

## **The Favored and the Sign**

Genesis 4:1-15

The Twenty Second Sunday after Pentecost, October 24, 2010

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You are favored! You are the favored of the Lord! He looks upon your sacrifices and He is pleased! He gazes upon you. He gazes upon you the way that lovers gaze into one another's eyes. He gazes upon you the same way that a mother gazes upon her new born child counting the fingers and the toes. He counts you to make sure that you are all there. He gazes upon you the way that an artist gazes upon the sunset that he is about to paint memorizing every detail wanting to remember all of it making sure nothing is forgotten. You are favored.

You are favored because you have the right sacrifices. You sacrifice to your Father in heaven your praises. You sing your praises. You sing to Him. You sing praise to Him. You have done as His Scriptures bid you to do. You sing and admonish one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. The psalms come in the Introit and Gradual. The hymns come at their appointed times. You sing and make melody to the Lord. These are the proper sacrifices to your Father in heaven. With these sacrifices He favors you. With these sacrifices He gazes upon you.

Do not question whether or not your singing is worth anything. God favors it. And if God favors it then what does it matter what other people think of your singing? Or do you believe that their opinion of your singing is more important than God's? And do not ask whether or not the congregation's singing is worth anything. God favors it. If God favors it, it does not matter what the assessment of human beings are. The only assessment that matters is God's assessment. Or do you believe that people's opinions are more important than God's opinions when it comes to how well the congregation sings? You are favored. You offer the right sacrifices.

You are favored because you pray. You pray to God. You have already prayed for the whole world this morning. You prayed for the peace of the whole world. You asked God to have enough mercy to grant peace to the whole world. You are favored because you prayed for all those who are worshipping here offering their worship and praise. You asked God to have mercy on them. You asked God to save you and to comfort you. You asked God to do the things that He so desires to do. You don't have to ask Him twice! You have asked God for the well being of His Church. God rejoices over His Church and so He rejoices over the prayers made about His Church. You have asked God to give you everything even though you cannot comprehend it all nor do you deserve it all. In spite of the fact that you do not deserve it, you have asked Him to give it to you anyway. Those prayers please God. They are a right sacrifice. God favors you because you have the right sacrifice. God gazes upon you.

God favors you because you have the chief sacrifice to end all sacrifices. You have the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross. On the cross Jesus fulfilled all sacrifice. From the sacrifice of Abel to the sacrifices offered in the temple at the time of our Lord Jesus fulfilled them all. He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. He was sacrificed for our transgressions. He was crucified for our iniquity. The punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. By His wounds we are healed.

In Leviticus the priest offers the sacrifice that atones for the sins of those who worship. Jesus fulfills that sacrifice. He is the priest. He offers Himself. When His blood is shed it atones for all those who worship Jesus. Your sins are forgiven. The blood of Jesus washes them all away. Through His blood you have redemption the forgiveness of your sins.

At Passover the family offers the sacrifice of the Lamb. The Lamb is sacrificed and the people are liberated from bondage to Pharaoh. Jesus fulfills that sacrifice. Jesus is sacrificed and you are liberated from your bondage to sin and death.

At Sinai the people made sacrifices and God formed a covenant with them and ate and drank with them. Jesus fulfills that sacrifice. When Jesus dies God forms a covenant with us. At Holy Communion we eat and drink with God. We eat and drink the sacrifice that was made, just like they did at Passover, just like they did with their peace offerings. Jesus fulfills the sacrifices. He fulfills them all.

You have Jesus so you have the sacrifice of Jesus. You have the right sacrifice. Because you have the right sacrifice, God favors you. He favors you as a lover favors His beloved. He gazes upon you.

Now it would be great to end the sermon here. It would be great to say Amen here. But whether you are in the book of Genesis or you are in the book of Revelation you know that there is more. The favored people are the persecuted people. As soon as God comes out and points to a group of people and says, "I favor them," there is fighting and warfare. It is even worse when both groups claim to have God's favor. Then they fight with each other to see who really has God's favor. It is unfortunate that is so true in today's day and age because God no longer shows His favor by granting victory and even in the Old Testament God did not always grant victory to those whom He favored. He will not always grant victory to you even though He favors you.

Those who are favored by God are persecuted. People hate those whom God favors. They want to be favored too, but they want to be favored in their own way. They want God to favor them because of who they are or what they have accomplished. They do not want to be favored because they have the sacrifice of Jesus. Those who are not favored resent it that God who choose to favor people only through the sacrifice of Jesus. Only through His cross comes life and salvation. Only through His cross comes forgiveness of sins. Only through His death comes eternal life for you and me. Only when Jesus dies do the holy ones rise from the dead.

People want God to favor them because they are good people. People want God to favor them because of the style and the goodness and the punctuality with which they make their sacrifices. They want God to favor them because they sing so well not because God gave them Jesus. They want God to favor them because they perform so well in church or wherever it is. They want God to favor them because they have lived so well. They do not want to be favored because of the sacrifice of Jesus.

For some reason that I have not figured out these people get so mad at the people whom God does favor that they will persecute them. The people whom God does not favor will persecute the people whom God does favor. Since God favors you, you can be sure that those whom God does not favor will persecute you. They will speak evil about you. They will accuse you of things that are not true. They will accuse you of racism just because you belong to Christ. They will accuse you of sexism just because you belong to Christ. They will call you names. They will call you stupid. They will call you narrow minded. They will call you rude. They will call you unloving. They will call you judgmental. They will call you intellectually ignorant.

If they can pull it off, they will put you in prison. They will organize political forces to oppose you. They will make sure that those who oppose Christ have the influence in society so that whenever any of those whom God does favor speaks in public they are ridiculed and laughed out of town. They will make sure that their boys and girls are elected to public office.

They will organize false religions. They will organize false Christianity. They will introduce a God named Jesus who is not the real Jesus but a false one. The Jesus that is the one that tells them that what they are doing is ok. The Jesus that they invent is the one who lets them be favored because of their

good works so that they can feel good about themselves. Their Jesus does not forgive sins. They do not want forgiveness. Their Jesus lets them save themselves. They do not let their Jesus save them. They do not want His sacrifice.

They will organize false religions that don't talk about Jesus. They will organize elaborate ancient alternatives to Jesus. They will work hard in society and in spirituality to eliminate Jesus from everything in the public arena. They will use whatever means necessary to accomplish these goals. And whether you think Islam is violent or peaceful, make no mistake, your adversary the Devil is not peaceful. He is roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

They will imprison you if they can get it pulled off. They will beat you and physically harm you, if they can get away with that. They will have you killed. They will murder you.

And in the end all of the societal persecution in the world does not satisfy them. They really want you dead. The reason they want you dead is because Satan wants you dead. He wanted Jesus dead, but look where that got him. They will kill you if they get the chance, if it is given to them to do so. The ones who are not favored by God will seek to kill and on some occasions they will murder those whom God has favored.

God will come with a vengeance. He will come with justice in His wings. He will come and He will deal with those who have mistreated those whom He has favored. That is to say that since God favors you He will take revenge on those who mistreat you. He will take vengeance on those who make fun of you. He will take revenge on those who abuse you and harm you. He will take revenge on those who murder you. They will become wanderers and vagabonds in the earth.

When God takes revenge there is damnation. There is hell to pay. When God takes revenge He does it in a grand way. He is God after all. When God takes revenge there is no way to stop it. There is no way to resist it. There is no way to put it off. And God does not even have to listen to an apology at that point. If God wants to take out those who persecute those whom He favors, who are they who can stop Him?

That is why when God comes with vengeance He also comes to save. He is coming to take revenge on His enemies. Who are His enemies? His enemies are your enemies because you are the people whom He favors. He comes with vengeance against those who oppose you. And when He takes revenge on them, you are saved. You are saved from them. You are saved from everything that they tried to do to you. God saves you from all of them. He favors you. You have the right sacrifice. You have the sacrifice of Jesus.

He will save you. He will damn them.

Now then, does anybody really feel good about that? Do you? Do you really feel good that a bunch of people are going to hell because they opposed you? They harmed you. They hurt you. They persecuted you. Do you really feel good about the fact that their fate is sealed?

Maybe some of us do. There is the old phrase that people in heaven won't be happy unless they don't know about the people who are in hell. But there are people out there who won't be happy in heaven unless they do know about the people in hell. Do you have a list?

Is there any hope for those people at all? Is there any hope for the everlasting salvation of those people who have persecuted you whom God has favored? After all Jesus has not returned just yet. He is not here yet. He has not arrived to execute God's judgment yet. Not all of those who have persecuted you have died yet. Some are still living. Some of your enemies are still alive. Is there any hope for them?

The answer is yes, but if God does not favor them now how will they know that God does favor them in the future? They will need a sign. God will have to give them a sign that He is merciful even to them for persecuting those whom He has favored.

Now God's signs have varied through the years. They are not all the same. On Cain we are not even told what the sign was. The sign for Abraham was circumcision. The sign for the Israelites in Egypt was the plagues that God sent against Pharaoh, the parting of the Sea of Reeds and the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. Those are pretty impressive signs. At Sinai the sign was blood that Moses sprinkled on the people.

When the people were in the land the king descended from David was the sign. The temple was the sign. All of these signs accumulated until Jesus came. Jesus fulfilled them all. Then Jesus instituted some signs of His own.

Jesus put out the sign of Baptism. Baptism is a sign of His mercy. Baptism is not merely an external sign by which a person is identified as a Christian. Baptism reveals to you the will of God. Just as surely as the mark on Cain revealed to Cain the will of God so Baptism also for those who persecute the Church remains a mark on those for whom God will show mercy, for those who will receive the Holy Spirit, for those whose sins God forgives. It is a mark that cannot be seen once you are baptized, but is a mark nevertheless. It is real nevertheless.

Baptism is not merely for those who already have God's favor, it is for those who need God's favor. It is not just for those upon whom God's gazes. It is also for those who have persecuted those upon whom God gazes. Saint Paul's baptism was quite an event for Saint Paul to say nothing of the fact that he actually saw Jesus.

Once such people are marked with Baptism, God will favor them also. If the favored of God are avenged by Him, those who have the sign of God are avenged by Him seven times over.