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Homiletics

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HOMILETICS

FEAST OF THE HOLY TRINITY

DANIEL

DAN. 6:26, 27

Proper Background

The *Gospel* (John 3:1-15) fits into the octave of Pentecost; it deals with the function and work of the Holy Spirit. It asserts that to know the Triune God is indeed a gift of the Holy Spirit. To know God, as the *Epistle* for today stresses (Rom. 11:33-36), is one of the joyous mysteries of our faith. The *Introit* is based on an Old Testament apocryphon (Tobit). The *Gradual* for today is based on another Old Testament apocryphon, the "Song of the Three Holy Children," a portion of which is included as a canticle in *The Lutheran Hymnal*, page 120. This particular apocryphal book is appended to the Book of Daniel, from which our text selection is made.

Introduction

"Daniel" means "God is my Judge." Daniel was a martyr, that is, a "witness" to his Lord. We are to be the "Lord's witnesses" in whatever comparable kinds of captivity and peril are found in our life. God is also our Judge.

The creeds of our church (today many use *The Athanasian Creed*, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, page 53) are standards of faith whereby to judge doctrinal purity. They also are standards against which our witness may be measured, for they spell out not only the details of our faith but also serve as expressions of our loyalty to our God.

God of All Gods

I. Our God Is a Living God

A. He revealed Himself to Moses as "I AM." He always was, is, and shall be. Consider the many "I am's" which Jesus spoke. $\text{E}\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\mu\iota$ in some N. T. passages

(John 8:24, 58; 13:19) means "the everlasting one."

B. God thinks; He acts; He creates. He is Father, Husband, Friend, Judge, Shepherd; King. All these pictures (Is. 54:5; Gen. 18:25; Ex. 33:11; Ps. 80:1; 10:16) are indicative of the fact that He lives (Hos. 1:10; Joshua 3:10). Christ is "Son of the living God." (Matt. 16:16; John 6:57)

C. Negatively expressed: God is no dumb idol; not inanimate, that is, He does not lack capacity for life; He has not departed from the men He made. He is vital, not mechanical. There is no diminution of force or activity or efficacy. God is living!

D. He gives life in creation. He sustains life in providence. He redeems life in His Son Jesus Christ. He lives! Death does not destroy God. The Holy Spirit gives life at creation and eternal life at conversion. By holy means the Holy Spirit makes holy people for the holy church. Forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and life everlasting are gifts of the living God. A living God for living.

II. Our God Is Steadfast Forever

A. He is unchanging (cf. Ex. 32:14) in His relationship with His people (Mal. 3:6). Empires, as the Book of Daniel stresses, may come and go Babylonian, Median, Persian, Macedonian, or Roman — but God is not moved or shaken.

B. His promises are "Yea and Amen." He changes not with years or circumstances. He wavers not as men do in fear. He swerves not from His course. His will is done.

C. His loyalty and faithfulness to His people may require long-suffering and patience (2 Kings 18:16), but His goodness and His kindness are sure. (Ps. 89:1; 138:2; 1 Sam. 20:14)

D. His $\text{T}\rho\upsilon\pi\eta$, steadfast love, is like a nut

within a shell, protected, preserved, sure, steadfast. It came to its fulfillment and fruition in Jesus Christ and His vicarious atonement. When our certainty of salvation, based on His steadfast promises, is demonstrated in our lives, we make His glory shine and His grace come forth.

III. *Our God Has Eternal Dominion*

A. "Forever and ever" He reigns. Daniel's God is not his alone. Heathen shall come from afar (Isaiah said) and acknowledge Him. Israel shall exalt Him before all peoples.

B. These last days in which we live will not diminish His rule even if men's hearts are failing for fear. The birth pangs of a new world are upon us, and the increasing frequency of the pains indicates we are closer and closer to the day of the birth of the new age of His glorious and everlasting kingdom. Then nations, kings, lords, angels, humans, living, dead, devils—all, all, all shall bow before the lamb upon the throne.

C. Those who acknowledge this will heed the edict of the King of kings and acknowledge, "The Lord, He is God." And the enemies will be cast into everlasting fire, even as the enemies of Daniel's God.

Conclusion

Darius the Mede, son of Ahasuerus, ordered all people to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. To make this God known to men Christ came to earth and the Spirit was given to the churches. We are His witnesses.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

LAMENTATIONS—A FUNERAL DIRGE

LAM. 3:41

Background

Today's *Gospel* (Luke 16:19-31) tells of the death of Lazarus and the rich man in parable form, and the *Epistle* speaks of confidence in God's love, which excludes fear

(1 John 4:16-21). The two may be blended in "Lamentations." A city is seemingly deserted by God, its population decreases from 250,000 in the eighth century B. C. to 20,000 in the sixth. Is there any hope that God will restore?

The funeral lamentation begins with Ps. 5:8: "Lead me, O Lord," or *Dirige, Domine*. It is from this opening statement that we obtain the word "dirge," a corruption of *dirige*. In death, in desertion, in fear, we need God's leading.

Cf. Lam. 1:20: "My heart is wrung within me," tumult and distress; 1:22: "my heart is faint"; 2:11: weeping, tumult, "my heart . . . poured out in grief"; 3:13: arrows in my heart; 5:17: a heart that "has become sick" with no joy. We may not share the suffering of Lazarus, but all this is common enough to all of us so that we must look to the Lord to lead us. Gathering in God's house, we lift up our hearts to God in heaven.

I. A Request

A. The writer of Lamentations invites us to lift up our hearts to God. He is aware that it may be that God will not forgive. (3:42)

B. "Let us draw near with a true heart" is the invitation extended at the beginning of our church service. Truth belongs to God. The Lord sees the heart as it really is, and it is not a pleasant sight. Gen. 8:21: "the imagination of man's heart is evil." Jesus: "Out of the heart proceeds" evil. Prov. 28:26: the heart cannot be trusted. Cf. Is. 29:13.

C. Baring the heart. Let the negative be developed. There is no hiding our secrets from God. Alexander of Macedon requested an artist not to allow the scar on his face to be seen in his painting. Pretenders and hypocrites are not wanted.

II. A Reminder

A. The writer of Lamentations encourages us to examine ourselves (3:40; 3:57).

Then we will want to lift up hearts to God in heaven. The heart is burdened, troubled. Memory is stirred and bitterness of regret wells up.

B. A patient with a heart condition needs protection and care. "Let nothing affright thee." The English Revised Version, 1881, translates Phil. 4:7 to read that the peace of God will "guard." Hugh Schonfield in his translation has that the peace of God will "stand guard." After we are reminded of God's Law in the sermon, we are further reminded that the peace of God shall "keep" our hearts. Today's *Gospel* tells us to rely on His words and promises ("let them hear them"). As post-Easter children we can also rely on "One who has risen from the dead."

III. A Response

A. Because we have lifted our hearts to God we will not be cast away. (3:52-58)

B. This response, we, too, speak in the *offertory*, that God would not cast us away and that He would create in us clean hearts. It was the story of a lamb that moved David to learn forgiveness from Nathan. It is the story of the Lamb of God that brings forgiveness to us. No man can cleanse the heart (Prov. 20:9). This God does in the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

C. Crushed and broken hearts have new life and spirit when told of God's forgiveness in Christ. We, too, can have and can bring to others the good news which creates new hearts and new hopes through the Word of forgiveness in Christ.

IV. A Restoration

A. When we are aware of what God has done (3:55-58), our dirge, our lament, is altered and becomes an anthem of praise and thanksgiving.

B. In the service we, too, are summoned to rejoice in our restoration, "Lift up your hearts." "We lift them up unto the Lord,

our God." It is in the *Sursum corda* that we respond in thanksgiving.

C. We who were afar off drew near at His invitation. We were reminded of His love, and we responded with our prayer and hope. He has restored us in His grace. He made it possible for tears to be wiped away. He has made us accepted in the Beloved.

D. Our thanksgiving and Eucharist is complete because He gives in Christ pardon and peace.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

EZEKIEL

EZEK. 36:22-27

The prophet Ezekiel and his message underscore today's *Gospel* thought on the great banquet theme. It is specially appropriate for members of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod who are experiencing some of this "banquet fellowship" in the biennial convention of their church body in Detroit from June 16 to 26.

Fear of God's Name

I. THE REQUIREMENT of the Prophet Is to Speak in the Fear of God

A. Voices from many marketplaces crying to people: libraries, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, telephone marketing, books, billboards. Who will speak *for the Lord*? The prophet must speak, "Thus says the Lord!"

B. Whether they hear or not, even as in today's *Gospel* (Luke 14:16-24), let them know there is a prophet in the land. Cf. Ezek. 2:5 and 33:33.

Counselors, consultants, public relations men can do their part to portray the image of the church, but the prophet's voice is needed today to declare His Word. On hills and valleys, in streets and alleys, thatched-roof chapels and gigantic cathedrals, storefront missions, high-rise apartments, that voice must speak. Iron curtains, bamboo curtains, apartment curtains—all need to be

pierced and entered. Lions, chains, swords, prosperity, poverty—nothing is to stop the march of God's prophets through the ways of the world crying out, "Thus says the Lord." Happy the people who have a prophet in their midst who speaks His Word.

II. THE RECOGNITION *Demanded of the People Is That They Know the Name of the Lord*

A. The importance of this is cumulative, for 69 times in Ezekiel the children of Israel are told to recognize "I am the Lord." Again and again the prophet exhorts: "Let Israel know the Lord; He is God."

B. And let all of us, all of the peoples of our world, know He is God. In their captivity, in the midst of sorrow and shame, even if they question whether there be a God, let all the world know "the Lord, He is God."

C. When they saw other gods, Israel wondered about the Lord whether or not He was God. Seeing other nations and their gods, some may question the necessity of sending missionaries to India, Ceylon, Russia, China, Nigeria, etc.

D. Convinced that *this* is life eternal, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3), we do everything within the power of our lives, our time, our talents, our treasures, our lips, our singing, our gathering together, to proclaim that He is God. Let nothing be spared. God controls, God saves, and without Him everyone is lost.

III. THE RESPONSIBILITY *Is Ours When We Fail to Fear His Name*

A. His name is holy (36:22,23). Disasters brought about by the sins of the fathers are not to be blamed on the Lord, as if He were the unholy one. It is so easy to blame parents or community for sin and trouble or even Eve and the forbidden fruit. The soul that sins dies. The son is not suf-

fering for the sin of the father but for his own sinning. (Read the excellent section, Ezek. 18:19-32.) I must bear the brunt of my own wrongdoings and sins. The responsibility is mine.

B. But God assumes responsibility not His own. It is God who bends down and comes to me. We get together in His at-one-ment. Ezekiel stresses the correctness of the judgment for sin, but God redeems. Now each of us has a new responsibility—to accept His love. By His grace we need not fail.

IV. THE RESTORATION *God Promises*

A. "Will the valley of dry bones live? (Ezek. 37). The answer of God is 'yes.' God's promises are Yea and Amen."

B. Jerusalem shall be called "the Lord Is There" (Ezek. 48:35); "the Throne of the Lord" (Jer. 3:17), for God does rule (Zech. 8:3); "the Faithful City," for God is faithful (Is. 1:26); "the City of Righteousness," for God is holy (Is. 1:26); "the City of the Lord" (Is. 60:14), for God protects.

C. Heavenly Jerusalem, the Zion above, is ours, not by our deserving but by His free gift. With His crucified, nail-marked hands He leads us to the holy, faithful, protected city, that we might be where He is. In its midst His name is holy, and it rests upon us. We are restored, forgiven, by His grace in Christ.

Conclusion

God summons us to hear His Word, to recognize and to know Him, to assume responsibility for right living, to rejoice in His restoration, and to know newness of life.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

(NOTE: Both Canada and the United States have national holidays at this time. July 1, 1867, or 98 years ago, under the BNA Act, the nation of Canada was born. July 4, 1776, or 189 years ago, by the Declaration of Independence, the nation of the United States was brought into

being. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people," writes Solomon (Prov. 14:34). It is a time for people to return to the Lord and humbly to call on Him for help. Two outlines are provided for this Sunday.)

JOEL

JOEL 2:12, 13

Introduction

In the painting "Joel," by Michelangelo Buonarroti, a scholar is seated in one of the temple chairs. In his hands he holds a scroll, and he must just have read something most disturbing. His head is partly turned as if in deep meditation. In a way this represents each of us seated in God's temple and meditating on God's Word and endeavoring with the Spirit's help to know the will of the Lord. But for each of us there must come the time that we begin to move. Our meditation must always move us.

Return to God

I. The Call to Return Is Proper Because God Is Slow to Anger

A. God has a right to be angry. He does not always exercise His right. But His right is His because of creation. He made us. Our very being and continuation are dependent on Him. Good or bad as we are, He extends love and mercy daily. He has a right to punish (Ezek. 18:4, 20; Gal. 3:10 f.; Rom. 6:23). The ox knows its master. Is it too much to expect that we should know who is Lord?

B. His anger is slow to punish, but punish He does; 120 years He waited for the people of Noah's time (Gen. 6:3). Aware of this "slowness to anger," Jonah fled to Tarshish and did not go to Nineveh (Jonah 4:2). The second giving of the Law (Ex. 34:6) began with this reassurance. Classical statements of God's slowness to anger are found elsewhere. Cf. Ps. 86:15; 103:8, 9; Neh. 9:17, 31.

C. His hand can be heavy. He crushed Judah with the plague of locusts. Look at

the description—their numbers (1:6), creating darkness (2:4), like horses (2:4), with noise (2:5), and lions' teeth (1:6), they advance (2:7) to destroy (1:7, 10; 2:3), like an army (2:4, 5). The vine of God is not fruitful, and destruction comes.

D. This *picture* is a greater judgment which climaxes in Judgment Day when all nations are called before God. Our nation and church is summoned to search its heart whether or not fruit has come of the vine God planted. God's heavy hand against sin, His anger and wrath, reached a saving climax on Good Friday. God Himself in Christ suffers for the sins of peoples and nations. Christ suffered His anger for us.

II. The Call to Return Is Proper Because God Is Merciful and Gracious With repentance come blessings.

A. God is persistent. Both Peter (Acts 2) and Paul (Rom. 10) quote Joel. Calling on the name of the Lord, they say, all nations find salvation. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The "interfering" God would not permit us to be damned. He will have all men saved. His plan to redeem us is fulfilled.

B. God is plenteous in grace. Judah, the very nation to whom Joel spoke, shall find, even as Father Jacob said (Gen. 49:11 ff.), that they shall bind their animals to the vines in peace, that they shall have so much wine their eyes will be red with it, so much milk that it will drool from their mouths. The grace of God is plenteous, overflowing grace to cover all our sins.

C. God's protection is for all. The nations in the valley of decision will not disturb God's people (Joel 3:9 ff.), for God protects. He is faithful. And in the midst of this the prodigal is welcomed back. Salvation is offered to all.

D. God's promises are blessings. Though the statement appears to be caustic, "Rend

your hearts, not your garments," yet the call to return comes through the rent veil (Matt. 27:51). Man may find it difficult to come to God, but God rends the heavens (Is. 64:1) and comes to man. Christ comes and redeems, calling men to repentance and to find in Him all blessings.

OBADIAH

Background

The similarity to Joel is found in the fact that a contemporary situation is used by the prophet for a twofold purpose, namely, to speak to the people of his day and to speak to the people of another day. This is typically prophetic and prophetically typical: the contemporary and the eschatological are blended. The Israelites and the Idumaeans present the background for a nation's history and God's works.

Eagles Brought Down

I. *Who Were the Eagles Who Were Brought Down?*

A. Isaac had *two sons*, Esau and Jacob. For the red pottage of lentils Esau sold his birthright (Gen. 25:29 ff.) and received the secondary blessing instead of the primary (Gen. 27). Edomites (Gen. 36:1) descended from Esau, Israelites (Gen. 49:2) from Jacob.

B. The Israelites returning from Egyptian slavery requested permission of the Edomites to pass through their territory (Num. 20:14 to 21) on way to Canaan. Twice Edom replied to the repeated request: "You shall not pass through." In spite of this unbrotherly treatment God encouraged Israel to treat Edom as a *brother*. (Deut. 23:7)

C. The Edomites were traditional enemies of Israel (Is. 34:5-7; 63:1-6; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 25:12-14; Mal. 1:2-5) and fought against Saul (1 Sam. 14:47), as well as David (2 Sam. 8:13). Balaam predicted Israel would dispossess Edom. (Num. 24:18 f.)

II. *How Did They Become Eagles Who Ought to Be Brought Down?*

A. Obadiah lists eight reasons: gloating (12); rejoicing over Israel's ruin (12); boasting of their distress (12); entering upon their calamity (13); looting their goods (13); killing the fugitives (14); betraying the survivors (14). It was not to be forgotten that a brother could betray and be treacherous (Ps. 137:7) (cf. I-C above). The temple was burned; the walls were broken down; the best of the land was seized. Cf. further, Ezek. 25:12-14. All this when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded Judah and carried them into slavery. Pekah and Rezin (2 Kings 16:5 f.) attacked Judah, and while these Syrians attacked, the Edomites raided Judah and took the people captive as slaves.

B. Judas Maccabaeus in a crushing victory recaptured some of the towns from the Edomites (1 Macc. 5) and according to apocryphal accounts became the hero to bring down the eagles.

C. For the Hebrew the eagle was a vulture, an unclean bird which fed on the decaying flesh of an animal someone else had brought down. The proud, haughty, evil-minded were called eagles. (The kings under Roman rule were mostly Herodians or Edomites.)

III. *What Does All This Mean to Us, that the Eagles Are Brought Down?*

A. The Lord rules all. Ps. 22:28; 103:19. The acts of God are on the right side of the ledger, for holiness and against evil.

B. God punishes. The Lord who redeems is also the Lord who punishes. Now the altar of His throne in heaven is an altar of mercy, but His altar is also an altar of judgment. "As you have done, it shall be done to you." There is a boomerang to sin as it pays its wage. God is almighty.

C. Pride precedes a fall (Job 20:6,7).

OBADIAH 4

Mount to the skies, and yet there will come humiliation and shame. (Is. 14:13)

D. The Lord raises and redeems. But not necessarily the worthy. His grace is for the sinner who repents. He exalts the lowly in spirit. He gives to the man, the nation, the people who are in need. In Jesus Christ, His Son, is all victory and power.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

HAGGAI and ZECHARIAH ZECH. 8:3

Background

Cyrus, 538 B. C., allowed the captive Jews to return to Jerusalem. He encouraged the rebuilding of the temple. Prince Zerubbabel (grandson of King Jehoiachin) was governor of the colony. Returning with him is High Priest Jeshua ("Joshua" in Hag. 1:1; Zech. 3:1). The temple is started, but work soon ceases; at least, little evidence of progress is noted.

Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the rebuilding of the temple of God as well as the purification of ritual. The temple was completed in 515 B. C.

It is the word of assurance of God's presence that encourages their work. The temple is not as fine as Solomon's (Hag. 2:3). But God is with them. "I am with you!" Cf. Hag. 1:13; 2:4; Zech. 1:3; 2:10; 8:3; 8:8.

I Am With You

I. Commemorating His Presence

A. In the tabernacle of Moses and in the temple of Solomon there were marks that commemorated the presence of God. The Shekinah (the Hebrew word meant the "dwelling of God") was the cloud of Ex. 14:19, the cover of Sinai (Ex. 24:15-18), the train of the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34 f.) and the temple (2 Chron. 7:1), the glory of the transfiguration of Christ (Matt. 17). There was also the living fire that lit the first altar; the ark of the covenant with its empty place

between the wings of the cherubim where God dwelt; Aaron's rod; the pot of manna. All these were gone. The "glory of Israel is gone" (Ichabod). Cf. 1 Sam. 4:21; Jer. 3:16; Ps. 132:8.

B. But God was present! (Hag. 1:13; 2:4; Zech. 2:10 f.; 8:3; 8:8.) Assurance then for returning Jew.

C. God is present now! The temple cannot contain God (1 Kings 8:27). "Immanuel," God is with us (Is. 7 and 8). God is omnipresent (Jer. 23:13; Ps. 139:7). God is present in His Word (Deut. 30:14. The Word is made flesh, and we beheld His glory (John 1:4). God Himself tabernacled among men. The glory is visible in Jesus.

II. Calling upon His Presence

A. The text stresses that God meets man. It is in the "house of prayer" (Is. 56:7) that God meets man. His presence is "where two or three are gathered in My name" (Matt. 18:20), as they call Him in prayer.

B. He comes in Word and in Sacrament. The living Lord is amongst them. God (Zech. 8:3) and the people (Zech. 8:8) are there together.

C. God is with us, to give us courage that our "hands be strong" (Zech. 8:9), that we do not fear but remember His promises (Hag. 2:4-7)

III. The Covenant of His Presence Is Known

A. The covenant is confirmed (cf. Ex. 6:4; Jer. 31:33). God will be God in "faithfulness and righteousness" (Zech. 8:8), though men be unfaithful and unrighteous. God will rescue His own from east and west and bring them to Jerusalem. "Marvelous" (Zech. 8:6) in the eyes of Israel and of Jahweh.

B. Even the enemies (Zech. 8:23) will recognize the presence of God in His covenant.

C. The covenant of His presence in Holy Communion, in abiding with us, strengthens

our testimony and witness to nations of all the world (Matt. 28:19, 20). The presence of God gives us no special prerogatives of unkindness or of superiority over others but the responsibility of service and of love so

that others may be aware of resources of God's grace and kindness in Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Elmhurst, Ill. GEORGE BORNEMANN

Sermon Study

EZEKIEL 36:22-28

I

The subject of *renewal* is most appropriate in the post-Pentecost period of the church year and also at a time when a serious self-appraisal is engaging the attention of all Christendom. Our text leads us to receive such renewal as God's gift, given solely because God is true to Himself.

II

Background and Structure of the Text

The prophet is summoned by God to proclaim a message to His people living in the darkness of disillusionment and despair in exile. But before the Lord gives him His great promise for this people (vv. 22-38), He first reveals to the prophet (in the section preceding our text, vv. 16-21) the deep concern out of which He makes this promise of renewal, the sad story of His previous dealings with delinquent people.

The Lord had chosen Israel to be His special people; at Sinai He had made a covenant with them. He had led them through the wilderness and had given them a special land to dwell in. He had thus taken the great risk of putting His holy name upon the people of Israel and upon the land which He gave them. Israel, however, had broken His covenant, defiled His land (by shedding blood and by idolatry), had profaned His name. Therefore the Lord had poured out His wrath upon them, calling upon the heathen Assyrians and Babylonians to be the instruments of His wrath to subdue them, destroy their political existence, and scatter them in

exile. But in all this the Lord's holy name had become discredited, for the nations were now saying, "These are the people of the Lord, and yet they had to go out of His land. He is both a capricious and an impotent god" (v. 20; cf. Ex. 32:12). Even Israelite exiles who wished to remain faithful wondered how the LORD could ever again bless the sinful people, the people whom He had rejected for His name's sake. This whole miserable situation bothers and grieves the Lord. He has "concern" for His holy name, and therefore He is about to act. Hence His prophet is to reveal (in the subsequent public message, vv. 22-38) how He will bring about the renewal of this people, so that His name will be sanctified in the eyes of all nations.

As always, attention to the form and literary genre of the text sharpens our perception of its unique content. The Lord's message is cast into the form of what Old Testament scholars call *prophetic demonstration pronouncement* (*Erweiswort*; vv. 22-23 a), consisting of three basic elements: (1) the reason for (2) an action of God to which is attached (3) the formula of recognition, which states that God's action is intended to demonstrate the secret of the Lord's person before the eyes of all nations.¹ What is surprisingly unique about the demonstration pronouncement of our text is that it is characterized not by the customary judgment and

¹ W. Zimmerli, "Das Wort des göttlichen Selbsterweises eine prophetische Gattung," in *Festschrift für André Robert* (1957), pp. 154 to 164. A clear example of such a pronouncement is found in Ezek. 25:3-7.

doom but by the message of mercy and renewal. Instead of bringing (as element 1) a reason for God's action which speaks of man's wicked activities, we hear the majestic reason for God's intervention (first stated negatively): "It is not for your sakes, O house of Israel, that I am about to act [and then amplified in a positive manner] but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned." Then follows, as element 2, the announcement of God's action: "I am vindicating the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations," and finally, as element 3, the formula of recognition, which indicates the worldwide effect of this divine action, "and the nations will know that I am the Lord."

The subsequent verses (23 b-38) are an unfolding of this key pronouncement (22-23 a). The Lord's action will restore His people to the holy land and thus halt the nations' mockery and demonstrate the Lord's sovereignty. The reason why He had formerly rejected His people was that they had profaned the holy land (v. 17) and His holy name. Now cleansing Israel and giving them a new heart and the driving power of His Holy Spirit, He will enable them to observe the covenant statutes and laws. He will thereby reestablish His covenant with them (28 b).

III

Specific Notes on the Text

V. 22. *Thus says the Lord God.* This messenger formula was used commonly in the ancient Near East by messengers in heralding messages. A prophet is primarily a messenger of the Lord.²

A comparison of this pronouncement with the similar message in Is. 43:22-28, esp. v. 25, shows that the prophecy here in Ezekiel is more impersonal and formal, in keeping with Ezekiel's more enigmatic, dark nature,

for he was not only a prophet but a priest who was utterly outraged by the uncleanness of delinquent Israel and who also passionately longed for the reestablishment of the worship of the temple in Jerusalem. It strikes the reader as surprising that there is no reference here to the Lord's love for His people or to His loyalty to His covenant (דָּוָהוּ, אֱמִתּוֹ, אֱמִתּוֹ). Instead, the reason for the Lord's action is His concern for the honor and majesty of His name. That is why He does not abandon His people. The Lord's name is here personified, as in Deuteronomy, and is portrayed as responsive to injury and adoration.

V. 23: *vindicate the holiness of My great name.* The Hebrew has the piel of וְדָבַר, and Gordon (in the *Chicago Bible*) translates, "I will restore the holiness of My great name."

... *know that I am the Lord.* To know refers not merely to intellectual recognition but to actual experience. The formula of self-introduction (*Selbstvorstellungsformel*), "I am the Lord," prefaced the Lord's announcement of His covenant (cf. Ex. 20:2) and of His covenant stipulations (esp. Lev. 18).³ What once was the experience of Israel will be the experience of all nations.

The oldest Greek MS does not have the subsequent section (vv. 23 b-38). This does not mean, however, that it is necessarily unauthentic or that it does not admirably unfold the implicit meaning of the preceding demonstration pronouncement.

... *when through you I vindicate My holiness before their eyes.* Three parties are involved: (1) *the Lord*, who shows Himself to be holy, (2) *Israel*, the sinful nation which will experience the fullness of God's faithfulness to His own holy Self, and (3) *the nations* before whom this justification of the Lord's holiness will take place (cf. Ps.

² C. Westermann, *Grundformen prophetischer Rede* (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1960).

³ W. Zimmerli, "Ich bin Jahwe" in *Gottesoffenbarung: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (München, 1963), pp. 11-40.

115:2) with such effect that they too will experience the revelation of God.

V. 24. The individual steps of the Lord's renewal of His people are described in the next verses. First, the Lord's people will again be resettled in the Lord's land; their exile will come to an end. But it now becomes clear that, when the Lord now acts "for His name's sake," He is creating something fundamentally *new*. To be sure, Israel had broken its covenant relationship with the Lord; its history was one of delinquency. But now the Lord will deal with this difficult problem of His people's disobedience in an *entirely new* and more effective manner. He will not merely put His Law into the people's heart (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) but will Himself participate in the renewal, pouring cleansing streams over them. To be sure, this promise is viewed externally, more formally and distantly than that of Jeremiah, but internally it brings an even greater promise: God Himself will participate in effecting the renewal.

V. 25. The inner renewal of the people proceeds in three steps. First is the cleansing from guilt and stains of the past. *Sprinkle with clean water* refers to a ritual act. In its paraphrase of our text the Targum vividly describes the cleansing in terms of Num. 19, the purification of a person defiled by a corpse with water made from the ashes of the red heifer. ". . . and I will forgive your sins as such who have been cleansed by the sprinkling of water and the ashes of the propitiatory sacrifice." The Qumran "prototypes" of Christian Baptism seem to go back to this passage.⁴

V. 26. *New heart*. This represents the second step in Israel's inner renewal. The heart that had been hardened like stone, closed to the Lord's call for obedience, revives. J. Knox translates: "I will take away from your breasts those hearts that are hard

as stone and give you *human* hearts instead." The Targum contrasts "a wicked heart that is as hard as stone" with "a heart, fearful of Me, which will do My will."

V. 27. *My Spirit* (cf. above, v. 26, "a new spirit") marks the third step in Israel's inner renewal. The Spirit of the Lord mediates not intellectual conceptualizations but, more important, power to function in a new, living manner, to perform new tasks. The tasks are described as genuine obedience and walking in accordance with the holy will of God as stipulated in the covenant terms (laws, statutes). Going beyond even the great promise of Jer. 31:31-34, this verse promises that the Lord will participate directly in the new obedience and renewal of Israel. This is the transformation of which Luther's explanation of the Third Article speaks under the rubric of "sanctification," i.e., how God makes us holy, transforms us who by our own reason or strength cannot come to Him into those who are forgiven and share in the resurrection life of Christ.

IV

Key Considerations for the Preacher

Although this prophecy is in a sense dated, that is, like all prophecies, directed to God's people at a particular moment in their history, it is also timeless in the sense that it lays bare the deeper, fundamental relationship of the Lord to His people. To be sure, God took the risk of giving His holy name to men; the very men to whom it had been revealed, profaned that name, so that God had to act in judgment. But lest the holiness of His name remain obscure and in doubt, God will act anew and will transform the miserable situation of His delinquent people.

(1) God does not act because of the merit or worthiness of His people but simply because He is true to Himself, to the work He has begun in the world. All human boasting is therefore vain. Cf. vv. 17-20 and vv. 31, 32.

⁴ Andre Dupont-Sommer, *The Essene Writings from Qumran* (Oxford, 1961), p. 76 (1 QS III, 4-9) and p. 81 (1 QS IV 21). Cf. also Heb. 10:22.

(2) God acts in order to bring His name back into honor and esteem. That is why He will cleanse His delinquent people from what pollutes them, transform their evil nature, renewing them with His own Spirit, so that they will truly walk in His way.

(3) Moreover, God is not restricting Himself to tiny Israel; He has a universal purpose which encompasses the entire world. The nations will one day experience His sovereignty, just as Israel has done.

This promise of renewal was not fulfilled at those significant points in their restoration when Cyrus proclaimed their liberation, or when Zerubbabel built the temple, or when Nehemiah completed the walls, or when Ezra renewed the covenant on the basis of the "Law of the God of heaven" (Ezek. 7:12-21). Each of these high points in the restoration was followed by subsequent disillusionment and disenchantment. The New Testament, however, proclaims the fulfillment of the promise in a final definitive manner. For in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ the *new* aeon has dawned and has inaugurated the renewal here proclaimed. The D-Day has come, and still even for us the V-Day of the final consummation is lacking. As the church celebrates the work of the Spirit in "the Pentecost season," it realizes that all this ancient pronouncement still applies to her. The Gospel for this Sunday (the Great Supper) also indicates that the Lord purposes to celebrate His great supper in the midst of a people whom He has Himself transformed from aliens and delinquents to be His own.

V

Suggested Sermon Outline

Introduction: Renewal

The Renewal of God's People (the Gift of the God, who Is Faithful to Himself)

I. "*Not for Your Sake*" (God's Rejection of Human Boasting)

A. God's no to Israel's attempts at self-renewal.

B. God's no to all ecclesiastical pretensions of renewal today. Our shame and delinquency that profane His holy name.

II. "*But for the Sake of My Holy Name*" (God's Purpose to Exalt His Holy Name)

A. The Lord's activity in Old Testament terms (ritual of cleansing the unclean by the ashes of the red heifer, Numbers 19; transformation of the hardened heart and renewal through God's new Spirit.) Cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Num. 11:24-30.

B. The great restoration or renewal that has arrived in Christ Jesus.

1. The cleansing by water (Baptism) and the Word (visible and audible). John 15:3

2. God transforms the heart of stone to a genuinely human heart so that "the just requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the spirit." (Rom. 8:4)

III. "*That the Nations May Know that I Am the Lord*" (God's Worldwide Purposes)

A. No genuine fulfillment of this promise in Old Testament times, despite the high points of Israel's restoration. Eventual disenchantment. The Old Testament remains unfulfilled. Cf. Qumran use of this passage.

B. The fulfillment of God's purpose in the church of the Spirit. The church gathered from all nations. The Holy Spirit's work of sanctification and renewal (cf. Luther's Third Article explanation: calls . . . gathers . . . enlightens . . . sanctifies . . . forgives . . . keeps . . . will raise . . . will give eternal life). God who has begun the good work in us will bring it to completion at the Day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6)

Reference: W. Zimmerli, "Ezechiel," *Biblischer Kommentar* (Neukirchen Kreis Moers: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962—63).

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