

THE GRACE OF GOD HAS DAWNED

Titus 2:11-14

Listen to the modern cry of despair, "Look what the world has come to!" Now listen to the joyful shout of the early Christians, "See what has come to the world!" Look, God has made bare His great heart. Look at this Scripture text which sets before your eyes the radical nature of the Incarnation. His great favor toward us sinners is disclosed in the act of sending His Son; the Word of grace and truth becomes flesh. In this act of Jesus' birth, God reveals His determination to restore us again to Himself; to make us receivers of His life and His destiny. We need God for every moment and every day of our lives.

It is related of Michaelangelo that when he came down from the scaffolding, from which he had for some weeks been painting the frescoes of a high ceiling, he had become so accustomed to looking upward that it was with real pain he forced himself to turn his eyes to the ground. Would that we might evermore be so arrested and held by the countenance of God's love that we could never be satisfied to turn our eyes from His face.

Today, through St. Paul, we fix our eyes of faith upon Him Who is the Way to peace and joy and triumph, the best preparation for the delights of the life to come when we shall see Him face to face. Now we fix our eyes on Him in His Son as He assures us that we can receive Him to ourselves, for today the grace of God is dawning, calling us back to God, offering us new life with Him and encouraging us to hope.

I. Calling us back to God.

Did you know that God invites you to turn to Him in a special way, that God invites you today? Many people do not recognize this invitation of God, and for various reasons they do not always respond to God's call. Some are afraid of Him. Even as at the first man's fatal fall into sin he hid himself from his Maker, because he was afraid, so people are afraid today. Others may feel too small to be noticed. They feel nobody cares. They feel that God's good news is only for the strong and mighty and not for the despised and wretched. Many today have put God out of their lives, out of their thoughts and activities. The world lies in desperate wickedness. Man is estranged from God, in open rebellion against God, enslaved in their entire outlook and attitude and will under the prince of this world. The people of this world do not know how to come back to Him.

Today God's grace is revealed to us (v. 11). Today we see God at work laboring and struggling to give Himself {v. 14} to a world which has rejected Him and turned away from Him. To people who don't even deserve Him, God willingly comes in love (v. 11). His unsolicited, wholly spontaneous goodness comes to us (Acts 15:11; Rom. 3:24). We cannot even go one step of the way, and He comes all the way to us.

God wants to return to our hearts and lives. He does not want to frighten anyone, so He comes as a tiny, helpless little Child. He offers Himself in a tender, simple way. His love and kindness appear as a revelation—as something new and wonderful and unheard of. How could He indicate His grace better than by sending His Son into our world? His grace appears in the Incarnation. His grace could be seen and handled and touched. It can be recognized and understood. The grace of God as a saving grace lies personified in Bethlehem's manger. It shines from the face of Him in Whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, of the Child born unto us, Whose name is Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Yes, God's redeeming love shines in

Bethlehem's field, where the angel of the Lord appeared to the Shepherds and the glory of the Lord shone round about them and the majesty of God veiled itself in condescending grace, so that fear was turned to adoration by the message: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ, the Lord" (Lk. 2:11 cf. Rom. 5:15; Lk. 2:30). This is saving grace indeed, bringing "good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people" (Lk. 2:10). This is Christmas!

Through the Son, the Father calls us to become His children (v. 14). What greater joy can come to us today than to know that we are God's children! The story is told of a little girl who had a new baby brother born into her home, who everyday went to school to tell her teacher something new about the baby. One day she told the teacher about the baby's hands and feet; then another day she told the teacher about the baby's lovely eyes! One day the teacher said to the little girl: "Mary, what is the best thing that you know about that little baby brother of yours?" Almost as quick as light the girl replied: "The best thing I know about him, teacher, is, 'he's all mine!'" Happy are we as we hear the Father say also to us: "He's all mine!" "She's all mine!"

This miracle of becoming God's children came through the gift of God's Son Who brought us forgiveness of our sins. Christ is our Savior because He is our Substitute. He gave Himself for us and by His self-giving sacrifice in our stead, His perfect obedience, His innocence, suffering and death, and the shedding of His holy precious blood, He accomplished His purpose. "That He might redeem us" (v. 14) His blood and death were the all-sufficient ransom. By the payment of the price our deliverance was effected. The manger and the cross cannot be separated (Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:2; 1 Pet. 3:18). We have complete deliverance!

We need to be the people on whom the grace of God dawns, because we need His power for life. And this is what the forgiveness of sins does--it brings God back into our lives. To be forgiven is to have God's life and God's power and God's Spirit restored to us. This is the gift He offers us in Jesus--the forgiveness of our sins.

II. *Offering new life in Him.*

The power and efficaciousness of the grace of God can be seen in those who have become God's children. The end result of the revealing of the grace of God is the new life we now live before Him. The forgiveness of sins brings life, as Luther says, "Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation" (Luther's Small Catechism). This is a lifelong process of living the new life in the light of the full salvation brought us by the grace of God. In Luther's expressive phrase, "we have been liberated from the prison, but the stench and disease of the prison linger on in our bodies. Sin still clings to us, and so our whole life is to be a constant cleansing" (St. L. XII:123). The twelfth verse of the text represents the necessary successive stages of the Christian life. A return to our Baptism is suggested. There must be a death through sin, renouncing godless ways and worldly desires. This precedes the entry into new life. Having renounced the devil and all his works and all his ways, and denied all connection with worldliness, we receive from God the power to live a life of service to Him and to our fellowmen.

We cannot see God's grace; we cannot grasp it. We can be sure of it, though, when people live their lives under God, using His power for life. The new life that St. Paul describes is something that is concrete and can be seen. When someone has the wisdom of self-control, and a sense of responsibility shows itself in a pure and honorable conduct, we know they walk in "newness of life" (Rom. 6:4; v. 12). When we see someone actively engaged in promoting their neighbor's welfare and refraining from anything that would injure them, we know this is a just person (v. 12). When we see someone who

fears, loves, and trusts in God above all things, who honors and worships Him, who communes with Him in prayer to hallow His name, let His kingdom come and does His will, we know this one is a godly person (v. 12). This is the visible assurance that the invisible God is working in them. God's gift in Christ is a useful gift. It offers us new life, a new pattern for living, and a new power.

III. *Encouraging us to hope.*

In the final verse of this text, St. Paul describes the glad expectancy which is the ruling and prevailing thought in the lives of people who are looking for their Lord's return. You see, our life is set in the frame established by two termini, the first appearance of Christ at His incarnation and the second appearance in glory at the end of days. The Christian's life reaches backward and forward. Its motivation lies in the revelation of God's saving grace in Christ; its goal is the return of Christ (1 Cor. 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:23).

From the world's viewpoint there may not be much for which to hope. But for the Christian there is reason for hope, "blessed hope" (v. 13). We can manage to live in this world with all its problems. We can remain unmoved in the midst of all the upheaval and turmoil around us because we look forward to the fulfillment of this happy hope. We know that each day brings us that much closer to the day when we finally will see our Savior as He really is.

Now we move by faith. God's grace transforms us, reshapes our thinking, redirects our will, restores our sense of values, so that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts (Lk. 21:34) "we may live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (v. 12). And the power for all this? It is the crib and the cross and the empty cave. All the sublime facts of our holy faith--the saving grace of God, redemptive activity of Jesus Christ, and the expectation of the blessed object of our hope in the glorious second coming of our Lord—all these provide us overpowering stimulus for a life of eager devotion to God (Acts 18:25; 2 Cor. 9:2; Phil. 1:11; Titus 3:8).

In your faith wrought eagerness to devote your life to Him, God may call you to serve Him in full-time church work, as a pastor, a teacher, a deaconess, a parish worker, a church musician, a Director of Christian Education or of Christian Outreach. Ponder your calling in life. As you pray about it, talk to me about it, and read the Word of God in light of your consideration, God will guide you, and His grace will give you power for a life of service to Him.

My dear friends, the day is coming when Jesus Christ will be fully revealed with His Father as God from all eternity. Toward that day we strive; for that day we long and hope. Jesus heralds the dawn of that new day which is destined to end the rule of the night of death, hell, and sin. And that hope is in itself a special gift--the un-shakeable conviction that the grace of God has appeared in Christ's coming in the flesh and will appear again in glory. Amen.

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