

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday in Advent, December 13, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 65, 56:3, 58:1-5, 74, 73:4-5.

Lessons: Psalm 85, Acts 26:11-18, Matthew 9:2-8.

Sermon Text: Acts 13:38-39.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Think of all the sacred music that has been written and played and sung by the Christian church to celebrate Jesus' coming. Everything from simple songs for children to grand oratorios and masses celebrating the coming and birth of Jesus Christ. Well, music is just one way we have of rejoicing, of showing our happiness and joy. So why can and do we rejoice at Christmas?

Jesus comes into our hearts with joy – assuring us of sins forgiven. When our sins are forgiven, we can rejoice. We are reminded again this Advent season that

JESUS COMES TO HEARTS REJOICING

- 1. Jesus brings news of sins forgiven.**
- 2. “Jesus comes in sounds of gladness, leading souls redeemed to heaven.”**

Each of us could think of the times we have sinned and how those sins trouble us. Are those sins forgiven? (Pause)

Can you remember a time when you wronged someone? Doing something wicked to them, saying something evil to them or even about them? Do you remember how your conscience is troubled by such things? Are those sins forgiven?

Satan, the devil, would like to make us think “NO” those sins are not forgiven. There is no hope. God will condemn you.

But there is hope for sinners. When mankind first sinned, God promised that a man would come who would win the victory over Satan. In doing this, he would also defeat death and allow mankind to overcome death. God gave mankind hope.

The fulfillment of that hope is found in Jesus Christ, true God as well as true man, and what he did for us.

Until the time that this descendant of Eve would come to earth and accomplish his work, God promised and kept repeating his promises of hope and his messages of forgiveness.

At first Eve thought that her firstborn son was the one who would save mankind. But that wasn't the case. Her firstborn son, Cain, turned out just as sinful as she and her husband were. In fact, he was also a murderer in deed as well as in thought, slaying his brother Abel.

The very fact that God didn't immediately snuff out their physical lives at the time of the first sin is a picture of hope and forgiveness. Until the promised Redeemer from death and from the power of the devil actually came to earth, God kept telling mankind about that promised Savior.

The history of mankind as recorded in the Scriptures is a history of hope, a history of forgiveness, a history of redemption.

God kept holding the message of forgiveness before mankind.

Even Cain's life was spared to give him opportunity to repent. When "*Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear"*" (Genesis 4:13 NIV) he was afraid that someone would kill him. "*But the*

LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him." (Genesis 4:15 NIV) So you see how troubling for mankind sin was – and continues to be.

But God repeatedly gave mankind words of comfort and forgiveness. At first, these words would have come from believing fathers to their families and children. Surely, beginning with Adam, people had been told of the great works of the Lord God. These words came from people whom God called to proclaim his message of the coming salvation to mankind and for all mankind.

After God sent a great world-wide flood to destroy most of wicked mankind, we learn that 120 years of Noah's preaching of repentance had no recorded effect on the wicked world. But that wasn't his fault. We don't know if any of the people who were destroyed in the flood actually repented before they died, but we do have reason to believe that the flood was not an instantaneous death for everyone.

God showed his love even after the great flood. His covenant was established and confirmed by the sign of the rainbow that he would never again destroy mankind by a world-wide flood. We read in Genesis 9: **"I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'**" (Genesis 9:11-13 NIV)

The message of God was carried on through the family of Noah especially through Shem down to Abram, whose name was later changed by God to Abraham, meaning father of nations. God's promise to Abraham included especially the words: **"I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** (Genesis 12:3 NIV)

The message of sins forgiven appears repeatedly throughout the Old Testament. Not only do we see God's forgiveness for the sins of mankind, but also men forgiving others for sinning against them.

A few notable examples include the history of Jacob and Esau and later Jacob's son Joseph forgiving his ten brothers for selling him into slavery.

To pick out a few more examples we can include King David, who later repented after having his sins of adultery and murder bluntly pointed out and heard the prophet Nathan say **"The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die."** (2 Samuel 12:13 NIV)

Then we get into the time of many of the Old Testament prophets, men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the writers of the shorter prophetic books, the ones we call "the minor prophets". These, too, speak of God's forgiveness for sin.

But especially, after God's Son came to earth, we find some marvelous examples of forgiveness.

The one who would now earn complete forgiveness was present on earth, teaching, performing miracles, and especially proclaiming the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is the ultimate bringer of the "news of sins forgiven". Remember those words from Luke chapter 2? **"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."** (Luke 2:10 KJV) And **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."** (Luke 2:14 KJV)

But don't we need words of forgiveness, too? Certainly. Our lives are filled with sin, with disappointments, with hurts because of sin – our sins and the sins of others – and things that make it hard for us to be happy and to rejoice.

Well, just as the hymnwriter tells us, forgiveness happens for you, too. "Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing, Bringing news of sins forgiven; Jesus comes in sounds of gladness, Leading souls redeemed to heaven. Alleluia! Alleluia! Now the gate of death is riven."

Jesus comes, glad to do his work. So we could say that he comes and he is rejoicing as he comes, even though he came to suffer and die. He did it for you, for us, that you may rejoice, that we may rejoice.

Look beyond your pain and sufferings, and yes, even look beyond depression. God gives you hope. Trust his Word, as he said, for example, even of the men who were crucifying him, **"Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."** (Luke 23:34 KJV)

Look forward to Jesus' second coming, when all who believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins will leave this sinful world and be taken to heaven to live with him there. God tells us plainly: ***“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.”*** (Revelation 21:4 KJV)

We could say, and we must say, that “Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing, Bringing news of sins forgiven.” Our hearts are rejoicing, too, when Jesus comes with the message of forgiveness.

In our sermon text, the news of sins forgiven, just as Paul was telling those in the synagogue in Antioch in Asia Minor, is a joyous message and leads to rejoicing. If you think about how great this message is, it should and must lead to your rejoicing. It is easy to see how some people, especially those who have newly or recently come to faith in Jesus Christ are excited in their worship.

I certainly hope that the unemotional, staid parts of our worship services and our worship lives are not indicative of indifference. Our singing joyfully is a great and exciting part of our rejoicing and it is a joy to hear singing in our worship services. When it comes to congregational singing, we have nothing to be ashamed of.

But the empty seats in church that are not occupied by members are certainly not a picture of members of our congregation rejoicing in what Jesus did for us. We think of what Jesus asked when he healed the 10 lepers – remember our Scripture lesson on Thanksgiving Day? – we ask with sadness – ‘weren’t all healed of the leprosy of their sins? But where are the rest?’

When it comes to “sounds of gladness, is there any greater sound than God speaking to you when he assures us ***“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses.”***

When we sing of “sounds of gladness leading souls redeemed to heaven” we must also especially think of words such as you hear every Sunday here in church. That is the simple Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is the message that leads to rejoicing.

I surely hope you have experienced the joy of hearing that your sins are forgiven, particularly when some especially troublesome sin has been bothering you.

Yes, Jesus can and does even sometimes touch our emotions with his message of forgiveness. But we don't have to rely on our emotions to assure us our sins are forgiven. The objective “news of sins forgiven” that Jesus brings, “leading souls redeemed to heaven” is all that we need to hear. For ***“faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*** (Romans 10:17 NIV) ***“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*** (KJV)

It is the hearing of the Word of God that creates and strengthens faith.

“Jesus comes in sounds of gladness, Leading souls redeemed to heaven. Alleluia! Alleluia! Now the gate of death is riven.” We have nothing to fear even from death because the gate to death is torn apart, broken in pieces.

So today you can rejoice in the many words of Scripture which tell us, for example, ***“Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.”*** (Matthew 9:2 KJV) And ***“Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven.”*** (NIV) And ***“Friend, your sins are forgiven.”*** (Luke 5:20 NIV) And ***“Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?” Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.””*** (Luke 7:47-50 NIV) We could go on and on with words of forgiveness from Scripture to you.

Just remember: ***“I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you.”***
Amen.