

Sermon September 6, 2015

A Flourishing Autumn

Isaiah 35:4–7a



Grace, mercy and peace from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

This is September, as if we didn't know it. Of course we do, but what I want to say is that September is a month of a new beginning, school starts, and as if life revolved around the school, once children begin school, it seems that a refocus on work also happens, at least for parents who have children in School. Summer proves to be a time of brake and rest for many, from our activities at home, work, and even at Church, so September is a month of

regrouping so to speak, and with renewed energy plunge into a flourishing autumn season. After all, our Lord, our Creator intends for us to always be productive in all aspects of our lives, and this is the time to do so.

But September can also be seen as the beginning of the end, the fall season, autumn, the entrance hall to winter. Leaves will fall, trees will become bare, and anything green will soon be covered white, all that is alive will seem as if dead. Autumn is the threshold of winter, isn't it! Now just the idea that winter is coming, it makes my spine shiver, gives me the heebie-jeebies!

But with that a sense of nostalgia invades and either stagnates, kills, or simply disturbs our productivity. The realization that time has passed; we couldn't stop it, and the feeling that we can't do anything about it, leaves in us also a feeling of brokenness and even defeat. Depending on how you see it, yes September can be a good month, exciting for it is the sign of a new beginning and of productivity, or of stagnation and deadness.

But here we are today, gathered in Church, in this house of prayer, yet those two way of seen this month can reach us even here, yes even God's people. On the one hand we come to Church with the excitement that this is God's house and this is where we ought to be, but on the other hand the idea that church is just church can overcome us, leaving in us a sense of emptiness that separates us from God more and more, leading us in the way of death, spiritual death. But how can that happen? After all we are God's baptized people? After all here we are gathered today? After all we do pray and read God's word. After all we are His people! You might even say, it is not fair!

Not only you might say that, even God's people felt and cried because of what they were going through. Zion, Jerusalem, God's special people were being attacked by neighbouring nations. And it was by the hand of God for their sins, for their rebellion against God, for the mistreatment against each other and for a selfish attitude.

God spoke through the Prophet Isaiah saying: "People will oppress each other— man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, the nobody against the honored." (Is. 3:5)

The Prophet also said: "The LORD says, "The women of Zion are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, strutting along with

swaying hips, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. ¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald.” (Is. 3:16-17)

It was them, God’s people, that brought the evil things they were suffering now upon themselves. Because of their rebellion, because of their false worship, because of their life styles based on selfishness that now they were suffering.

But their suffering was leaving them feeling like fall, like trees losing their leaves, they were feeling they were on the threshold of winter, of death itself. They felt abandoned, weak and anxious! They felt robbed, weak, deceived, and oppressed.

Yet God, after turning away from them for a moment, comes to vindicate them, this is what we hear he was going to do, in our Old Testament lesson this morning.

Hear once more these wonderful words of good news: ⁴ Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.”

God sees the hearts of those who repented and came to their aid.

This was good news for the people of Zion, but it is also good news for each one of us, for those who feel like you are standing on the threshold of death itself.

That’s what sin does to us. That’s what the world does to us, that’s what the human flesh does to us.

Although we enter in this time of regrouping and of new start, we are constantly reminded of the world outside, and inside. Maybe it has happened to you, you feel excited about what is to come, a new school, a new project, a new house, or simply a new stage in life whatever that might be. Yet almost immediately your joy is sucked out by the thought and what we see in the world, or by what you have done in the past. There is your joy, gone, your peace gone, your happiness, gone! God intends for us to be productive in this season and out of season, but we can’t because we lack the energy, the motivation, the life as it were, to keep going.

All you feel in the end is emptiness and insecurity for you have been robbed, you now feel weak, deceived, and oppressed. Satan has deceived you, your flesh tricked you, and the world is oppressing you, no wonder we feel at the threshold of death! And it is not fair, but maybe it is!

And does God hear your cry, your cry for mercy and justice? Yes he does!

He did with his people of old, Zion, His special people. He does with you as well!

He brings justice in his hand, he deals with you in mercy, he does not repay for your sins as ought to be but in forgiveness he restores you into his family, after all your place is in his kingdom. You have a place in his presence but when sin reigns, sin robs of that place, but God gives you something else, he restores you.

And as he restores you in the forgiveness of sins, he in a compassionate embrace heals your soul and strengthens your weakened body.

The vengeance of the Lord came to Zion, but also comes to you. It is set – for Zion’s sake justice is done. And for you sake it is also done.

God's great justice is seen in giving His Son Jesus Christ as he gave his life for each one of us on the Cross of Calvary. There the payment of our sins was made, the fact is that God doesn't dismiss our sins and rebellion but he dealt with them, through His son he dealt with our sins.

There Satan was defeated; there sin was destroyed; there the world lost its power, no more threats for you His people. Of course, only when you allow those things to happen, only when we sin, that we lose our place in God's presence.

That's the bad news, because as long as we are in this world, we will be easy targets of sin, but the good news is that, God in his infinite grace will not abandon you. Instead God satisfies you. Instead, He does something for us and in us that we can't do for ourselves. God meets our inner needs. He quiets restlessness and turmoil. He ministers to longings. He soothes wounds. He calms fears. He satisfies our souls.

Now, every time you partake of the gifts of grace through word and sacrament, your justice becomes part you, there too, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives you hope, joy and happiness. No more sadness but makes you rich.

No more sorrow and sadness. He made us rich – isn't that what we hear in the epistle reading for today? "Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?" (James 2:5)

Listen again what he does in us: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water."

Looking forward to this fall? I hope that with this great news of God's justice and mercy in our midst, you can say, yes! I'm looking forward to it. I'm looking forward to take part in the work of God's Kingdom. I'm looking forward to a fruitful autumn.

I'm ready to treat others in God's love and great care. I'm ready to treat others not with prejudice or in selfish ways, but instead share with others God's love turned justice in Christ Jesus.

It is true, once we experience the healing work of Christ in his justice, in his mercy there is healing in our hearts and in our relationship as well.

There is the beginning of the recognition of the Glory of God

After all God's comes powerfully among his people, the question is do we allow him to, and when we do, he does marvelous things in and through us.

In His name, amen.