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Christ the King Lutheran Church – Cody, WY
Easter Vigil
March 30, 2024
Text: Psalms

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The underlying theme guiding the Wednesday Lenten services and now the services of Holy Week, has been the mighty deeds of God described in the Old Testament. I wanted to give special attention to the Old Testament because there is always a temptation in the Church to downplay the importance of the sacred writings composed before the coming of our Savior. More often than not, the neglect of the Old Testament is unintentional. There's just so much to consider in the New Testament!!

But there have been times in the Church's history, however, when opposition to the Old Testament was purposeful and intense. The most famous was Marcion, who lived in the 2nd century, so very early in the life of the Christian Church. He rejected the entire Old Testament and even some of the New Testament with heavy Jewish accents like Matthew and Hebrews. Even as the Church's lectionary grew and developed, Old Testament readings were the last to be selected and the least regular in their usage. Even in our own venerable *The Lutheran Hymnal* published in 1941, one has to look in a totally separate section of the hymnal to find suggested Old Testament readings to accompany well-established Epistle and Gospel readings.

And that leads me back to where I began. This year's Lenten and Holy Week services have given pride-of-place to the mighty deeds of God recorded under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. Tonight's service is a veritable feast in the Old Testament! Creation from Genesis 1, Noah's Flood from Exodus, chapters 7-9. The Red Sea deliverance in Exodus 14, the prophetic salvation promised to the world recorded in Isaiah 55, and that great, mighty deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in Daniel 3.

This is our history, our stories. They describe God's mighty work of creating us in His image to be lordly stewards over His very good creation. They teach us about the devil's treachery, man's fall into sin, God's promise of Savior, divine worship, and universal salvation offering to all. The Old Testament teaches us about the salvation promised exclusively in the Passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's simply impossible to think about Jesus without reference to Him being the Seed of the Woman promised in Genesis 3, or His Virgin Birth in Isaiah 7, or Him being the Suffering Servant dying on the cross in Isaiah 52-53, or His resurrection from the dead described in Psalm 16 and illustrated in Jonah and the great fish! Our Trinitarian baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus is Noah's flood and the Red Sea brought down to each baptized person. Can there be a better example of God's promise to be with us always even unto the end of the age than the fiery furnace? As the Lord God was with those faithful men, so He will be with us in life, death, and into eternity. May God the Holy Spirit grant us all the courage, faith, boldness, and humility of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

But there are other Old Testament Scriptures used generously tonight which I haven't mentioned. The psalms. The book of Psalms is our original and best hymnal, inspired by the Holy Spirit, to be read, studied, prayed, and sung until the end of time. Jesus prayed the psalms. Those 150 psalms cover the height and depth, breadth and length of all human experiences and God's mighty works of judgment and redemption in the world.

We used psalms in tonight's service after hearing God's Word. This is most appropriate. For prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are the right responses to hearing God's mighty deeds. We use the psalms in our Sunday divine worship services where they are strategically placed to give voice to our praise. The psalms are more than filler material moving us along to the next part of the service. Praise is the first and best response to God's Word.

Consider Psalm 33 used after the Creation account from Genesis 1 and 2. Psalm 33 begins with, "Shout for joy in the Lord, O you righteous! Praise befits the upright" (vs. 1). Praise befits the upright (i.e., Christians) for we

know from God's Word that we were created to live in and celebrate God's world. There is nothing more fitting and beautiful than for redeemed image-bearers of God to sing God's praises.

Psalm 29, used after the account of Noah's flood, guides us in praying, "The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over many waters" (vs. 3). God's Word works judgment and salvation often through the same event. The flood condemned rebellious man while saving Noah and his family. In faith, we hear God's voice of salvation over the waters of our baptism where He says, "This one belongs to Me!"

Consider Psalm 91, prayed after the Fiery Furnace from Daniel 3. In verse 14, we have this great promise in which our Father speaks to us as His redeemed saints, "Because he (i.e., the believer) holds fast to me (i.e., to God) in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name." As we face trial and temptation, we pray according to the sure promises of God. Because we have God's name given to us in baptism, and because God has worked His redeeming love in our lives, we know with courageous certainty, that God in Christ will deliver and protect us. Pray the psalms; use them in your daily worship.

As we prepare to celebrate with joyous reverence the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead, may His inspired words from the Old Testament fill our hearts, minds, and imagination. Psalm 46:8a, 11, "Come, behold the works of the Lord...The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.