

Sermon Psalm 111 1st Sunday after Christmas Series B

Sermon: 1st Sunday after Christmas

Text: Psalm 111

Theme: Remembering the wonders of the Lord

Goal: Looking back and forward with confidence and thanksgiving as we move into a New Year.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: As we move into a New Year, the Psalmist invites us to Praise the Lord and to remember His deeds and wonders of the past and of the present, and to go forward in the confidence that “those who follow His precepts have good understanding” and will be blessed by the Lord in the New Year as we have been blessed till now. The Celebration of Christmas showed us that God is faithful to all His promises. And we know that the babe Jesus didn't remain in the manger, but He grew up, accomplished the task of salvation He had come to do, and He sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for us and guiding our path along His ways.

The wonders the Psalmist calls our attention to be remembered can be linked to the Apostle's Creed: God Father, who created and preserves us; God Son, who redeems us; and God the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies us.

I – The Creation

“Praise the Lord! Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.”

These words are engraved over the entrance of the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, England, where many great modern scientific discoveries have been made (ABC 715). When it was engraved, the founders of the Laboratory took the truths of the Bible seriously and dedicated their work and researches to the glory of God. Maybe

nowadays this inscription is nothing but part of the history; or, maybe, some of the scientists truly believe in the true God. Anyway, it is important for us to acknowledge that the work God has done is great and we are beneficiaries of His works. He not only gave us life, but He maintains us, as the Psalmist confesses: “He provides food for those who fear Him.” Luther confesses – and we confess with him: *I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition thereto, clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and homestead, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all my goods; that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which I owe it to Him to thank, praise, serve, and obey Him. This is most certainly true.* – Can we complain about the year that is ending? Maybe we didn’t receive all of these blessings; but we are still here and we Praise the Lord, because He is gracious and compassionate.

II – The Redemption

The daily bread, however, doesn’t assure us eternal life. Something more is needed. And the Psalmist praises the Lord because “He provided redemption for His people; He ordained His covenant forever – holy and awesome is His name!” This redemption came through Jesus. We have to go back to the Christmas story and see how the faithful Christmas’ characters received Jesus. - Mary acknowledged that the baby in her womb was the promised Redeemer when she sang: “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!” (Luke 1:46). – Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, said when his son was born: “Praise be to the Lord, the

God of Israel, because He has come and has redeemed His people. He has raised up a horn of salvation for us” (Luke 1:68,69). – The old people Simeon and Anna praised the Lord when they saw the 40-day old baby Jesus in the temple; and Anna “gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).

And when the Psalmist remembers God’s Covenant, we have to remember the New Covenant done by the blood of Jesus: The Holy Communion. “This is my body, which is for you; do this, in remembrance of me. This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Corinthians 11:24,25).

Luther summarizes God’s redemption in the 2nd Article of the Creed: *I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and delivered me 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, in order that I may be [wholly] His own, and live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.*

III – The Sanctification

Without faith it is impossible to enjoy God’s blessings and to praise Him. The Psalmist summarizes faith and its result in the word “fear”: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow His precepts have good understanding. To Him belongs eternal praise.” “The fear of the Lord” *doesn’t mean being afraid of God. Hundreds of times we read of the Lord, or His messengers, saying, “Do not be*

afraid". And this is one of the big messages of Christmas! *The "fear of the Lord" that we are encouraged to have is reverence for Him. That reverence means that we recognize His greatness and our smallness. It means that we put Him in the centre of our lives, and desire to serve Him and to walk in His ways. To have that fear and reverence is truly wise* (ABC 716). In short, it is our faith and our Christian life.

Luther confesses about our faith and its good consequences in our life: *I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith; in which Christian Church He forgives daily and richly all sins to me and all believers, and at the last day will raise up me and all the dead, and will give to me and to all believers in Christ everlasting life. This is most certainly true.*

Conclusion: As we remember God's care and kindness during the past year with thanksgiving, we also look forward to God's guidance in the New Year. We do some forecasts for our life, but we don't know what will happen. Will all of us be here at the end of 2015? I hope so! But God's plans are better than ours; even if He calls us to be with Him forever. We can only trust in Him, follow Him in obedience of faith, and go forward in the New Year in the assured confidence that He is with us and that He takes care of us. Nothing more is necessary. As Jesus said: "Do not worry about tomorrow... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:34,27). We commend our lives in God's gracious hands. "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:31,32). Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 28 December 2014