

First Sunday after Christmas/December 29, 2019  
Isaiah 63:7-14/Children of God  
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church  
Pastor Jerry Stobaugh

“Surely they are my people...”

In our Old Testament reading, the prophet Isaiah says, “I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”

He goes on to speak of God’s good and compassionate acts. God called Israel to be His people, to be His children who will not be false to him. He became the Savior of Israel, since He claimed them as His own. When His people were distressed, God was distressed. When they were in trouble, God sent the angel of His presence to save them. In love and mercy God redeemed them, by bringing them out from slavery. In compassion and kindness, He lifted and carried them through all the days of old. He would not do otherwise, for God made the people of Israel His children. By God’s grace, they were Children of the Heavenly Father.

What was true of Israel’s past, is true of Israel today. We, the Church of Jesus Christ, are God’s Israel. All these acts of kindness, God did and continues to do for us. In His compassion and kindness God called us to be His people. He called you and me to be His sons and daughters. He became our Savior and claimed us as His own. When we are distressed, God is distressed. When we are in trouble, God sends the angel of His presence to save us. In love and mercy, He bought us from slavery to sin. He lifts us and carries us throughout all the days of our lives. God would never do otherwise, for He made us His children. We, too, are Children of the Heavenly Father.

Again, what was true of Israel in the past, is also true of you and me, the Israel of today. Isaiah says, “But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them.” Almost from the very beginning, Adam and Eve rebelled against God. They were disobedient and ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Throughout all history, God’s people have been no different. In Egypt, Moses killed a man and fled to avoid punishment. Once across the Red Sea, Israel molded idols from their jewelry and bowed down to the golden calf. All through the desert Moses dealt with rebellion and sin, just the way we do today.

From the very beginning of our lives, we rebel against God. We cannot reach the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, yet we strive to do so. We reach out for idols of our own making, trying desperately to find something to lead us into salvation of our own making. We take our own possessions, and like the Israelites, throw them into the fire in hopes of finding the God who carried us through all our troubles; and when God calls us on our idolatry, we make sinful excuses. You and I, even as God’s children rebel and grieve the Holy Spirit.

As sinners, we bring the wrath of God upon us, body and soul. Every time we sin, we make God our enemy. Because God hates sin. God sees sin in us, and so He turns against them. He fights against them in us because He hates to see His children fall into sin. God hates sin so much because He knows where they lead if unchecked, [Rom 6:23a] “...the wages of sin is death”. Our rebellion makes God our enemy. Our rebellion leads us to death and hell and breaks the bond that makes us Israel, Children of the Heavenly Father.

But, praise be to God our Epistle reading says, [Gal 4:4-7] “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of

woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” God himself mended the bond that makes us His children. He did so by sending Jesus, to be born of Mary. Jesus Christ, the child in the manger is the Angel of God’s Presence, come to save us. Christ is the Angel of the Lord, come to redeem us in love and mercy. Christ is the Angel of God, who comes and lifts us out of the pit of sin and carries us into the kingdom of God. Just as in the days of old, God became our Savior. He sent the Spirit, which we grieved by our sin, into our very hearts to move us to repentance. St. Paul testifies, [Rom 8:15-16] “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

The Holy Spirit makes us call out, “Abba. Father. Save us from our sins.” The Holy Spirit cries out, “You are the children of God.” By the working of His Holy Spirit, we do cry to God our Father, and by the same spirit we hear the Father’s response. He says, “You are my holy children.” In his grace, God saves us from our sinful act of rebellion and mends the bond of sonship we broke by our sin.

During this season of Christmas, God calls on us to look back; To do as Israel did in the days of old, “Then he remembered the days of old, of Moses and his people.”

We look back upon the days when Moses led God’s people out of slavery by the hand of God. We look back at all the sins we have in common with the people who fled Pharaoh and his mighty army. We look back and see all the kindnesses of the Lord granted to His

children. As Israel, redeemed by God, we also look back to a time not so long ago as the Exodus. We look back to the day of our own baptism, when the devil was driven out of us. We also look back to the birth of Christ; when the time had fully come and we were all given the inheritance of children of God. In faith, we, as the children of God, look back in the Scriptures to the days of old when Christ was born, and the Holy Spirit gives us answers to the questions that conclude our reading from Isaiah.

Where is he who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of his flock? He is in the manger, quietly sleeping beside his blessed mother. Where is he who put in the midst of them his Holy Spirit? He is right here in the water and the Word of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Who caused his glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? He is here even in our own hands as we partake of his body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar. Who divided the waters before them to make for himself an everlasting name? He is in heaven, at the right hand of God. He is ascended, glorified after His death on the cross and resurrection from the tomb. He is here, in His Word, proclaiming His everlasting name to generation after generation of His children. Who led them through the depths? He is here, lifting us out of the depths of the waters of Holy Baptism, daily drowning our old self by His blood shed on the cross. He is here, cleansing every sinner in His midst by the power of His everlasting intercession before the Father in heaven. Christ is here, and in His grace, even this very moment He is raising us up to an everlasting life of blessedness and love.

Where is God? He is here in His Holy Word, leading us like horses in open country and holding us up so we do not stumble. He is here in His Divine Sacraments, guiding us like cattle down onto the plain to feast in awe on his holy gifts. He is here, in his Son, Jesus Christ, the Angel of His presence, and He gives us rest for our weary souls in

the Spirit of the Lord. God comes in His kindness and compassion. He came in flesh and blood, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem us who were born under the law, so we may receive the full rights of children of God. Simply put, Christ our God, through His Word and Sacraments makes you a child of the Heavenly Father and therefore you will live with God in the new heavens and new earth forever. Soli Deo Gratis!