

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the Old Testament, Psalm, and Gospel texts this morning, we hear a common literary form within the Hebrew community—the beatitude, or “blessed” statements. We should not be surprised to hear Jesus speak and teach using beatitudes, since it was a common way of expressing things in the Hebrew language as well as in the Greek. His words also bring into focus the words of the prophet Jeremiah and the Psalmist as well, given that the word *ashre* in Hebrew is frequently translated “blessed” or “happy.”

Here in the first Psalm, we are greeted with an initial blessing by the Psalmist. “*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,*”¹ is how it begins in Luther’s own translation. The NRSV, which we used in the liturgy, reflects the original Hebrew, even if the NRSV is not the literal translation offered by Luther. However, Luther’s translation helps us to understand the psalm a bit better.

In his lectures on the Psalms, Luther writes, “The first psalm speaks literally concerning Christ.”² In the use of the word “man,” the three understandings of the word are all applicable. First, Christ is a man because of his manly virtue. Second, he is a man, not a child, and third, he is a man because he has a bride—the church. Christ. Being pure and without sin, Christ did not take the counsel of the wicked—the Pharisees and scribes, among others—nor did he walk as sinners—including you and I—walked.

He didn’t even “sit in the seat,” that is, take the place of a teacher, as one of the Pharisees or scribes of the temple. Indeed, while the Pharisees and scribes created rules and regulations that they claimed followed God’s Law, the Law of Moses, they were creating rules that were in opposition to the

¹Martin Luther, vol. 14, *Luther's Works, Vol. 14 : Selected Psalms III*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, Luther's Works, 14:287 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1958).

²Martin Luther, vol. 10, *Luther's Works, Vol. 10 : First Lectures on the Psalms I: Psalms 1-75*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald and Helmut T. Lehmann, Luther's Works, 10:11 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999, c1974).

Laws set forth by God. For example, even though the 4th Commandment tells us that we are to honor our fathers and mothers, the Pharisees declared that the gifts and sacrifices in the temple were of more value than that which might be given to one's own parents, as we read in Matthew 15 verse 5. Here, as Luther notes, we have an example of the "advice of the wicked" being rightfully ignored, and the delight being found in living within the Law, honoring parents by taking care of them, rather than tossing another bull on the sacrificial altar at the temple.

The Psalmist tells us that those who follow in the path of the Lord, and live among the righteous are like "trees planted by the streams of water." Trees by the water receive the right amount of moisture, their fruit is abundant, and their leaves don't wither, even in the hottest time of summer. At the same time, those who ignore the ways of the Lord are like the chaff left over after the harvest and thrashing, and are blown away in the wind or burned in the all-consuming fire, as we hear elsewhere in the Holy Scripture.

But what does all this mean to us? What are we to do about all of this? Quite simply put, my friends, those who have been baptized in the flowing water of baptism have their roots in the good water, and are constantly being fed, and are strengthened and will produce good fruit, even in bad times. But even those baptized are at risk of being blown away in the winds if they follow in the paths of the wicked, act contrary to God's law and wishes, and place human deeds, works, thoughts, and desires before those of God. God watches out for the faithful, the righteous, but those who are wicked God will allow to proceed down a pathway to perish.

We are made righteous before God in our baptism. When we sin, even after we are baptized, we are acting outside of a state of grace, and need to be brought back into the fold—not because we have to do some work to make God love us again, but because we need to be reminded of the grace which God has laid before us by His act of love for us—the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. In his earthly ministry, Jesus modeled for us the godly life, an ideal that we human beings will never reach, but for which we constantly are called to strive. In his death, Jesus took upon himself all of our sins—indeed, all of the sins of the

world—as one final sacrifice so that those who believe in him and are baptized shall be saved—made righteous before God. In his resurrection, Christ defeats sin, death, and the devil in one final act of love and mercy for us poor miserable sinners.

So we, the baptized children of God, made righteous and fed by the waters of our baptism, come to the Table to receive the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord and Savior, not because we are perfect and sinless, but because we are imperfect and sinful beings, and need to be healed and made righteous and, through the visible sign of God's love for us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, are given a foretaste of the coming feast, a reminder that we are righteous and pure before God, even in our sinful human nature, and that we, like our Lord Jesus Christ, are happy—blessed—because we do not follow the advice of the wicked, or sit in the seat of the scoffers and unbelievers, but stand righteous and strong before God and the world.

So let us go from here back into the cold, windy world, and seek out those who scoff, those who tread on the path away from the streams and flowing waters, and do not meditate on God's Word, and bring them close to the water, back onto the path of the righteous, and into the family of God our Father, who loves us and wants us to be in a right relationship with Him. This is the Good News we are called to proclaim to the world. Be blessed and share that blessing. Amen.