Worship Report

In Nomine Iesu

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Text for our consideration this morning is from the OT reading, from Isaiah.

Greetings to you from myself, my wife, and our young son Ephraim. We are thankful to our Lord for being here among you to live in the grace of God with you in all things. It has been a whirlwind couple of weeks with moving, getting acclimated to the city, making the parsonage our home, working on getting to know you (and your names… which might take me a while, please bear with me), and becoming part of the Geneseo community and part of Concordia. Change has been plentiful in our lives these past couple weeks (and you have made it pleasurable and endurable with all your outpourings of support). Yet with all that has been taking place, if there’s one thing I’ve known since the day I asked my father why the church down the road had Thanksgiving Day services and we didn’t, it’s that Lutherans aren’t big fans of change. Right?

Right. As creatures of habit, we are comfortable in what we are used to. We celebrate traditions around events that are steadfast. We are dedicated to history and doctrine. We enjoy our liturgy because we are familiar with it, and there aren’t any surprises. And even as I worshipped with you last Sunday morning, I noticed there are a few things I am going to have to modify about my own Sunday morning worship practices as I conform to what you are used to, and serve you as pastor.

I know of some churches, and I’m sure you do to, who have had the same pastor for 30 plus years! Others have pastors for only 3 or 4 years, just a short time. Pastors in office do change, people come and people go, buildings under renovations and decisions are made in committees… but whenever any change is actually necessary in the Lutheran church (did I say “change”?), it is always met with some tenseness, there could be some disagreements, there might even be outright rejections of “change”.

Is change always necessary? Well, no, depending on the situation, it’s not. In fact, there’s a word that you might be familiar with, “adiaphora”, which refers to those things that are neither commanded nor forbidden by the Word of God, able to be changed without repercussion from God.

When it comes to the way of the Lord, though, there is no adiphora. Some changes are necessary to be made, even in the Lutheran church, and they are not always welcomed with opened arms.

To be Christian necessitates change. Luther himself, when composing his 95 Theses, first argued, “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said "Repent", He called for the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” Repentance, the message that John the Baptist was born to preach, is all about change.

The forerunner of Jesus commanded all who heard to prepare the way of the Lord through repentance, a change that needed to take place. It’s not God who has to change, but all humanity. If the president were to walk down this aisle, we would see an immediate change take place. How much more important is the coming of the messiah to His people on earth? Pointing to the coming Messiah, John’s message of repent, “to change one’s thinking” “to turn again” was heard by many. In Judaism, the primary sense of repentance is always a change in man’s attitude toward God and his conduct of life.

We were meant… created to live for so much more which was lost in Adams fall, when even our
attitude toward God changed to be naturally hostile. Too often we revert to the leading and guiding of that Old Adam within us, allowing sin to suck us in. There is no change of life in sin, and according to the holiness of God and His Law, sin necessitates repercussion... which is why the prophet Isaiah was sent to the people of Jerusalem to tell them of their coming punishment for sin and for their lack of repentance... but also, as in our text, to assure them of the Lord’s impending restoration and salvation for all flesh.

For this sinful flesh and blood is perishable, unable to inherit the kingdom of God, which necessitates a change for our salvation.

In comparison to Christ, John recognized his own unworthiness to even untie the sandals on the feet of Jesus. In repentance guided by God’s Word, we are led to the same type of comparison as we recognize our imperfections, our unworthiness, our shame and our guilt. We fall short of the glory of God, and we are broken and crooked, hilly and rough, people who are unworthy of being in the Lord’s presence. For our sin, and, as happened to the people of Jerusalem, repercussion must occur... death. We are in need of change, of transformation, of salvation.

The message of John the Baptist echoes today, “Repent! Make the crooked straight... the hilly level... the desert wilderness flourishing with vegetation, and the rough smoothed!” This change is impossible on our own. That is why God does it within you, in your hearing of the message of Christ.

When Isaiah prophesied to the Lord’s people, he spoke of their impending destruction by the hands of their enemies. This may not sound like a loving God, but if there was no destruction, no change, even we would be lost. For God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us! (Romans 5:8) Effectively, he was “destroyed” for us, paying for all sin, and in its place, returning to you good things in double proportion for your sin.

"Comfort, Comfort... “ for God, in His abundant grace and mercy, has doled out supreme punishment for all sin in the crucifixion and death of Jesus His Son our Savior. On the cross, His perfect body was changed by sin as He absorbed the sin of the world... dying even for your sin. The perfect way of salvation is revealed through the cross, and continues to His empty tomb for death could not hold Him. He Who died was transformed to new life in resurrection, and in Him death is swallowed up forever! As the grave couldn’t hold Him, so the grave also will not hold you when the Lord returns to pay you double from his loving and merciful hand.

This is a change we can live with. This is a change you do live with by baptism into His death and life (Rom. 6:3-4), washed by the water and the word of God. God has accomplished this change in you that will last unto salvation in Christ! The old Adam that demands death is himself drowned and dies with Christ in daily, lifelong repentance, making way for the new man to rise up and live every day conformed to the way of the Lord.

As a guarantee of this change, and to lead you in the life of repentance, He gives you His Holy Spirit. The same Spirit was at work in Isaiah the prophet and John the Baptist, who both proclaimed salvation in the way of the Lord. Continually does the Spirit come to you in your reception of the Means of God’s Grace. And Christ again comes to you this day in your hearing of the Word, in your participation in the Lord’s Supper, with double comfort, double tenderness, double pardon, and double forgiveness.

You have been washed. You have been sanctified. You have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God! (1 Cor. 6:11) By His Word and Sacraments, the necessary change of the forgiveness of your sins is accomplished for Christ’s sake. Isaiah the prophet pointed to Him, John the Baptist pointed to Him, the Word points to Him. This church points to Him. You point to Him...

As faith looks forward to the time when the glory of the Lord shall finally be fully revealed, when all flesh will see together the salvation of our God. Until then, we live in repentance anticipating that great and glorious day of final change. On that Day, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead will be raised! Christ will take our lowly bodies of earthly flesh and clothe this perishable with what is imperishable, this mortal with immortality. Death will be swallowed up in victory. The final change will have occurred and we will be restored to life! In Christ, your citizenship is in heaven! (Philippians 3:20) And there you will be with all the faithful who have traveled the way of the Lord in this lifetime; finally and fully changed, with Christ Who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:8) Amen.

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus until the day of everlasting life. Amen.
Soli Deo Gloria