

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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First Sunday After Christmas, December 29, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 76, 19:5, 114, 234, 112:5-6.
Lessons: Isaiah 45:4-19, Romans 9:1-18, Luke 2:25-35.
Sermon Text: Isaiah 45:20–25.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Which of us doesn't have some kind of ornamentation, some kind of jewelry, some kind of decoration we wear? Necklaces? Rings? Pins or brooches? These things are made of gold, silver, precious jewels, and even made of wood, as our text pictures idolatry.

Does every piece of jewelry or decoration we wear have some meaning? Much decoration or jewelry we wear just because it is pretty or because we like it. But much jewelry has meaning and symbolism. I wear a ring on my left hand as a symbol that I am married. I also have another ring on the other hand which was a special gift and has a cross on it. Both those pieces of jewelry have meaning and symbolism for me.

Many of you wear or carry some kind of Christian symbol, such as a cross around your neck. How many people in the world just use the cross as ornamentation, as jewelry, but their lives don't show that they believe in and follow the Savior who died on the cross? For those who believe that Jesus Christ came to suffer and to die on the cross after carrying the cross to the place he was crucified, his cross is more than just a decoration, more than just a piece of jewelry.

Just as a Christian would not willingly want to wear a symbol of Satan, I often wonder why unbelieving people of the world would want to wear a symbol of Jesus Christ.

This may seem a strange introduction for a sermon. Isaiah has many messages from God in this text. The chief idea is:

TURN TO THE LORD! THERE IS NO OTHER GOD!

1. We see here God's invitation to be saved eternally.
2. *"In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength."*
3. *"Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save."*
4. *"All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame."*
5. All believers, Jewish and Gentile, are saved by God's mercy.

The prophet is told *"Declare what is to be, present it."* And what is he to present, to offer and give to mankind? He is to declare what the Lord God says. And the most important part of that message is the message of salvation.

God promised this salvation long ago, at the time of the first sin.

The message is that there is no other Savior, nothing that can save us from an eternity of suffering. *"Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other."*

God is the only one who can save. He tells us *"By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked"*. The Lord God, the true God has sworn, has taken vows that his words are true and they cannot be revoked and taken back.

This includes the message of his authority and power. He assures us that *"Before me every knee will bow."* Every human must admit that *"In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength."* This will surely not happen when sin is rampant in the world, but it will happen on Judgment Day. *"Every knee"*, every person who

ever lived will have to bow to the Lord on the day the Lord Jesus comes in judgment. All will have to admit that righteousness is found in Jesus alone. And unbelievers will be sent to everlasting shame.

God has told the truth and he has sworn to it. It may not happen on earth that every knee will bow, but it must happen on the day Jesus Christ comes in judgement, as we confess in every worship service, to judge the living and the dead. At that time every human who ever lived will have to admit, to their joy or to their sorrow, that true righteousness and salvation come only from Jesus Christ. ***“They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’”***

All those who doubted, who questioned the Words of God, who sought their own salvation, who thought they were smarter than God will be put to shame on judgment day. ***“All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame.”*** Everyone who has fought against the Lord will be put to shame, everlasting shame.

“They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.’” That is what we celebrate at the time the Savior’s birth is celebrated. December 25, “Christmas Day” is celebrated by many around the world, although they may have no clue what Christmas is really all about.

By today, at the end of December, people of the world are turning to the next season, the next thing, the next way to use and celebrate the things of this world. They are putting away the things they decorated with and celebrated Christmas with to look at the next way to celebrate and to honor this earth and its possessions,

But believers will say ***“in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.”***

Isaiah writes ***“But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.”*** Israel, the descendants of Abraham, were the first to whom the promise of salvation was sent and given. But who is really ***“all the descendants of Israel”***?

God’s gracious invitation is to come to him and be saved eternally. Isaiah invites all mankind. God promised Abraham that ***“all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”*** (Genesis 12:3, NIV84) The head of Satan would be crushed for all mankind.

Isaiah explains that with the words ***“Gather together and come; assemble, you fugitives from the nations.”*** In that invitation to all peoples we see the picture of fugitives. Fugitives are those who are fleeing, running away from something. And isn’t there enough in the world to run away from? We who believe in Jesus are fugitives from the power of Satan, from death, from hell. Christians are even fleeing from every appearance of evil. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: ***“test everything. Hold on to the good. Keep away from every kind of evil.”*** (1 Thessalonians 5:21–22, EHV)

Isaiah then speaks of all those who do not believe in or even know about the true God. ***“Ignorant are those who carry about idols of wood, who pray to gods that cannot save.”***

And what kind of gods do people bow down to? Do you remember what you learned about the first commandment and idolatry? What kinds of things become idols to people? Possessions? The human body? Praise and honor from men? Think of all the things that are so important in the lives of people!

Idolaters are ignorant of the real truth. How many people are really ignoring what God says? They do not know or believe what God says. That makes them ignorant. We read in First Corinthians: ***“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:18–25, NIV84)

Isaiah is not the only one who is to ***“Declare what is to be, present it.”*** You who know the truth of God’s Word are to declare it, to declare the whole truth of God’s Word. God says that there will be judgment, yes, but also every day before that moment of judgement, salvation is offered to all mankind. We have just celebrated the day when God’s salvation came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Yet the ignorant, the unbelievers, will ***“take counsel together.”*** They will gang up on Christians. Yes, God says, let the ignorant take counsel together – and isn’t that exactly what they’re doing, with all their attacks on God’s truth, and their presenting the so-called “truths of the world”? To them God is not the measure of all things. God is not the message. Their message is ‘Man is the measure’ of all things, not God. Men are convinced that humans can do anything. Humans think that they will conquer diseases, even permitting them to continue in the sinful behavior which causes diseases. Think of sins against the Sixth Commandment! Man thinks that man and his solutions will prevail. Man thinks that man will conquer and control the changes in the world: climate, violence, destruction of the environment, nation warring against nation. Yet we know that man cannot bring about peace among men. Jesus himself said ***“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.”*** (Mt. 24:6–7, NIV84)

Sin is the reason and the cause of wars and rumors of wars, of fighting among men, of discord among nations and between individuals. And sin will exist until Christ comes in judgement.

God asks here ***“Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the distant past? Was it not I, the Lord?”*** Didn’t God declare truth from the beginning? Didn’t God’s promises begin at the time man first sinned? Yes, God, the Lord, declared the truth. And that truth includes the fact that ***“there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.”***

There is no one else who can save mankind. Mankind is looking for some kind of saviors, some kind of leaders for all the problems in the world but God is the only one who can really save man, even from himself, and it is a salvation which will take us out of this world of sin, sorrows, and tears.

The prophet relays this appeal from God: ***“Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.”*** This is a plea to mankind in all the world: turn to the true God. There is no other God. There is no god who can do what the true God has done, does right now, and will do tomorrow and forever: save mankind and take them out of this vale of tears and sadness and strife.

Listen again to our hope: ***“But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult.”*** Is that only the physical descendants of Abraham, those who have Jewish blood? Paul in Romans, especially in chapters 9, 10, and 11, laments that many of his people, the Israelites, have abandoned Jesus Christ as Savior. He writes about how he wishes that all who are physically Israelites, children of Abraham would be saved eternally. But God makes it clear that you don’t have to be physically an Israelite, of Jewish blood, to be saved eternally.

In our Epistle lesson you heard of all the blessings that Paul’s own people the Israelites had received from God. Yet he wrote ***“For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.”*** (Romans 9:6, NIV84) ***“In other words, it is not the natural children who are God’s children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham’s offspring.”*** (Romans 9:8) ***“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.””*** (Romans 9:14–15)

“As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”” (Romans 10:11–13)

And we close our sermon from Isaiah with Paul’s doxology in Romans: ***“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”*** (Romans 11:33–36)