

Holistic Salvation

2Peter 1:2-11

Ash Wednesday, February 14, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There is this God.

He has called you. He has called you through the recognition of His glory and excellence.

His glory is the manifestation of Himself however that manifestation may occur. His glory came to Israel in Egypt when He rescued them through Moses. His glory came to the shepherds near Bethlehem on the night when His Son was born. His glory was revealed when His Son was crucified and raised again from the dead. His glory is manifested throughout the world wherever the Gospel of His Son is preached.

In this preaching of the Gospel is also His excellence. His excellence is moral and merciful. He shows His excellence chiefly in the death of His Son where His excellence in morality and His excellence in mercy are met. God is morally perfect. He is just and true. I tell you not the least stroke of a pen, not the smallest letter will by any means disappear from the Law until all things are fulfilled. The Lord is at the same time merciful, full of compassion, and slow to anger. He abounds in steadfast love. That is why the cross of Jesus is the excellence of His justice and His mercy. His justice is met when His Son dies on behalf of a sinful world. His mercy is met because in that death He grants mercy to the whole world. It is therefore through this excellence displayed as His glory that He has called you.

Through His glory and excellence, He has given you honorable and great promises. He has promised you life and godliness.

When God promises you life, He promises you a holistic life. He does not merely mean rescuing you from death. He also means health, well-being, peace, and a life that functions the way that God designed it to function. This is why God promises you not only life, but also godliness. The two are inseparable.

Here is where we preachers need to confess to you laypeople our sins. One of the sins of us preachers is that we have preached and taught you in such a way that you view the life that God gives as a get-out-of-jail-free card. We have preached to you in such a way that the forgiveness of your sins is nothing more than simply God overlooking your sins so that you may be saved from your sins and given everlasting life. We have criticized Roman Catholics for teaching in such a way that their laypeople get the impression that they can live however they want during the week and as long as they go to mass on Sunday to get it all forgiven, they will be ok with God and God will give them everlasting life. We criticize them for this and turn right around and preach to you people in the exact same way. And you have learned it. You have learned it all too well. Many of you speak of having your friends and relatives baptized so that they are "covered." And then when I baptize the person in question that person has no more a relationship with God after they were baptized as they did before. We preachers have committed the gravest of sins in teaching you this. We are guilty of Pharisaism. We have traveled over land and sea and engaged in institutional evangelism efforts and then when we make a single convert, we make him twice as much a son of hell as ourselves.

So, let me repent in this pulpit here at the beginning of Lent. The everlasting salvation that God gives is not a get-out-of-jail free card. It is not God overlooking your sins as if they weren't all that bad to begin with. The salvation that God gives is life and godliness. These two things are inseparable. In the eyes of God, these two things are the same thing.

You see the problem with humanity is not that we sin and then we die. The problem with humanity is that we don't work. We do not operate the way that God designed us to operate. This manifests itself in ways that we humans and even the Holy Scripture divides into two different categories. The first category is sin. The second category is death. But whether you are talking about sin or death, you are talking about human beings not working the way that we should. We have lost functionality. We don't function the way that God created us to function.

God did not create us to worship created things rather than the creator. Since we worship created things rather than the creator we do not work that way that we should work. God did not create us to dishonor our parents or murder our neighbor. God did not create us to commit adultery or fornication. God did not create us to steal or damage another person's reputation. God did not create us to tell lies or to covet our neighbor's stuff. Neither did He create us to age. He did not create us to slowly get old and as time passes our bodies function less and less. He did not create us to die. There was no death in the creation when God called it good. He did not create us to rot in the ground somewhere in our graves. He did not create us to grieve and mourn over those whom we have lost. The reason that these things happen is that we do not work the way that we should. The anger that God feels toward this whole situation is like the anger that you feel when you realized that you just bought a lemon from the dealership and you are making payments on something that is going to cost you a lot more than you budgeted for. The car does not work the way that it should. It does things or fails to do things that it was designed to do. It decays faster than other cars and needs constant repair. It has lost functionality. We have lost functionality. Whether it is sin or death we do not work the way that we should work.

Salvation therefore is when God restores to us functionality. The one who calls you through His glory and excellences is the same One who gives you life and godliness. Life and godliness go together.

That means that not only is God restoring your bodies to life by healing and resurrection, He is also restoring you morally. He restores godliness. He grants that you worship Him only. He grants that you honor His name and the worship day. He grants that you honor your parents. He grants that you live in peace with your neighbors. He grants that you are faithful to your wife. He grants contentment with the things that are yours. Love does not delight in evil. Love rejoices with the truth.

He does all of this by His divine power. Only His divine power could do this. We cannot fix ourselves. So with His divine power God gives life and godliness. The two go together. They are inseparable. If God is giving you everlasting life, He at the same time is giving you godliness. If God is giving you godliness, He at the same time is giving you everlasting life. He does not give one without the other. The God out there raises the dead.

The full explication of the life and godliness that God gives is the great and precious promises that He makes. Whatever God promises will be life and godliness to you.

When God gives you these promises it is so that you will share in His divine nature.

Sharing in His divine nature does not mean that you become divine. Sharing in His divine nature does not mean that you become mini gods. When Luther says that you are mini Christs Luther is getting at something else. He is not suggesting that you suddenly become uncreated beings along with God. There are those notions out there in the world. They are not among us so I will not take too much time warning about them. When you partake of the divine nature it means that you flee the corruption in the world in lust.

Now first of all, you do not flee the corruption that is in the world in lust in order to partake in the divine nature. If that were true we would be preaching salvation by works. Rather when God makes His great and precious promises to you, it is because He makes those promises to you when He calls you

in His glory and excellence that you flee the corruption in the world in lust. One cannot flee from the corruption in the world in lust unless God has called you through the recognition of His glory and excellence. Without that we would have stayed in the corruption in the world in lust.

Now two things we must understand in this regard. First of all corruption refers to the decay of life. It refers to death. It is another way of talking about how we do not work right. It is another way of speaking about the slow decay of our bodies and our souls on the way to death. It is about death itself. It is about the corruption that destroys our bodies after death and returns them to the dust of the earth in accord with the curse of the Lord in Genesis, chapter three.

But corruption has another meaning and you know it. We talk about corruption in government and we are referring to crimes that our public officials commit. Corruption is also in the world in lust. And this lust is not simply the sexual lust that we think of when we hear that word, but it includes vastly more. The lust of which God speaks is what the old Lutheran theologians called concupiscence. Concupiscence is the desire to sin. Any desire to do any sin even if it is to worship something other than God is concupiscence. That is the lust that a person flees when God makes His great and precious promises which are revealed through the recognition of His glory and excellence.

So the God who calls us does not only grant life and godliness, when He does so we wind up fleeing corruption of all kinds whether by death or by lust. This is the result of participating in the divine nature.

As a result haste is made. Haste is made to obtain more and more of the divine glory and excellence for in these things there is an increase of the recognition of these things. In the increase of the recognition of these things God bestows life and godliness. In the bestowal of life and godliness we escape from corruption and lust.

Making haste to obtain more and more of the divine glory and excellence you obtain faith and in your faith you obtain excellence, and in your excellence you obtain knowledge, and in your knowledge you obtain self-control, and in your self-control you obtain steadfast endurance. This is the steadfast endurance that stands up under persecution. This can only be obtained with the prior self-control. With steadfast endurance, you obtain godliness. With godliness you obtain brotherly love. This is so because godliness is not an abstraction. God is not interested in theory. God is interested in the practical and the concrete. Your brothers are those people of the same godly community of which you are a member. That is why our congregation keeps a roster of her members. Brotherly love which is the result of godliness is not an abstraction that we think about without taking action. Brotherly love is manifested in the congregation between her members. So as you increase in recognition of the One who called you in glory and excellence your love toward the other members of the congregation with whom you commune and hear the glory of God will also increase. And with brotherly love will come self-sacrificing love.

The self-sacrificing love that God grants to you will be manifested in the brotherly love that you show one another. Real sacrifice before God is not loving someone who lives far away, but rather loving those with whom you attend the Divine Service. It is there with your neighbors who have sinned against you that brotherly love manifests itself in self-sacrificing love.

All of these virtues that God lists in 2 Peter, chapter one, come together with life and godliness. In fact godliness is one of the virtues listed. They also come together with the fleeing from corruption and lust in the world. They come together with the making of haste to increase the recognition of One who called you by receiving more and more of His glory and excellence. That is what you are here to do. That is what Divine Service is all about. And so you have made such haste. You have even come out on a Wednesday night to do it.

These virtues will not prove idle or fruitless in the increase of your recognition of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because they will not prove fruitless, brothers, make every haste to make your calling and election firm.

This is one of the strangest exhortations from God. Only He calls. Only He elects. And yet in spite of the fact that only He calls and only He elects, He exhorts us to make haste to make our calling and election sure. Since He calls us through His glory and excellence the only thing He can possibly mean is that we should imbibe more and more of His glory and excellence. And why not? Because in doing these things we will not stumble.

You will not stumble in your faith if you imbibe more and more of His glory and excellence. Find those places where His glory is made known and go to those places. Avoid those places who give glory to man and his accomplishments. Man can do nothing apart from God. Wherever His glory and excellence are there are the places where the recognition of God increases. With an increase in recognizing Him, there is an increase also in the virtues and you will richly obtain the entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.