

Ash Wednesday/March 6, 2019
2 Corinthians 5:2-6-10 & Joel 2:12-19/The Time Has Come
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“...Behold, now is the favorable time...”

The time has come. The day has arrived. The time has come to be reconciled to God. Now is the favorable time. The day of our salvation is here; now is the day of salvation. The day and time have come for you to return to the Lord your God. The Lord says through the prophet Joel in tonight's Old Testament reading [Joel 2:12-13]: “‘Yet even now,’ says the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.’ Return to the LORD your God...” The time has come, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, to repent. Today is the day, for today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the penitential season of Lent. Through these forty days we will intensely and intentionally spend our time examining our own sinful nature and our need to repent. The mood is somber. The hymns darker and reflect our need for a Savior from our sins. The readings take on a different tone, from the God in man-made manifest to the Suffering Servant. No matter where you look, the new reality is inescapable; you and I need to repent, turn around and return to the Lord our God, and be reconciled to Him.

We need to be reconciled to God. Yet we cannot. We cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to Him, for we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment. We cannot turn to the Lord our God, nor can we return to Him, for by our sins we are alienated from Him. We are strangers before Him. Now is the day of salvation, for the kingdom of God is here, but we place ourselves in danger of being forever separated from the Lord, of spending eternity in hell. As long as we continue to live in our sins and not seek forgiveness from the Lord, we will never

be reconciled to God. We are not capable of doing this by ourselves. We cannot make things right with Him; we only make our situation worse. We must examine ourselves and know our own sinfulness. If we do not, we cannot worthily come to the Lord's Table and receive His body and blood. How can we examine ourselves? We may go to Luther's Small Catechism, where in Section Four he gives us "Christian Questions with Their Answers: Prepared by Dr. Martin Luther for Those Who Intend to Go to the Sacrament." Luther lists 20 questions, each with an answer based on the Scriptures. From this section Luther asks the following questions that we may ask ourselves: "Do you believe that you are a sinner? Yes, I believe it. I am a sinner. How do you know this? From the Ten Commandments, which I have not kept. Are you sorry for your sins? Yes, I am sorry that I have sinned against God. What have you deserved from God because of your sins? His wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation" (Questions 1-4). At the end of the questions is a note, which states thus: "These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and devout Dr. Martin Luther for both young and old. Let each one pay attention and consider it a serious matter, for St. Paul writes to the Galatians [Gal 6:7] "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap."

Under the chief part of the Catechism on Confession, Luther asks, "What sins should we confess?" He answers, "Before god we should plead guilty of all sins, even those we are not aware of, as we do in the Lord's Prayer; but before the pastor we should confess only those sins which we know and feel in our hearts." Luther follows with the question: "Which are these?" He answers, "Consider your place in life according to the Ten Commandments: Are you a father, mother, son, daughter, husband, wife, or worker? Have you been disobedient, unfaithful, or lazy? Have you been hot-tempered, rude, or quarrelsome? Have you hurt someone by your words or deeds? Have

you stolen, been negligent, wasted anything, or done any harm?” We need to examine ourselves in the light of the Ten Commandments, and we will see every time we fall far short of the glory of God and far from being reconciled to Him. We need to turn to Him and return to Him, confessing our sins to Him and imploring His forgiveness. This is what repentance is all about: turning our backs on our sins and turning to the Lord for forgiveness, asking for the Holy Spirit’s help so we may no longer remain in our sins. We cannot and dare not delay any longer, for, “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (6:2b).

This is most certainly true, for, as the Lord says through the prophet Isaiah [Isa 49:8] and the apostle St. Paul [2 Cor 6:2], “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” The time for our salvation has come. The Lord has heard our cry, and He has delivered us. Salvation unto us has come by God’s free grace and favor [Rom 5:6-11], “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Yes, we are reconciled to God, reconciled through the blood shed on the cross by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us, lost and condemned persons, purchased and won us 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 suffering and death (Second Article). Through the blood of

Christ, we are reconciled and forgiven. He has restored to us the joy of His salvation, and He upholds us by His generous, His free Spirit.

We walk by faith and not by sight. Through our faith in Jesus Christ we have seen our Lord as He comes to us this evening through His Word. Through this means of His grace and by the Holy Spirit it work in us, we join Simeon in the Temple as he beheld the infant Jesus and as we prepare to leave this house of worship, singing the Nunc Dimittis: “Lord, now let Your servant go in peace; Your word has been fulfilled. My own eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared in the sight of every people: A light to reveal You to the nations and the glory of Your people Israel.” Now is the accepted time, even as we pray this evening. Now is the day of salvation, even on this Ash Wednesday in the Year of our Lord Two Thousand Nineteen.

The time has come. Our salvation comes in the Person of Jesus Christ and through the blood He poured out on the cross for us. We are saved and forgiven. We are restored to a right relationship with God. We are reconciled to Him, for God “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” The Lord who knew no sin took your sin upon Himself and became your sin so that He would reconcile us to God in Him, for God [Joel 2:13b] “...is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” Thanks be to God He gave us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. He comes to you with words of forgiveness, and where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. Now is the day of salvation. Now is the day of forgiveness. Now is the day of eternal life for you. Soli Deo Gloria! Glory to God alone!