

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Pentecost 5 series C. June 27, 2010
Zechariah 13:7 to 9



“Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The LORD is our God.’”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

George Orwell had an idea that he wrote down back in 1944. Then during 1947-48 – while suffering from tuberculosis – with painful difficulty breathing – coughing and choking – in Scotland – George Orwell wrote a novel called 1984! George wrote about what the world might be like some 40 years into the future. How well did he do? George wrote about Big Brother watching you. Not to be paranoid – but – the last time you were in the airport – have you looked around? There are surveillance cameras everywhere! There are security cameras in the parking lot – cameras where you go through security – where they make you take off your shoes – where they run your carry-on luggage through a scanner – where they may have you stand in a machine that can see through all your clothes! There are security cameras in the bank – that film you making deposits and cashing checks. There are security cameras in the gas station mini-mart filming you buying a Mt. Dew or a cup of coffee! There are metal detectors in schools. There are cameras at intersection traffic lights. Big Brother is watching! George Orwell wrote about *Newspeak*. Do you know what that is? It’s when you use words to cover up the truth! It was many years ago – that missiles were called *peace keepers*! There is collateral damage. When you drop a bomb or fire artillery or a predator drone fires a missile and there is collateral damage – do you know what that is? It’s not property. It’s not things and stuff – it’s people – women and children are collateral damage – people that got killed that you didn’t intend to kill. It doesn’t sound as bad. George Orwell – 66 years ago – wrote about today! You might think that’s pretty amazing. But it’s nothing – compared to what Zechariah did. Zechariah wrote down the very Word of God. Some 536 years before baby Jesus was born Zechariah wrote about how Jesus would be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane – on his way to the cross to save us. Today God’s Word is powerful practical comfort and encouragement:

The LORD Is Our God!

- 1. Even when we are scattered**
- 2. Even when we pass through the fire**

The part of God’s Word we are concentrating on today is from the scroll of the prophet Zechariah. Zechariah was a priest. That was work you were born to. You had to be able to point to the fact that your father, grandfather and great-grandfather were priests – all the way back to Aaron! It wasn’t like today where almost anyone can grow up to be a pastor or teacher or staff minister! You had to be strong and healthy. I have relatives and friends who have fingers missing – with hands and feet and arms and legs that don’t work. You couldn’t be a priest – if

you were crippled or handicapped – if you couldn't take a big slab of meat and ribs and put it on your shoulder and carry it up steps and heave it up on the altar! Priests worked very hard at the Tabernacle and then in Solomon's Temple – offering turtle doves and goats and sheep and cows and bulls – countless animals – massive amounts of meat. Priests looked like the butchers who work at the meat market – their chest and arms and tummy red and orange from the meat of the sacrifices. People like Zechariah knew in the most literal way – **the wages of sin is death.** They knew in the most literal way – **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.** People like Zechariah knew the smell of the bitter smoke from fires burning all that meat – whole burnt offerings – sin offerings and guilt offerings and fellowship offerings – grain and fresh baked bread and the purest oil and the sweetest wine – all poured out – to give glory to the Great I AM – who promised to sacrifice his only Son – the ultimate Lamb of God – who would take away the sin of the whole wide world – the 104 billion people who have lived on this planet in the history of mankind!

People who heard the Word of the LORD through Zechariah would also be familiar with the Word of the LORD through Haggai. What would that mean to you – the Word of the LORD through Haggai? The name Haggai means “festal” or “festive”! That's not by chance or coincidence. Imagine Pastor Celebration or Pastor Joyful Worship! To hear his name was to be reminded of the Gospel! Imagine what it must have been like – after 70 year – 70 long years of living in Babylon – just about the time people had given up all hope of ever returning to Jerusalem. Why did it matter – returning to Jerusalem? It made all the difference in the world! It was back in Israel – in the little town of Bethlehem that the Savior was going to be born. It was back in Israel that the Messiah – the Anointed One – the Redeemer would be born to rescue God's people from all their sins. It was in Jerusalem – at the Temple – that God's people offered their sacrifices – to worship the Great I AM! Imagine what it must have been like when almost twice the population of Watertown would walk some 1,000 miles back to the promised land. Imagine people less than 70 years old – had never seen Jerusalem. Imagine what a disaster awaited them – to return to farms and homesteads that had sat in neglect for the past 70 years! It took the better part of 2 years to re-lay just the foundation for rebuilding the Temple. By then the Samaritans – those of mixed racial and even more troubling mixed religious background – people who were left behind – inter-married to the soldiers of occupation – whose religion was a fruit salad of Old Testament Scripture and whatever false gods and traditions that they knew – were mixed in. The Samaritans – for reasons of jealousy and bitterness and paranoia – complained and accused – to the point that the Persians brought the work to a screeching halt! According to God's plan – Darius the Great became King. Two years into his reign Haggai and Zechariah began to preach God's Word. By then the Jews were more to blame for delays in building than their enemies. With the encouragement of the King – the Temple was at last finished and rededicated!

The scroll of the prophet Zechariah has 3 parts. The first part has 8 visions – like 8 dreams while you are awake. These 8 visions are about hope for God's people – hope in the Gospel promises of God. Chapters 7 and 8 talk about fasting and feasting – times when they did not prepare and enjoy food – time that was supposed to be dedicated to repentance – painful awareness of their sins and painful self-discipline. There is talk about feasting – about celebrating the grace and goodness of God. The problem as always – was the people's hearts! That's always the problem – our hearts. The LORD wasn't really so concerned about who was eating and when they were eating. He was concerned about their hearts! **“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think**

evil of each other.” Zechariah 7:8-10 Don’t think to yourself – I’m not eating pita bread – I’m not eating dates and figs and pomegranates – I’m not eating grilled lamb chops. I’m a better person than you are! Be kind and thoughtful in how you treat your wife. Be kind and thoughtful how you treat your little brother and little sister. Be kind and thoughtful in how you treat the person sitting two pews ahead of you in Church. Be kind and thoughtful in how you treat the person who works beside you in the factory or in the office. Be kind and thoughtful – not because *it’s nice to be nice to the nice*. Show kindness and forgiveness for Jesus’ sake!

The last two chapters are two great oracles – literally two great *burdens* – two messages from the LORD that once you know them weigh heavily on your heart and conscience and mind! The oracles – the burdens are about Jesus – the Messiah – the anointed King. In the first burden – the anointed King defeats the powerful enemies of his people – yet he is rejected by his people. In the second burden – the one we are concentrating on – the rejected King is enthroned and brings blessings to his people – His Church! **“Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the LORD Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered... *Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered...*** You know this Scripture! We read them every Holy Week. They are quoted – referred to in the Gospel of Matthew and Mark and John! Strike the shepherd – arrest and scourge and spit upon and crucify the Son of God – and the sheep will run for their lives! Strike down the Good Shepherd – put him to death – and the little ones – the lambs and the sheep – will all run away and hide behind olive trees in the dark. Strike the shepherd. Put him to death and the frightened little sheep will be eternally rescued. **“In the whole land,” declares the LORD, “two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it.”** Most will be lost eternally – but always the faithful remnant will be spared by grace – God’s amazing grace!

This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. It is tempting to think – if Jesus loves me so much – then he will surely use that power to keep me safe from all the potholes and all the speed-bumps of life. If Jesus loves me so much – then he will surely keep me safe from painful troubles and painful difficulties of life. But he doesn’t! And that’s when the devil tempts people to doubt! The devil tempts us to ask – even out loud – *“What’s the point of coming to Church every Sunday? What’s the point of reading my Bible cover to cover? What’s the point of saying my prayers all the time – and still people I love get sick and suffer and die? What’s the point? What’s the use?”* Jesus’ forgiving love does not mean we won’t have painful difficult sometimes **ALMOST** unbearable troubles! Remember the end of today’s Gospel reading. **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily – not his pillow but his cross – and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life – wants to do whatever it takes – to make this life comfortable – will lose it, but whoever loses – sacrifices and gives up this life for me – will save it – eternally!”** When we have times of trial and painful testing we need to remember how short – comparatively short this life is – compared to eternity! The 80 or 70 or 60 or 50 years or maybe even much less time than that – pales to insignificance – compared to forever in heaven! We are only here for a little while! The peace and rest and joy and safety of Heaven will last forever. We will not be tested beyond what we can bear. With the trouble will come the strength to persevere! All things – everything – even the most painful things in life – all work together for the ultimate good of those who love God! We will not only survive. We will not only endure! We will be blessed – even through the most difficult times! Those times will teach us and remind us – and show us – what really matters and what doesn’t! Life is not about “things and stuff!” It’s about the Father’s love – made real in Christ Jesus – who died and rose again to forgive all our sins! Life is about getting ready to go to Heaven! Life is about Jesus’ unconditional forgiveness!

I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" I got into my car on the way to Bible Class – and I listened to Educational Radio. An author was talking about the crime of murder – by means of *poison*. Oh, she said – people don't poison people near as much as they used to – back in the golden days of poisoning. Back in the day – you could poison people and pretty much get away with it – because there weren't the sophisticated tests we have today. Poisoning is an especially nasty way to murder someone. It takes time and planning. Nobody – in a fit of passion – poisons someone. You have to plan. You have to invest time. You need to look them in the eye – and give them the poison. You have to be motivated! She talked about how they used to call arsenic the inheritance poison – used again and again – to speed the demise of the rich uncle or parent – so you could get your inheritance! They talked about the lady who was offended by her friend who stole her lover – so she murdered them both with a wedding cake that had poison in the frosting! They said you have to have a cold hard heart to poison someone. And I thought of the devil. How cold and hard and murderous and jealous is the devil's heart. How he longs to try and poison us – little by little – over time. He would do anything to try and steal eternal life from us.

It was a long time ago that George Orwell wrote 1984 – Big Brother is watching. When you buy your groceries – do you swipe one of those little loyalty cards – *beep beep*? Somewhere – someone could hit some computer keys and have a read-out how many packages of bagels I have bought in the last 10 years – how many were egg bagels, how many were cinnamon raisin bagels, how many were multi-grain bagels and how many had sesame seeds! Someone could hit some computer keys and know how many little bags of rawhide chews and how many packages of Milkbones Daisey and Kirby have gotten as little treats when they come inside! There are badges you can wear at work – with a little computer chip in them – so they can tell how long you were in any one place on any given day. If you have On-star in your GM SUV – and you are in an accident where your air-bag deploys – someone in – I don't know – Atlanta, GA will know – and call you and ask you if you are ok? And if you aren't – they will use GPS to alert the paramedics where to begin looking for you! That's all pretty amazing. But it's nothing – compared to the fact that 536 years before the fact – God knew that His Son would be in an Olive Grove on a Thursday night – the wee hours of a Friday morning. That his innocent Son would be arrested like a common criminal and his weary and emotionally exhausted disciples would run away. God knew that his Son would die in our place to pay for all our sins – so we can live by him forever. The Good Shepherd is always with us – until the day we will be with him forever! Amen!

To God alone all glory!



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