

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Twenty-Fifth Sunday After Trinity, November 17, 2024**

✝ ✝ ✝

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

Hymns: 20, 240:4, 527, 476, 476:4.

Lessons: Ezekiel 34:17-24, Hebrews 12:18-24, Matthew 25:14-30.

Sermon Text: Psalm 126.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Fellow redeemed in Christ:

In this present life all earthly things come to an end. Time itself is fleeting and comes to an end. We speak of last year, of last night, of the last hour or minute. All have passed and cannot be relived. That's the way it is with our lives also. The psalmist says: ***"All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan."*** Ps. 90:9

We think of this especially as we draw near to the last Sunday of the present church year, which is next Sunday. Another year on the church calendar is history. As the last Sunday of the church year reminds us of the end of all earthly things and the Last Day of this world, so also the Advent Season which begins on December 1 reminds us of the coming of Christ to take us to our heavenly home.

We are still occupied with the here and now, with the sufferings, problems, and duties of this life. Because this life is filled with sufferings and problems of all kinds, it is good for us to look ahead to the life to come. That enables us as believers in Christ to bear all the problems and troubles of this life with calm confidence. Let us, therefore, meditate on:

**THE FINAL DELIVERANCE AND GLORY OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD**

- 1. The sufferings of this present time are followed by exceeding great joy;**
- 2. The tearful sowing of the Word is followed by a joyful harvest of souls.**

The psalmist writes: ***"When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed."*** The word ***"captives"*** in our text is better translated: "the returning ones." The word ***"Zion"*** is another name given to the Church of believers in Christ, the Holy Christian Church. So our text would read: "When Jehovah brings back the returning ones of his Church," or "When Jehovah restores the fortunes of his Church."

We should also know that there is a difference in interpretation of our text by the various men who have studied it. Most modern theologians apply the words of our text to the return of the people of Israel from the 70-year captivity in Babylonia. Luther and the older theologians for the most part interpret the psalm to refer to the joyful deliverance of God's people at the end of days and the glory of heaven. It is in this way that we want to apply the words of our text. The words, then, are to be understood not as a recitation of history, but as a prophecy of the deliverance of God's people on the Last Day and a contemplation of the great glory and joy that day will bring. We will appreciate this interpretation of our text more as we go through it.

Looking forward to that final deliverance of God's people that the Lord will bring about, the psalmist speaks of something wonderful beyond our imagination, when he says: ***"We were like men who dreamed."*** It's difficult enough to try to imagine the great joy we shall have in heaven, let alone try to describe it in words. The psalmist adds: ***"Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."*** This kind of language is the familiar language of biblical prophecy. Isaiah, for example, speaks

of the deliverance of all believers in Christ on the Last Day in these words: ***“...the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”*** Is. 35:10 Almost the identical language is used by Isaiah also in chapter 51, v. 11.

This exuberance of joy is certainly appropriate for the thought of being delivered from this earth and obtaining heaven’s joys, rather than for the lesser joy of Israel returning from their captivity in Babylonia. The returning exiles returned to broken down huts, and the new beginning in their home land was a depressing and sad affair. The Bible tells us, as reported by Nehemiah: ***“They said to me, ‘Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.’”*** Neh. 1:3

It also was not all joy when the rebuilt temple was viewed and found to be far less glorious than the original temple built by Solomon.

Our text, however, speaks of unbounded joy. On the Last Day when we all stand before the throne of Christ to await the judgment, we will testify as our text says: ***“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”*** This will be our testimony before all the heathen, the unbelievers, who will hear themselves condemned by Christ in the judgment. We as believers in Christ will joyfully sing of our deliverance in Christ, the redemption the Lord planned and carried out. We are hard pressed to speak of it in better words than Luther used in the Second Article, where he confessed that Jesus ***“has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death; that I should be His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence and blessedness.”***

This deliverance from sin, death, and the power of the devil, we already have by faith in Christ. We believe and rejoice in this fact: ***“The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*** I John 1:7 We who are guilty of so many sins rejoice when we hear Paul saying: ***“But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation - if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.”*** Col. 1:22-23 Not only have our sins been taken away, but, Paul says: ***“Christ Jesus...has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*** II Tim. 1:10 And we can rejoice that Jesus came to this earth ***“to destroy the devil’s work.”*** I John 3:8 This deliverance we have now already. How much greater and more wonderful will be the final deliverance when the Lord takes us to heaven! Then, indeed, we will sing: ***“The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.”***

Meanwhile, while we are still on this sinful earth, there will be no lack of trouble, tribulation, sorrow and suffering for the sake of Jesus and his Word. This is to be expected, for Peter writes: ***“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”*** I Pet. 2:21 Jesus also said: ***“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*** Matt. 16:24 Here on this earth, whatever cross the Lord lays upon us as his believing children, we should willingly bear. Whatever suffering or persecution may be involved in spreading the Gospel and bearing witness to the truth of God’s Word, this every believer should willingly bear. So it was for the apostles, as Paul says: ***“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ...”*** I Cor. 4:9.10 We should not expect to have it better than Christ did or his apostles, but rather with Paul we should want to take part in ***“the fellowship of sharing in his (Christ’s) sufferings.”*** Phil. 3:10 Remember, that of all who are finally delivered by Christ on the Last Day, it is said: ***“These are they who have come out of the great tribulation...”*** Rev. 7:14

If we understand this, then we can also appreciate the great joy of being finally delivered from all tribulation and having the unbounded joy of eternal life, described in the Bible in these words: ***“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*** Rev. 21:4 This will be the joy of all who by God’s grace have faithfully heard the Gospel and put their trust in Jesus Christ. This joyful contemplation of the future glory of heaven should cause us to fervently pray: ***“Amen. Come Lord Jesus.”*** Rev. 22:20 Even as we pray for this second coming of Christ, so

also we should keep in mind the promise God gives in our text, namely, that the tearful sowing of the Word is followed by a joyful harvest of souls.

2.

The psalmist expresses this prayer: ***“Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.”*** This prayer is most necessary for all believers in Christ, because here our arch-enemies, the devil, the sinful world, and our sinful flesh, still give us so much trouble. Believers in Christ pray for an end to this sinful life, for sin spoils everything. We long for the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ at the end of days, just as the people in the southern part of Palestine, a dry, desert region called the Negev, waited anxiously for the end of the dry season and the beginning of the spring rains.

Together with his prayer, the psalmist also expresses a promise for the future: ***“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”*** The mention of sowing seed reminds us of the parable Jesus told of the sower and the seed. Some of the seed, Jesus said, fell on hard, unproductive ground and did not bring forth a crop. Jesus explains: ***“The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.”*** Luke 8:11-13 So today, some of the preaching falls on deaf ears, and the devil is ever active in trying to take the Word out of our hearts. Still others, Jesus says, hear the Word, ***“but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.”*** Luke 8:14 For all believers in Christ, those concerned with the spreading of the Gospel, and especially the pastors and leaders in the church, it is a tearful thing to see that so many reject the Gospel and do not care about hearing God’s Word.

Yet, this sorrow also will come to an end. Our text says: ***“Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy.”*** Since we cannot look into the hearts of those who hear the Word, we cannot see if they believe. Therefore, it will be a joyful surprise on the Last Day to have the Lord reveal publicly who did believe while here on earth. He will make known the fruits of all our labors in spreading the Word. It will be a surprise, for we will see some in heaven whom we did not expect to see, but whom the Lord brought to faith through the Gospel. Looking ahead to that, we should be strengthened in our work of spreading the Gospel by these words of the Lord recorded by Isaiah concerning his Word: ***“It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*** Is. 55:11 This promise is why we can look forward to a fruitful harvest of souls. What a joy especially it will be to see those in heaven to whom we personally spoke the Word of God. Then it will be evident that no work or sacrifice for the Lord was ever too great!

May this promise in our text spur us on in our work as Christians, and may this also spur us on as we hear John speaking of what he saw in heaven: ***“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”*** Rev. 7:9-10 O how fervently we should pray: God grant that we be numbered among them in heaven, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

(Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for November 24, 1991.)