to bleed, we’d rather it not be us. If someone threatens to make us less, we’d rather fight back. We have too much to lose. It shifts our focus from God to the temporal.

It was this same sentiment that led to Herod’s slaughter of the innocents. Herod would pay anything to keep health, wealth, and luxury. I get why he’d want those things. I want them, too. I want to fight back. Find a God who protects me by smiting the evil idolaters, and lets me have everything I make an idol out of. I understand Herod better than I want to. He was afraid. It drove him even deeper into sin and unbelief. This is the damage of idolatry. Herod wasn’t content to seek his daily bread apart from God. He would try to replace God or kill Him.

When God took on flesh to join a hostile world, however, it was to be Herod’s opposite. Jesus did not fight back. He gave Himself over to sinners. The magi worshipped their God by giving Him burial spices to go with the gold and incense that was due His divinity. The Lord has revealed what kind of God He is. He is the suffering servant. He is the crucified Jesus. He bled and died so that you would live, because God agrees with Herod and with us: Someone has to bleed for all this sin, and He, too, would rather it not be us. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. --Rev. Harrison Goodman

Almighty Father, in Your Son You loved us when not yet begun Was this old earth’s foundation! Your Son has ransomed us in love To live in Him here and above: This is Your great salvation. Alleluia! Christ the living, To us giving Life forever, Keeps us Yours and fails us never! (O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright, LSB 395:4)
Tuesday after the Epiphany
January 7, 2020

Today's Reading: Isaiah 60:1-6
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 1:1-14, 22-28; Romans 1:1-17

For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the
peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen
upon you. (Isaiah 60:2)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The nations agree: It’s dark
down here. Everyone thinks they can fix it. The real reason we cloak our
politics in religion isn’t just for votes. It’s because we think we can fulfill
the prophecies. We think we can be what the Scriptures promise: the
ultimate hope for a better world.

Nobody ever brought you gold, frankincense, and myrrh. That
was reserved for the true source of hope and the light of the world:
Jesus.

It’s dark down here, but hope isn’t found in changing that fact. It’s
found in the light that shines in darkness, so that darkness could not
overcome it. The grave could not overcome it. That light is Jesus. The
whole of the Bible points to Him. Lift up your eyes and see, We don’t
need to create a utopia in order for Christ to conquer death on the cross
and rise from the dead. All the nations gather because whether the
kingdom is growing or crumbling, God wants to be present to save in a
way that kingdoms never could. The wonderful part is that in Christ, they
never had to do the saving. The Christ Child was born. He is the Savior
of the nations, come in the flesh. The glory of the Lord has come to
earth. There is hope that rests on Him, given not just to the nation that
figures out the right system, but to all. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

—Rev. Harrison Goodman

Come, heav'nly Bridegroom, Light divine, And deep within our hearts
now shine; There light a flame undying! In Your one body let us be As
living branches of a tree, Your life our lives supplying. Now, though daily
Earth’s deep sadness May perplex us And distress us, Yet with heav’nly
joy You bless us. (O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright, LSB 395:2)

Saturday of the Third Week after the
Epiphany
February 1, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 11:4-17; 2 Timothy 4:1-18

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would
rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of
wickedness. (From the Introit for The Transfiguration of Our Lord)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. As soon as we see how scary
the world is we start looking for a safe place. Kids hide under covers.
Peter sets up tabernacles on mountains: one for Moses, one for Elijah.
one for Jesus. Let me stay, too! It’s safe up here. Until it isn’t. The
lightnings lighted up the world, and even the safe mountain trembled and
shook.

We spend so much time looking for what must be the house of
God, the safe place, that we lose sight of the miracle of the
Transfiguration. It was there all along. If all the world is God’s creation,
His dwelling place is wherever He dwells. Jesus dwells with sinners. With
you. It isn’t measured by how safe it looks or feels, but by His promise.
This is my Body. This is my Blood. This is for you for the forgiveness of
sins, life, and salvation. My soul faints for the courts of the Lord, where
He sustains me and shields me, feeds me and gives me His favor. My
soul longs for church, where Christ has promised to be not just with me,
but for me.

The Transfiguration is awesome because of the display of
power, but it isn’t safe. There’s no promise. There’s no mercy. There’s no
“for you.” At the end, what’s left standing was there all along, but more.
Jesus only, but Jesus for you. He has all the same power and divinity.
He bears human likeness not to be more approachable, but to die on the
Cross to save you. It’s scary down here, so Jesus descends from heaven
to save us by dying our death and rising from the grave. He sets up His
courts wherever His Word is preached and His Sacraments are
administered. We find shelter in His presence even as He gives us His

Glimpsed and gone the revelation, They shall gain and keep its truth, Not
by building on the mountain Any shrine or sacred booth, But by following
the Savior Through the valley to the cross And by testing faith’s
resilience Through betrayal, pain, and loss. (Swiftly Pass the Clouds of
Glory, LSB 416:2)
Friday of the Third Week after the Epiphany
January 31, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 10:1-11:3; 2 Timothy 3:1-17

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it. (2 Timothy 3:14)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The prediction of dark and latter days is more than a "Don't say I didn't warn you" from on high. It isn't even a recognition that evil will always oppose the truth, coupled with a challenge to be ready. It's more fundamental. The truth will always stand against evil. The truth was there first. The evil didn't come until later. In the beginning was the way, the truth, the life. In the beginning was God. All the evil, in contrast to the power of God, is folly. Christ brought the evil to nothing on the Cross. Sin is forgiven. The devil, defeated. Death, destroyed. Don't be afraid.

This isn't a revelation of who the bad men are. It's about who we are. Christianity is about Jesus' saving sinners through a cross. We take shelter under the Cross. Crosses hurt. To be close to the Cross is to...hurt. It doesn't mean that it isn't working. It means that it is.

We live in dark and latter days. The world has gone insane. It points to us and yells that we're the crazy ones. "You are not like us." It's so constant and so loud. Our faith, our cross, our resurrection, our law, our Gospel, our Sacraments: It all honestly starts to sound crazy sometimes.

So Paul tells Timothy to hold on to sanity by remembering who he learned it from. Remember Jesus. The world has gone crazy. They yell with one voice. But they can't yell your Savior into the tomb again. The Scriptures attest to Jesus. Remember Jesus so that you know righteousness. Know that you already have it. Know that crazy can rise from the dead. Jesus is Lord. Then lean into it. The Scriptures are profitable to rebuke and teach and correct crazy. They teach a Law that makes us seem insane, and even more, a resurrection that names us sane. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. --Rev. Harrison Goodman

Thy strong Word bespeaks us righteous; Bright with Thine own holiness, Glorious now, we press toward glory. And our lives our hopes confess. Alleluia, alleluia! Praise to Thee who light dost send! Alleluia, alleluia! Alleluia without end! (Thy Strong Word, LSB 578:3)

Wednesday after the Epiphany
January 8, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 2:1-3:11; Romans 1:18-32

...call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks. (The Small Catechism: Second Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The more powerful a thing is, the more rules there are about it. There aren't actually a lot of laws about feathers. Guns, though, have many. It isn't because they are evil. Guns and feathers are just things. But one is powerful. When a gun is used for good, great good can come. When a gun is used for evil, tragedy follows.

Now see the gift God gives you in His Name. It's yours to use. It's so powerful that it needs a Law. When His Name is used for good, great blessings come. When it's used for evil, great pain results. Did you catch that? God doesn't give us the Second Commandment so we know what not to say when we stub our toe. Misusing God's Name causes pain. The Second Commandment is about more than typing “omg” or saying the word “damn” when you get hurt. The Second Commandment is about a God who gives you a gift for when you're in trouble.

Pray, praise, and give thanks. Remember who your God is. Remember the truth about Him. Find comfort in Him. Hope. To break the Second Commandment in the most fundamental way is to lie about who God is. More pain comes from false doctrine than from saying "damn" when your toe is already hurting. How you use God's Name matters, because it's so powerful that it can comfort sinners with the promise of the Gospel, and can cause great pain when the desperate and penitent find only a vengeful god. Remember who your God is. Use His Name in accordance with His character. Tell the truth about Him. Great comfort is found in this truth. It's the way. It's the life. It's Jesus, and we are given the Name of Jesus as a gift. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. --Rev. Harrison Goodman

Your name be hallowed. Help us, Lord, In purity to keep Your Word, That to the glory of Your name We walk before You free from blame. Let no false teaching us pervert; All poor deluded souls convert. (Our Father, Who from Heaven Above, LSB 766:2)
Thursday after the Epiphany
January 9, 2020

Today's Reading: Ephesians 3:1-12
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 3:12-27; Romans 2:1-16

This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ephesians 3:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The mystery is not that God exists. That is so poor a secret that we'll try and find Him in every idol we craft, convinced that He's finally on our side. It's so poor a secret that atheists are mad at Him in whom they don't believe, which is harder than it sounds. How often are you mad at a unicorn? The mystery is not even that He's for the Gentiles. Today it's harder to convince people that a God who made everyone wouldn't be thrilled with us no matter what we look like.

The mystery is not God. The mystery is not for the Gentiles. The mystery is Christ for you, God has an eternal purpose: to save sinners. He came to save Jews and Gentiles, but more specifically, to save you. Before He ever spoke and said, "Let there be light," He knew what would happen. He knew your sins—all of them. Then, when creation fell with Adam, God followed us down, all the way to the tomb. That's the mystery. Jesus died for you. God became man to die and rise so that you, who are dead in your idolatries, and are enemies of God, could be reconciled. The mystery has a name. Paul calls it the Gospel. It lets us stop trying to control God by finding Him in idols. It makes peace between God and the sinners who could not by their own reason or strength believe. It names us something more than a race. We are the sinners Jesus died for. Our confidence is in Him. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Giver of grace, descend from high; Your sever'fold gifts to us supply; Help us eternal truths receive And practice all that we believe; Give us Yourself that we may see The glory of the Trinity. (Creator Spirit, by Whose Aid, LSB 500:3)

Thursday of the Third Week after the Epiphany
January 30, 2020

Today's Reading: Titus 1:1-9
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 9:1-17; 2 Timothy 2:1-26

Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior. (Titus 1:1–3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. This text shows us what makes a pastor. It's actually in that rambling introduction though, not in a pastor's behavior. We love rushing to the reproach part, but who would be left standing? I'm not saying your pastor should lean into sin. I'm saying Christ bore our reproaches upon the cross, as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me."

The makeup of a pastor starts with God's will and truth, not with the behavior of men. For the sake of the faith of the elect, the God who never lies would see His Gospel preached. The Lord insists the elect have hope and truth. He's even preached the Gospel through Caiaphas and Pilate both.

Start with the Gospel. Let the clergy not take an iota or a dot from it. Not with false teaching, and not by their actions, either. The reason Paul calls the clergy to the standard he does is because sin is by nature selfish.

The list of sins he lays out to Titus point to self, not Christ. He clarifies as he closes, "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it." Give Jesus to sinners, don't take Him from them. God promised them eternal life before the ages began. Don't settle for those who would turn a gift into extortion. Your pastor gives Jesus to sinners. To you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Though with a scornful wonder The world sees her oppressed, By schisms rent asunder, By heresies distressed, Yet saints their watch are keeping; Their cry goes up, “How long?” And soon the night of weeping Shall be the morn of song. (The Church's One Foundation, LSB 644:3)
Wednesday of the Third Week after the Epiphany
January 29, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 8:1-23; 2 Timothy 1:1-18

You shall not murder. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need. (The Small Catechism: Fifth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The naked commandment is always easier than its meaning. Jesus leans on it. Hatred is sin. Not helping your enemy is sin. I prefer a commandment that only has to do with stabbing or shooting. I can hopefully, maybe, sort of, manage that. Kind of,

The real issue goes deeper than my sinful heart. The true problem is that I disagree with God on a fundamental level with the idea that some people should be allowed to prosper. I would see them suffer in my heart. He would rather suffer Himself to save them.

The Fifth Commandment starts with a truth: God would die that your enemy would live. To break this commandment cuts to the heart of the Gospel. There should be people trapped in the wages of sin. Death. The free gift of God is life everlasting. He calls us to start there.

These are sinners that Jesus died for. These are sinners who have been given an undeserved gift. They don’t deserve to live, but God wills them alive so firmly that He’d die to make it so. That even applies to you, who harbor hatred and venom within you. Jesus died for murderers, because even when we’d rather die by the sword, He’d see us live by the Cross. Your sins are forgiven you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

“You shall not murder, hurt, nor hate; Your anger dare not dominate. Be kind and patient; help, defend, And treat your foe as your friend.” Have mercy, Lord! (These Are the Holy Ten Commandments, LSB 581:6)

Friday after the Epiphany
January 10, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-32; Romans 2:17-29

And if you are sure that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of children, having in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? (Romans 2:19–21)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If you want to live by the Law, you’ll die by it. If you want to die by the Gospel, you’ll live in it. The latter has caused no small amount of hard feelings and has been widely regarded as a bad move.

The truth is that we’d much rather live by the Law. Watch kids play tag: There’s no grace involved. New rules pop up every 30 seconds. With each new law comes an increase in trespass. It doesn’t seem to make them happier, but they can’t seem to quit.

I wish this was as simple as reminding you not to be a hypocrite. If the Law could bring about peace, we’d have found a way. If you want to live by the Law, you’ll die by it. Sing “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine,” all you want, but first actually look at the Law. Finding someone worse than you to condemn doesn’t actually make the sins you hide any less wrong. It just leaves us condemning each other along our way to the grave we’ll share with those we spent our whole lives calling sinners.

God does not desire this to be the last word. He calls even the wicked to turn from the religion of the Law and live. Turn from your sins and hear the Gospel. Jesus fulfilled the Law for you, and for all. Jesus died for you, and for all. Your neighbors’ public sins are atoned for, and so are your secret ones. More rules can’t do this. But a merciful God already has. Our religion is to die with Christ, that we would live in Him. Our hope is not that we can save others by our works, but that Christ can save us from our works. Christ has given you life in Him. Turn from your works and live. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Thy works, not mine, O Christ, Speak gladness to this heart; They tell me all is done, They bid my fear depart. Refrain Refrain To whom save Thee, Who canst alone For sin alone, Lord, shall I flee? (Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ, LSB 565:1)
Saturday after the Epiphany
January 11, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 33:1-20; Romans 3:1-18

My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. (From the Introit for the Baptism of Our Lord)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The ruler has come: Jesus, son of David, yet David’s Lord. Anointed with sin by John the Baptist. The firstborn and highest of kings, with whom the Father is well pleased. The covenant will stand. The Lord promises He shall fall for the sins of the world. The steadfast love of the Lord looks like Jesus, hanging on a cross for you.

The psalms twist into knots when we try to figure out where we fit in them. The Bible is about Jesus, not about you. Take, for example, Psalm 22. The opening line is “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Read the remaining verses and it becomes obvious that this psalm is ultimately all about Jesus. Sure, David wrote this psalm because he was suffering from profound loneliness during his own circumstances. And sure, we can draw great comfort ourselves just by reading David’s words. But at the end of the day, the psalms are focused on Jesus, and Jesus for us.

There’s a reason our liturgy is packed with the psalms. The liturgy is God’s giving and sinners’ receiving. Even when we “praise” God, we give Him His own words back. They’re words of the covenant, the recognition of His faithfulness and love. Our words echo what we’ve received. “You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation” (Psalm 89:26). In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

There stood the Son of God in love, His grace to us extending; The Holy Spirit like a dove Upon the scene descending; The triune God assuring us, With promises compelling, That in our Baptism He will thus Among us find a dwelling To comfort and sustain us. (To Jordan Came the Christ, Our Lord, LSB 406:4)

Tuesday of the Third Week after the Epiphany
January 28, 2020

Today’s Reading: Acts 20:28-35
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 6:1-7:14; Romans 16:17-27

And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. From your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things. Not just weird or wrong, but twisted. Distorted. They started with something pure and right, then altered it. They started with God’s Word. They turned it into something else. The most dangerous false teachers quote Scripture.

Paul commends to the pastors he leaves behind more than just the Bible. He points them to God and the Word of grace. He points them to Christ and the source of grace: the Cross. Paul commends to them not just the Bible, but also the Gospel. The forgiveness of sins. Of all that the wolves would set tooth and claw to, they hate the Gospel the most. Twist it into moralism, self-improvement, and get-rich-quick schemes. Twist it into less than the whole counsel of God. Rob the Cross from those in need of it. Paul begs them through tears to give the Gospel to sinners. It builds sinners up. It changes them. It sanctifies. Makes holy. Saves. This is what the Church stands on. This is what Jesus gives through Her.

It is more blessed to give than to receive. He’s more blessed than we are. God gives and we receive. God blesses us with His mercy, His favor, His life, and His peace. He needs nothing from us. He gives His gifts to us. Care for the flock by giving them the blood that purchased them. The Church will always look pretty beat up. The wolves and false prophets speaking twisted things are still here, but we have the Gospel, the Word of grace made flesh to die and rise. We have Jesus. He conquered death and gives life to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

By grace! None dare lay claim to merit; Our works and conduct have no worth. God in His love sent our Redeemer, Christ Jesus, to this sinful earth; His death did for our sins atone, And we are saved by grace alone. (By Grace I’m Saved, LSB 566:2)
John Chrysostom, Preacher
January 27, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 4:1-5:11; Romans 15:14-33

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed. (Romans 15:18)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. The archbishop John Chrysostom’s last name means Golden-tongue. Folks heard him preach and he got a new last name because he was that good. Even so, he died in exile. That sounds like a bummer, yet he preached Christ to the end. This is the greater thing.

We want the titles. The praise. The acclamations. Stop. To God be the glory. We remember Chrysostom for what God has done through him. We read his sermons to hear the Law proclaimed in sternness and the Gospel preached in all sweetness. We remember Chrysostom, who only wanted to speak of Jesus. It’s easier to deal with Epiphany in the person of Jesus who heals the sick, but signs and wonders are still being done by the power of the Spirit of God where His Gospel is preached. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. This Word is enough to raise the dead.

It’s hard to look at the visible Church sometimes and see the true and living God at work within it. Faith comes by hearing. It was preached by Chrysostom. It’s preached by your pastor. The Epiphany still happens as we hear the Word and believe. God is revealed. Dying men are given life. Christ is proclaimed, and death is conquered for you. In the Name of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

To live is Christ, for us, to die is gain; Where then shall be our hunger, danger, pain? Our joy to preach good news to rich and poor, Then be with Christ, to live forevermore. (The Saints in Christ are One in Every Place, LSB 838:3)

The Baptism of Our Lord
January 12, 2020

Today’s Reading: Matthew 3:13-17
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 34:1-24; Romans 3:19-31

But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. (Matthew 3:15)

In the Name of Jesus. Amen. There’s a lot of confusion over who God is. We do that on purpose. It leaves room for us to invent the god we want, who believes what we believe and hates who we hate. This god follows the laws we make and only wants us to be happy. Sin always tries to create God in our own image.

In the Baptism of our Lord, we see who God is: triune, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But if we look closer, we see more. God is more to us than just triune. The Epiphany is seeing God at work. We know Him by more than just His Name. He reveals Himself in action. The Father speaks from on high, the Son is incarnate to fulfill all righteousness, and the Spirit remains with and conveys Jesus. God is what He does.

God does something. The revelation of the triune God was shown to us through the Baptism of Christ in order to fulfill all righteousness. God is what He does. He fulfills all righteousness for us. Jesus climbs down into filthy waters for forgiveness He doesn’t need. He assumes our sin and carries it to Calvary. There, the Father is well pleased. Wrath is abated. Love abounds. The Spirit conveys this Jesus to us in the same waters. You are baptized, not into syllables, but into the triune God who fulfills all righteousness for you. You have life in His Name. In the Name of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Father in heaven, at the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River You proclaimed Him Your beloved Son and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. Make all who are baptized in His name faithful in their calling as Your children and inheritors with Him of everlasting life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Baptism of Our Lord)
Monday of the First Week after the Epiphany

January 13, 2020

Today's Reading: Isaiah 42:1-7
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:13-28; Romans 4:1-25

A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. (Isaiah 42:3)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Nobody wants justice except the wounded, the trampled on, and the sinned against. Everyone quotes "judge not, lest ye be judged," but "an eye for an eye" is the verse we really have in mind. The broken want their pound of flesh. Someone told me God didn’t give us the “eye for an eye” verse to set a minimum on punishments, but rather to place upper limits on them. It wasn’t that He was worried that we’d be too lenient with each other. He was worried we’d be too harsh. Makes sense.

Our Lord promises to open the eyes that are blind to the justice I want. There is a sad state of affairs down here, where we’ve so lost track of sin that we don’t know whether it was the blind man or his parents who sinned. But I think God wants to open the blind eyes taken in judgment. I think He wants the eye taken for an eye restored. I think this because the Lord promises justice with one breath, and with the next, promises to free the prisoners, who don’t deserve it. He will bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison. There is no justice in bringing out the prisoners. Justice by the Law does not let loose the prisoners. The Gospel does that.

Our Lord’s promise is not to break those who’ve broken you. It’s that He will not break the bruised reed. He will not crush the sinners, but will bring forth justice all the same. It’s the Gospel. Wrong was done and needs to be punished. Jesus would bear the cost Himself in the name of justice. Your pound of flesh was paid on the Cross. He died that you would live. And not just you: There is enough justice here for your enemy, too. Look. See their sins punished. See your God’s mercy, not just as a guilt trip so you will forgive them as well, but as a promise of mercy that doesn’t rest on your heart’s being pain-free. Mercy rests on His promise. Your sins are forgiven you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

—Rev. Harrison Goodman

Thine the kingdom Thine the prize Thine the wonder full surprise Thine the banquet then the praise Then the justice of Thy ways Thine the glory Thine the story Then the welcome to the least Then the wonder all increasing at Thy feast at Thy feast. (Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise, LSB 680:4)

St. Titus, Pastor and Confessor

January 26, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 2:1-3:10; Romans 15:1-13

Heal the sick in it and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” (Luke 10:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. When I look at this reading, all I can think about is what the 72 didn’t have. Maybe I have too much junk, but it’s hard to imagine a church that close to the brink. I want extra. Because I see the wolves. The pitfalls. The problems. I see all the challenges, and I know myself and my sin well enough to be worried. So anything that helps stand against them? I should have a couple of those.

The thing is, it’s that worry that injects something toxic in this little word we use called missions. At some point it stopped being about giving other people the Gospel and started being about making sure we survive. Making sure the institution survives because we’re very worried about our institutions. We fear, love, and trust our institutions. We have the same problem with them as I have with my junk. As much as I have, all I can see is what I don’t have.

I see the wolves, too. I see sinners who devour what gets in their way, who snap at each other, so worried that they don’t have enough that they lose sight of what they’ve become. They become the wolves who only care about having more to devour.

This is who Christ sent the 72 out to. It wasn’t different then. There were the same fears, selfishness, idolatry, and sin. He’s still sending. And we’re still more focused on what we don’t have rather than what we do. Jesus sent 72 sinners to give His gifts to other sinners so that we would be more than an institution. Say peace be to this house, and there is peace. Say to them, the kingdom of God has come near to you. And it does, Jesus is in your church through the Word and Sacrament. That’s the measurement of the Church. Peace, not measured in stuff, but in the Blood of the Lamb, gives life to you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Almighty God, You called Titus to the work of pastor and teacher. Make all shepherds of Your flock diligent in preaching Your holy Word so that the whole world may know the immeasurable riches of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for St. Titus)
The Conversion of St. Paul
January 25, 2020

Today’s Reading: Acts 9:1-22
Daily Lectionary: Zechariah 1:1-21; Romans 14:1-23

And immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. I think Paul would hate the hymn “Amazing Grace.” “I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.” It’s literally about Paul, and that’s the problem. Saul, also known as Paul, went to the temple to proclaim Jesus, not himself. Paul doesn’t talk much about his conversion experience, but just continues to confess his sins to the Church he persecuted and clings to Jesus, the Son of God.

I’m a convert. I hate the song, too. Everyone wants to know when the scales fell from my eyes. “Tell me the story of why you’re special.” I’m not. Paul wasn’t, either. He was the enemy. He watched the martyrs die. He persecuted the Church and persecuted the Lord. There’s something in us that wants to think that adult converts have a better story than the children who were baptized early and raised in the faith. Look at what they figured out. Look at how they’ve changed. The thing is Paul still called himself the chief of sinners. It is a glorious thing when God’s gifts are given to the little children He wants brought near Him. I can’t by my own reason or strength believe as a grownup any more than an infant can. It was the Holy Spirit who called us by the Gospel.

God’s mercy is what makes Paul stand out. It has nothing to do with Paul, but everything to do with Christ. Jesus died for an enemy. Jesus spoke to Ananias, who knew how terrible Paul was, and called him to be an instrument of mercy to him. “Amazing Grace” can mean a lot of things to different people. Paul wants everyone to know the details, not of his own story, but that of his Lord. This Jesus, who was crucified? He is the Son of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Harrison Goodman

Almighty God, You turned the heart of him who persecuted the Church and by his preaching caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world. Grant us ever to rejoice in the saving light of Your Gospel and, following the example of the apostle Paul, to spread it to the ends of the earth; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for The Conversion of St. Paul)

Tuesday of the First Week after the Epiphany
January 14, 2020

Today’s Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 36:33-37:14; Romans 5:1-21

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. (1 Corinthians 1:28)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There are already too many sermons and devotions that lament the workings of this world, as if it weren’t already on our minds. The problem is that we’re all waiting for the God who promises to fix it, to out-world the world in rhetoric, satire, or even violence. To do something to make people nicer to us.

He showed up in the face of all the same ridicule, born of the Virgin Mary to be called the son of a whore. Born into of the same violence, carried off to Egypt while the king slaughtered every male child his age.

Our God entered into our world to bear it, not to outdo it. It was to enter into the Jordan River, to be baptized by John into sin, blood, humiliation, and destruction, and to carry it all to the only place that road could lead: the Cross. It’s foolish. Low. Despised. It brought to nothing the things that are. The sin. The humiliation. The destruction. The death. Christ left those things buried at Calvary.

So when the world does worldly stuff and we want to complain about it, look instead to the Cross, where Christ not only conquered, but also forgave the world. God doesn’t need to fix the world. He forgave it. Christ never calls us to see sheep and goats. He is the judge of that. He calls us to love our neighbors. That’s not rooted in our overcoming them, but in our seeing that He died for them, too—seeing those in the world that hate you and calling them friend, worthy of love because God paid the price in blood: That’s foolishness, too. But it’s what God chose to do. You don’t need to be afraid of them. You are baptized into Christ Jesus, who has already brought to nothing the evils that are. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Harrison Goodman

Almighty Father, in Your Son You loved us when not yet begun. Was this old earth’s foundation! Your Son has ransomed us in love. To live in Him here and above: This is Your great salvation. Alleluia! Christ the living, To us giving Life forever, Keeps us Yours and fails us never! (O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright, LSB 395:4)
Wednesday of the First Week after the Epiphany

January 15, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 37:15-28; Romans 6:1-23

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear it and learn it. (The Small Catechism: Third Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus, Amen. God commands us to remember the Sabbath Day for a reason: that it would be kept holy. That last word matters: holy. It shows why the premise we usually understand regarding the Sabbath Day is completely wrong. Holiness never comes from us, but it always comes from God.

The Sabbath Day was not quarantined from the week as a lightning round for extra Jesus-points. It was not set aside for us to do the work of not working, or even for us to do the work of worship. If the day is going to be holy among us, it’s not going to be based on anything we do.

Holiness comes from God. What if He set aside the whole day because He actually wanted to spend it with you? What if He set the day apart so that there would always be room to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament? It’s these things that make us holy. Jesus, given in Word and Sacrament, forgive sinners. Any day that happens is a holy day.

The premise of the Sabbath is that God wants to give you real gifts in time and space. Don’t just spend time thinking about Him, but understand that He enters reality to give you real gifts on a specific day. God isn’t hiding in heaven. The day is holy because He shows up to make it that way, and you are holy because He gives you the gifts that accomplish it. He commands them to be received because He loves you enough to insist you receive a gift. In the Name + of Jesus, Amen. −Rev. Harrison Goodman

“Come unto Me, ye weary, And I will give you rest.” O blessed voice of Jesus, Which comes to hearts oppressed! It tells of benediction, Of pardon, grace, and peace, Of joy that hath no ending, Of love that cannot cease. (Come Unto Me, Ye Weary, LSB 684:1)

St. Timothy, Pastor and Confessor

January 24, 2020

Today’s Reading: Acts 16:1-5
Daily Lectionary: Joel 3:1-21; Romans 12:14-13:14

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily. (Acts 16:5)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Timothy is a walking example of what nobody thought would work. They questioned his age. They questioned his lineage. Yet Paul trained him, laid hands on him, and ordained him. And through Timothy, God saw fit to strengthen churches in the faith, and they increased in numbers daily.

None of this stuff should work through the clergy we have. It feels good to actually say it out loud, because it’s what we’re all thinking anyway. Critiques of Timothy might not have been fair, but they were logical. That’s why God ordains pastors. All of us have flaws. Blind spots. Sins. It might not be fair to point them out, but it’s logical. Look at all the reasons this shouldn’t work. Still, God promises to work good through pastors. Timothy had nothing in himself that was worthy of the ministry. He knew his age and father would be thrown in his face. It’s why Paul tells him not to let anyone talk down to him for being young. It’s why Paul tells him to be circumcised. Stop looking at Timothy and start looking at the God who promised to speak through him.

Sooner or later every Christian has problems with a pastor, because he’s a sinner. Your pastor needs Jesus for the forgiveness stuff, too. The question is, did God still promise to work through him? That’s what the call is. God promises to work through this particularly inept man to strengthen the Church. It shouldn’t have worked with Timothy, but God defied all odds. Then again, most people stay dead after being crucified, too. The risen Lord holds the Church together, even through Paul and Timothy, and even through your pastor. It doesn’t rest on them, but it rests on the God who conquered death. It’s about Jesus. If He wants to use a cross to save you from death, that’s really no more absurd than hearing the message of reconciliation through a sinner. Rejoice. Christ is at work in what shouldn’t function, and yet has since the beginning. Jesus is proclaimed to sinners, and they live. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. −Rev. Harrison Goodman

Lord Jesus Christ, You have always given to Your church on earth faithful shepherds such as Timothy to guide and feed Your flock. Make all pastors diligent to preach Your holy Word and administer Your means of grace, and grant Your people wisdom to follow in the way that leads to life eternal; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for St. Timothy)
Thursday of the Second Week after the Epiphany
January 23, 2020

Today's Reading: Romans 12:6-16
Daily Lectionary: Joel 2:18-32; Romans 11:25-12:13

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.
(Romans 12:9)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If you are in Christ, the Law is not about you. You need not earn your salvation. He has won it for you. It's finished, and there's nothing left to add to it. The Law still applies, but now it's about your view of your neighbor. Love actually looks like something. Love for neighbor takes flesh, but differently in each person. We call it vocation, Paul outlines the gifts God would give to your neighbor through you.

We turn a gift into a curse. Sinners take the gifts and try to measure them, to outdo one another in showing honor. It's hard to measure that unless you're looking at yourself.

It's so tempting to compare yourself to others. The Law is great for that, but the Law always accuses. There will always be someone doing more. I cannot give as much. I cannot work as hard. I cannot teach as well. We're so desperate to make the Law about us, even when it kills us. Lord, have mercy. He does. He fulfills the Law for you. He serves your neighbor through you. If you are in Christ, the Law is not about you. The gifts Paul talks about aren't about you. It's all about your neighbor.

Your gifts will differ from someone else's. That doesn't make you less holy or your help for neighbor any less, Christ already accomplished your holiness. Let love be genuine. That means look to Jesus and stop measuring yourself. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Serve the people God gave you in the vocations He has placed you in. Genuine love only comes from the Cross, so start there, Breathe. The Law isn't about you anymore. Hold fast to what is good. Hold fast to the gifts of God. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. --Rev. Harrison Goodman

Son of God, eternal Savior, Source of life and truth and grace, Word made flesh, whose birth among us Hallows all our human race: By Your praying, by Your willing That Your people should be one, Grant, O grant our hope's fruition: Here on earth Your will be done. (Son of God, Eternal Savior, LSB 842:4)

Thursday of the First Week after the Epiphany
January 16, 2020

Today's Reading: Luke 2:41-52
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 38:1-23; Romans 7:1-20

And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Luke 2:49)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. There's a lot of speculation about Jesus as a child. We expect Him to be different. Twelve-year-old me was different from me today. Knowing me back then gives insight into who I am today. So we figure if we knew more about kid Jesus, we'd know more about God.

The thing is, He really only has one story. It plays itself out over and over again throughout time, even here. His parents were in Jerusalem for the Passover, a remembrance of the blood of the lamb that saved God's people from death. He was gone for three days, then appeared again in the temple. It really should sound familiar.

Jesus was the Passover Lamb, sacrificed to save you from death. He was apart from us for three days, then rose from the grave. Now we find Him in Body and Blood in the temple, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Same story. Over and over. Now and forever more. We don't need more. Young Jesus is the same as adult Jesus, is the same as the pre-incarnate Son of God, is the same as Jesus for you given in the temple today. It's not a letdown. It's good news. The story of saving you is the only story God wants to tell. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. --Rev. Harrison Goodman

Jesus has come as the King of all glory! Heaven and earth, O declare His great pow'r, Capturing hearts with the heavenly story; Welcome Him now in this fast-fleeting hour! Ponder His love! Take the crown He has for you! Jesus has come! He, the King of all glory! (Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure Eternal, LSB 533:4)
Friday of the First Week after the Epiphany
January 17, 2020

Today’s Reading: 1 Kings 8:6-13
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 39:1-10, 17-29; Romans 7:21-8:17

Then Solomon said, “The LORD has said that he would dwell in thick darkness.” (1 Kings 8:12)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. The descriptions of the Holy of Holies all sound about like what we’d expect if God needed a house. The Ark was a thing of beauty, history, and glory. The gold and the handiwork, the tablets of the Law, the cherubim who guarded it. These sound like God things. These are the things that seem bigger than we are.

But when the Lord shows up, it’s in a cloud of darkness so thick that the priests could not minister there. It covers everything. Those things that seem bigger than we are still can’t save us from darkness. Not the gold, not the Law, not even the angels. So much of our religion consists of trying to figure out why the things we put our trust in don’t deliver us from the dark. So much of our faith is recognizing that the dark is exactly where God puts Himself.

He won’t bind Himself to any one city. He goes with His people wherever they go. The cloud was a sign of it. The Lord makes His home in the darkness. It’s the story of the incarnation and the crucifixion. The suffering servant entered death to pull you out of the tomb even as He rose from the dead. Christianity is the God who enters the darkness to be with you there, that the darkness would not overcome the light that is Jesus. The closer you get to the darkness, the closer you get to the Lord. You don’t need to escape what’s wrong to be near God. You won’t find the Cross in a perfect sunset. You’ll find it where the sun was blotted from the sky. God was in the darkness for you, dying that you would live. Be not afraid of the dark. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me. (Abide With Me, LSB 878:1)

Wednesday of the Second Week after the Epiphany
January 22, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Joel 2:1-17; Romans 11:1-24

Honor your father and your mother. What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. (The Small Catechism: Fourth Commandment)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. If we can’t obey the First Commandment and honor God, who is without sin, a commandment to honor a couple of sinners seems...ridiculous. We’re so quick to look for loopholes so we can avoid obedience to those given in authority over us that we’ve already despised them. We’d rather look for excuses than direction. We’d rather find fault than gift. You can say respect has to be earned. Yes, your parents, your government, and your pastor are sinners. All of them. But you’re just as quick to break the First Commandment as you are the Fourth. The problem isn’t actually the call to obey people who are wrong sometimes.

The problem is, we’re afraid that God can’t work through sinners. The Fourth Commandment is a gift. God gave you particular sinners and promises to love you through them. They aren’t strong enough sinners to stop Him. It’s the same as the First Commandment. Respect has to be earned, but God has earned it, and we’ve still not feared and loved God. Your idolatry hasn’t stopped Him from redeeming you. Your disobedience to your parents hasn’t stopped God from working good through them.

The Fourth Commandment is a gift because it actually points out through whom God wants to care for you. Look to them and see God’s hands at work, even through sinful puppets. It isn’t up to your parents to earn your respect. It isn’t up to them to be without sin. It’s up to God to love you through them, so rejoice. This, too, has already been accomplished for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

“You are to honor and obey Your father, mother, ev’ry day, Serve them each way that comes to hand; You’ll then live long in the land.” Have mercy, Lord! (These are the Holy Ten Commands, LSB 581:5)
Tuesday of the Second Week after the Epiphany
January 21, 2020

Today's Reading: Exodus 33:12-23
Daily Lectionary: Joel 1:1-20; Romans 10:1-21

And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14)

In the Name + of Jesus, Amen. Stop. Saying. God. Is. Everywhere. Clapping emojis. Of course, God can act anywhere. “Where shall I flee from your presence?” But His presence is distinct. Moses begs for it. He doesn’t say, “God is everywhere, man.” He says God’s specific presence is the mark of His favor. Side note: never accept theological insight ending in “man.”

The incarnate God is incompatible with the God of the ether. The God who wraps Himself in human flesh to save you doesn’t work through a cloud, but through a cross. You don’t have to wonder where He is because He shows you. God can work everywhere, but what matters is that He works in specific places for you. God’s being everywhere offers no comfort. He’s not satisfied with that, so He promises Moses a revelation, even if it’s just of His back. We don’t get to see His face for another 1,500 years.

The light of the glory of God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. You are given a vision of the glory of God that Moses didn’t see until he rested. You are given the comfort of knowing that God’s favor is upon you, not by your works, but by His present mercy. Comfort comes from knowing where God is, and more importantly, what He’s doing. He reveals this in a specific place. Christ crucified. Present mercy for you. Baptism. Christ shows up in Divine Service in Body and Blood for you to eat and drink. God can work everywhere but puts Himself in bread and wine for you. God can work everywhere and chooses to work in the water and the Word to bring you comfort in the face of so much that’s unknown. We aren’t limiting God when we say that He wants you to know where and how He’s present. He chooses to reveal Himself this way so that you would be certain of His blessings. You are baptized. The favor of the Lord is with you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

Christ is our cornerstone, On Him alone we build; With His true saints alone The courts of heav'n are filled. On His great love Our hopes we place Of present grace And joys above. (Christ is our Cornerstone, LSB 912:1)

The Confession of St. Peter
January 18, 2020

Today's Reading: Mark 8:27-9:1
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 40:1-4; 43:1-12; Romans 8:18-39

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. (Mark 8:34–35)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. “Hey, I realize you’re God, but you’re really screwing this up. Let me tell you a better way to do it. I’d know. I spend most of my time imagining what I’d do if I were in charge. Never mind my motto, ‘It seemed like a good idea at the time.’"

It isn’t just that we jump right in with Peter and tell Jesus not to die on the Cross and seek power instead. It’s that we love to talk about bearing our own cross for all the wrong reasons. The entire discussion of taking up your cross to follow Jesus gets framed in all the same selfishness as rebuking the divine. I should be the one determining good and evil.

We love to talk about bearing our cross. It lets us see ourselves as the victims. Poor, good, us. Evil world. Jesus sacrificed for the good of the very people who are hurting Him. But the Cross is God’s love that sacrifices for sinners and calls them righteous, not a framework that lets us write them off as evil oppressors.

Take up your cross and follow me. Stop seeing the world as “us vs. them.” The Cross is what unites us. My cross, your cross—there’s really only one: Jesus’ Cross. His suffering and death unites sinners in the forgiveness of what divides us. We are not called to suffer independently of Jesus. We are called to recognize that the people who make us suffer are tied to us in the same Cross Jesus bore on Calvary. We are called to be united with Him in His suffering even as we are united with our neighbors, for whom He suffered. That won’t happen by putting on a brave face or telling God what to do. It comes from looking to the Cross where Christ also died for you. The thing that knits creation together is mercy. The whole world can’t save a soul, but the Son of Man already lost His life for our sake. We can face all, even death, unashamed of the love that knits us together unto resurrection. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. —Rev. Harrison Goodman

O Lord, fix our minds on the things of God, that we may see your cross. Amen.
The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 19, 2020

Today's Reading: John 2:1-11
Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 44:1-16, 23-29; Romans 9:1-18

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. Jesus fills the jars with more wine for people who’ve already had too much. I think that’s done on purpose. Jesus turns water into wine for anyone who ever left church, ate lunch, and then realized they felt exactly the same as they did earlier that morning, with all the same problems and vices.

This is called a great sign. It manifests God’s glory. It’s not just the beer run from on high. It’s that He threw good after bad. He sent good wine to drunk folks. Our God sends good gifts to sinners. You might not care enough, improve enough, or learn enough. That won’t stop God. He gives more gifts to you, more mercy, more forgiveness. Not because it impresses everyone, because the sign was done in secret. And not because the people earn it by making responsible choices.

Jesus does this great sign because it’s the third day, That’s the day of celebration. The day Christ rose from the dead after paying the price we couldn’t and wouldn’t. And Jesus gives gifts in church for the same reasons: It’s a celebration. He sends good gifts after sinners, regardless of what we’ve done, and however empty we feel. Whether you feel it or not, notice it or not, appreciate it or not, there is good wine here. It is the Blood of Christ for you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen.

–Rev. Harrison Goodman

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (Collect for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany)

Sarah

January 20, 2020

Daily Lectionary: Ezekiel 47:1-14, 21-23; Romans 9:19-33

What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. (Romans 9:30–31)

In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. It always feels good to be more loving than God, to find fault in His work. “God, I can’t work all the settings on the washing machine, but here are all the ways you’re running the universe wrong. Trust me.” Look around. I don’t see enough righteousness. If God would just conform to our ways, our laws, our righteousness, things would go better.

We pursue righteousness just like Israel. We chase a law we’re convinced leads to utopia. We’ve never succeeded, either. So we lament that God won’t do things our way. We think we’re more merciful than God, but in chasing the Law, we miss the Gospel. The clay won’t understand the potter. He chose to save even the Gentiles, who never pursued righteousness. God endures it with much patience. The potter became clay to become the vessel of wrath. The Son became man to endure the wrath of the Father upon the Cross.

We are vessels of mercy, prepared for glory. Your righteousness doesn’t come from works of the Law. That’s a gift. You don’t need to come up with new laws that yield the righteousness that God’s perfect Law didn’t. You don’t need to build a utopia to see everyone loved. God has already worked this love upon the Cross for all: It’s called the Gospel. It’s good news, not just for a few who have figured out the right way to behave, but for all. Faith is trust in the God who endured wrath over sin out of love for the sinners. Faith is trust in Jesus: God who became man to suffer and die to save you. In the Name + of Jesus. Amen. –Rev. Harrison Goodman

What mercy God showed to our race, A plan of rescue by His grace: In sending One from woman’s seed, The One to fill our greatest need—For on a tree uplifted high His only Son for sin would die, Would drink the cup of scorn and dread To crush the ancient serpent’s head! (The Tree of Life, LSB 561:3)