

## St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz

December 29, 2013

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas series A.

Isaiah 63:7-9



### Praise and Prayer

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us – yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses. <sup>8</sup> He said, “Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me”; and so he became their Savior. <sup>9</sup> In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old.

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

It happened at the *Best Buy* in Augusta, Georgia. A customer is seen very clearly on a surveillance camera – stuffing a laptop computer under his jacket. When an employee confronted him – the shop-lifter became irritated. He knocked down the employee – drew a knife and ran for the door. Just outside the door were 4 Marines – collecting *Toys for Tots!* The would be robber stabbed one of the Marines in the back. Apparently not a very good thief – he wasn’t very good with a knife either – the wound – not too serious! When the police arrived with an ambulance – they treated the wounded Marine. They also transported the robber. He had broken arms – a broken ankle and broken leg. He will be getting a visit from the tooth fairy – it’s unbearably painful to sneeze or yawn and some of his ribs might be cracked. All these painful injuries – the police report says – were sustained when the robber slipped and fell off of the curb! Now – truth be told – isn’t there a part of us that says, “Good! He got what he deserved – that robber and thief – that assaulted and wounded a Marine!” Isn’t there a part of us that says – “I wish the bad guys always got justice like that – swift and sure!”? It’s easy to think – pound the bad guys – until we stop and realize – we too – are the bad guys! We daily sin much – and indeed deserve nothing but God’s eternal wrath and punishment. The precious good news – that we never get tired of hearing is – we are forgiven by grace – through faith – for Jesus’ sake. The Christ child was born to die on the cross – to wash away all our sins! This 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Christmas God’s Word says,

#### **We Belong To Jesus!**

##### **I. Jesus paid the price**

##### **II. Therefore we joyfully serve Him!**

Our reading today is from the second half of the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The second half is mostly Gospel – comfort that begins with chapter 40 – Hebrew poetry that says, “**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.**” Isaiah 40:1,2 We are concentrating on chapter 63 – beginning with God’s Day of Vengeance and Redemption. **Vengeance is mine – I will repay says the Lord!** Moses says in Deuteronomy – his final words of instruction before he died and God’s people went into the Promised Land! **“It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time**

**their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”** Deut. 32:35 Paul told the Romans, **“Vengeance is mine...”** The writer to the Hebrews said, **“Vengeance is mine...”** The LORD’s vengeance is so fierce people will ask, **Who is this – with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? It is I, proclaiming victory, mighty to save.”** **Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone; ...I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. It was for me the day of vengeance; the year for me to redeem had come.”** This is a violent picture of the LORD’s wrath against sin. There will be no escape from His fierce and terrible judgment.

Then comes the verses we are concentrating on. The heading is *Praise and Prayer*. They go together – praise and prayer. Sometimes people say – why should I come to Church? I already know that I am a wretched sinner that Jesus died on the cross to redeem me. I’m not going to hear anything I haven’t heard a thousand times before. The message is always the same. That might be true. And yet do we ever get tired of our spouse or our children or our grandchildren saying, “I love you!”? To think of Church in terms of what’s in it for me – also misses the point of praise – of worship – of thanksgiving! God’s Word says, **“I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us--yes, the many good things he has done for Israel...”** **I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD.** Who do you tell? Martin Luther said, *“First you tell yourself!”* Isaiah reminded himself of the kindnesses of the LORD. Pastors preach their sermon to themselves first – countless times before they preach it to their lambs and sheep – they preach it to themselves! Pastors and teachers – clay jars – Tupperware containers of the priceless precious truths of God’s saving Word! Pastors convict themselves of sins and painful failures – long before they step into the pulpit – to say, “Examine yourself in the mirror of God’s Word! Do you see iniquities – a failure to measure up to what God expects from you? Have you used the birth of the Christ-child as an excuse for drinking too much brandy in your egg-nog or hot buttered rum or wine? If your doctor told you to avoid concentrated sweets have you eaten fists full of fruit-cake anyway? Will you drink too many beers this afternoon then curse football players if they throw the football to someone wearing a different shirt from theirs? Will you spend time in a living room full of family that you seldom see – lost in your own selfish world – with a screen only a few inches big – oblivious to the people around you? Will you spend the remaining family gatherings avoiding the people you don’t like – gossiping about the people we feel oh so superior too? **Remember the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised...yes, the many good things he has done for you!**

<sup>8</sup> **He said, “Surely they are my people, children who will be true to me”; and so he became their Savior.** The disciple that Jesus loved wrote, **“We love him because he first loved us!”** 1 John 4:19 And again on the night he was betrayed Jesus told his disciples, **“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends, if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.”** John 15:13-17 To stay true to Jesus you need to stay true to his Word. That means very simply – read your Bible. Read Meditations. Read, For Such A Time As This! – the most comforting Meditations ever written – as chosen by Pastor Henry Paustian! If someone gave you money for Christmas – and you still

don't have a 2011 New International Version – get one. Get an e-Bible to read on your new I-pad. Read Forward In Christ! Read a Holman Christian Standard Bible. Read a NASB. Read an ESV A Lutheran Study Bible. Memorize Romans like Martin Luther recommended. Get some People's Bible Commentaries – and read those – and you will be surprised how often you can talk about what you read – with your co-workers and friends and relatives and neighbors! We will be children true to our Heavenly Father – the more we read and study and talk about God's Word! We will be true to Him – not because this new year we made a resolution to behave better. We will be true to Jesus because he will keep us true! That's what he does!

**<sup>9</sup> In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them.**

This is what Jesus' disciples called a hard saying. There are some technical Hebrew complications. And yet the powerful Gospel truth is clear. The LORD is talking about sympathy – about compassion – about empathy--about feeling someone else's pain. Do you know about that? Some people have more of that than other people. Sometimes sympathy and compassion come from a shared experience. There is distress in the Emergency Room at the hospital. If you have ever been in the ER you know what I am talking about. People scramble around someone on a gurney. With scissors they cut off their clothes – they start an IV. They put a Sphygmomanometer cuff around your arm. They put that little oxygen tube around your head – the little tubes pushing good clean oxygen into your lungs. They very likely will draw some blood to test. They may take x-rays. If the person being worked on is someone you love – they very likely will push you out of the room – pull those curtains around the bed and tell you, "You are going to have to wait in the waiting room." Someone very likely will take you by the arm and pull you away! That's distress. And sometimes the distress is spiritual--mental – emotional. Sometimes the distress is guilt and shame – or an addiction to drugs or alcohol or sex or porn. I read about a young man named Ned Vazinni died just the other day. He was only 32. He wrote a book about his life – about his distress called, "It's Kind of a Funny Story". But it really wasn't. Ned wrote about being depressed – and lots of young people took courage and found hope in what he wrote. But in the end it wasn't enough! The Dahli Lama's The Art of Happiness is exceedingly clever and insightful. But there is ultimate hope and complete forgiveness in the name of Jesus and no one else! In your distress Jesus too was distressed – and with the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross he saved us! That's what this verse means!

**<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised...** In

Stow, Ohio, there is a place called the *Nervous Dog Coffee Bar*. A man ordered a cup of coffee – and while the barista – the coffee shop worker turned her back on him – the man reached into the big plastic jar for tips and grabbed as many dollar bills as he was able – and smushed them deep into his pocket. When the workers realized what he had done – they had pity on him. Instead of calling the police who would surely have arrested him – they put the video of the robbery on Facebook. Then they put up a sign that said they were organizing a food drive for this obviously desperate man. The first person to donate? The person who was working when the money was stolen. Last I read – they had at least 3 boxes of food – and they would deliver them – if they just knew where to take them. And while they were at it – they decided to give free coffee to this desperate man for the rest of the year! How about that? That's kindness! Some people criticized. They said you should have to pay for your mistakes! Don't do the crime if you can't do the time. And I get that. But maybe – just maybe – there is also room for forgiveness. Forgive the people who have hurt us. Forgive the people who have made a mistake and done something wrong. Remember the kindness and goodness of Jesus – who was born in a stable and slept in a manger – in order to save us from all our sins. Think about the kindness that moved Jesus to be your Savior. Then go and do thou likewise. Amen!

To God alone all glory! \_\_\_\_\_