

The Penitent Church

Kenneth Korby

Luke 19:41–48

Greeting

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

Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem

My dear brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus, in today's gospel we heard of Jesus weeping over Jerusalem. The hymn was not wrong when it said, "He crieth out in bitter [unclear]," for Hebrews tells us about His bitter tears and groaning and praying. Jesus comes to his own city, to his own people, and they will not receive him with the care for salvation that he brings.

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, not because Jerusalem was necessarily more wicked than say Saint Paul, Minnesota, or Sodom and Gomorrah, although her guilt was greater than both. But Jesus wept because Jerusalem, the city of God and the people of God, would not repent. This is his city. He cried over it.

Little Jewish boys and girls were taught to think Jerusalem is the navel, that is the belly button of the whole universe. It is Jerusalem, not sexually perverted Sodom and Gomorrah or Saint Paul, but Jerusalem.

Saint Paul says today in the reading, "This is Israel. The sonship belonged to them, and the glory. They had received the glory and the covenant. They had received the law. In them was the divine service held under strict orders. There were promises and there were sacrifices made. This is the city of the patriarchs. That is the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And in the flesh, Messiah, God blessed forever, came from this people."

And Jesus wept. He sat there and cried. For death had dominated sinners, and now this Lord of life and salvation has come to set them free by suffering death, to give life to the people who are doomed to die. But His great love, even loving us to the death, to bring us that salvation, even that they will not receive.

A Wake-Up Call to Us

So the warning to Jerusalem is a wake-up call to us. You are His holy church, baptized into His name, and He is the one who has come to care for you with salvation, with divine forgiveness, not to stick and nail your sins to yourself, but to stick and nail them to His own precious body on the tree, and He makes you clean, even though you are polluted to the core with greeds or lusts or fears or enmities or angers or jealousies or worst of all, just contemptuous indifference for God.

You couldn't care a farthing whether He gives His body and blood to eat and drink, or gives holy absolution, or preaches and tells you to pray. It's worth nothing.

The Visitation: God's Pastoral Work

So Jesus comes to bring peace, and Jerusalem did not know the things that make for peace. He came to visit them. This visit is his high pastoral work, the foundation of all pastoral work.

He came to look at them and see their condition. Look, visit like television. You look at it.

He came to bring His word to nurture and cleanse them, and He came by His life to show the life in God, to give us a picture, and He came to pray. That is the foundation of God's pastoral work and ours, to see the miserable condition in which His people live by their own choice, and He by His own choice, coming to them not to damn and spank and beat and throw them out, but to look at them with pity, to cry over them, to feed them on His word, to pray for them.

He Sows in Tears and Reaps in Joy

He is indeed the man who sows in tears and who reaps in joy. You are part of his harvest, fruits growing on the tree that was planted on that holy hill. "Remember your holy hill," said Daniel.

That's where he planted the cross. The seed was buried there, died, and rose on the third day.

He weeps as he comes this beginning of Holy Week. This is what we call Palm Sunday. He comes to Jerusalem now, and He's carrying a seed with Him. That is, He is the seed, and He will reap in, bringing His sheaves with Him; that is why He is now sowing in tears. Today we hear his weeping.

You are not ignorant Protestants who don't know much about God. You are not part of the den of robbers that teaches, that robs you of God's gospel, saying you must do this and keep these 12 steps and do that and decide for Jesus. You belong to that holy confessing Catholic Church, which knows the truth. His own people. He's named you.

Learning to Weep: The Penitent Church

Now we are to learn today how to receive Him, how to weep. We need to know so that in our hearts we reflect what's in his heart, the heart of God, who is going to bleed for us, cries over our unwillingness to repent. We have to learn to cry with Him over our hardness and indifference, our rebelliousness, our thinking that he is insignificant, our trusting any old thing that promises something to us, so that our repentance becomes fruitful.

We have been unfruitful in our own hearts, and so the church that listens is the penitent church, hearts that weep in contrition. Our hearts are broken. We don't have any claims, and we can't offer any change that will make God take away that wrath or destruction.

We trust that that work of making peace is what He has done and gives to us, and so we want penitent hearts, hearts that are created anew to trust Him. For the climax and the crown of all penitence is to live in the joy of that faith that we have peace with God in Him, and hearts that cling to Him in hope.

Daniel's Confession and the Destruction of Jerusalem

Daniel knew something of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem 500 years before Jesus came, and Daniel knew how to confess. He confessed the treachery of Israel, the confusion and the shame that goes in the people of rebellion. Children don't know who or what to obey, and so they just follow their own impulses, like the adults who are misteaching them.

Daniel teaches us a different way, and now 500 years after Daniel, Jesus knows that all of God's big guns are already in position. The enemies will come upon this Jerusalem. They will build a trench around it to starve them out. They will knock the walls down. There won't be one rock on top of another, and they will kill you and your children in you.

And you did not know that God had come to cleanse and forgive you. So Jesus weeps. For where Jesus is not, there is nothing but wrath and destruction. For where Jesus is, there is nothing but peace and cleansing.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

So He cleanses the temple. It was not the destruction of that Jerusalem in Israel that takes away your sin or that fulfills the wrath of God. God's wrath is harder, hotter, harder, and longer than that.

But the real temple that is consumed in fire is the body of Jesus, God's Son. He is the one who was roasted and put to death under that wrath, and on the third day rose from the dead, never to die again.

This story of his weeping, as I said, begins Holy Week, and that Holy Week ends in Easter Sunday. That is why today and every Sunday is a festival of Easter. There is never a fast day on Sunday, although many fast from hearing God's word, or from eating and drinking, or from singing and praying, but it's not a fast day; it is a feast day, because God has cleansed His temple.

In Jesus, God comes to us. He visits us. He looks at us to care for us in our misery, to feed us on His Word that we may have life in the Spirit, to show us by His life itself how to trust and love, and He prays for us. He is God's wisdom, making His temple clean and pure.

A House of Prayer, Where He Is Received

This temple is called the House of Prayer. For it is a house where he is received.

You will be singing in a few minutes: "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna! Please save us." That He will say, "Take and eat. This is My body given for you."

He has given you His word of forgiveness out of the mouth of His pastor, holding on to the baptismal font where you were washed, and you got the whole load of His goodness to you. This is a house of prayer. This is a place where He comes to lord it over us by cleansing us, forgiving us, and renewing us.

The sin that we cannot shuck off, we can't take it like an ear of corn, just pull off the shucks and roast and eat the kernels. We can't shuck the sin. This is a rightness with God that we cannot achieve, even if we're [unclear], if we're religious and pious. You do not get it by achievement.

We participate by reception, not by performance. He gives it, and it is to be received by his trusting, by trusting him.

The Den of Robbers: Robbed of the Law and the Sacrifices

The sorrowful perversion of the temple, what Jesus called the den of thieves, den of robbers, meant that the people in the temple of Israel had been robbed. Something had been stolen from them. What had been stolen was not merely that maybe some exchange merchant didn't give the proper temple shekel money in exchange for their foreign currency. That may have happened too.

It may have happened that some of the sheep they bought there were blemished, and the sheep that they bought for sacrifice were to be unblemished. But that's not what's at the heart of Jesus. He's not grumbling because we have crosses and amulets and books, things like that, for sale. What he is accusing of is they have robbed God's people of the law and the sacrifices.

The law of God was not given so that by our performance we could put God under our debt. "I feel right about God. I think right about God. I do right about God, and I try to be a decent person."

Nor is the law so we can go a whoring after anything we want, do as we please, act as we will, and it's all right. That is to be robbed of the law, for the law of God has its goal: to catch us, break our hearts, and drive us to that Christ who is wounded for us, and there are the sacrifices. They thought that if you kill enough animals, God would have His thirst for blood satisfied, and He'd be pleased with you. Ankle deep in blood is all we need, or maybe give a little bit more money to some charity.

The sacrifices were meant that death is going to occur not in the sheep or goat. They are only pointing to Jesus. He is the Lamb of God. And so, what they had done is they had turned the law and the temple taxes and their sacrifices into a work by which performance they were going to achieve something right with God.

Judas, Robbed of Absolution

I can think of no more tragic symbol of this robbery than dear old Judas, who, when he went to his priest and confessed, "I have sinned. I have betrayed innocent blood," they didn't know enough to absolve him. They said, "What is that to us?" That is to rob Judas of heaven.

And there are many like that in the church. "Confession and absolution—forget about it. That's just a Roman Catholic thing."

Well, I can assure you, it is not. Would to God that the Roman Catholic Church also practiced it without robbing people, but instead of receiving and trusting, they were led to believe that participation was by performance.

Zeal without Knowledge

Paul acknowledges that they were zealous about it. They weren't like a bunch of us, indifferent about whatever goes on. They had a zeal.

They had a passion, but their zeal was first ignorant of the righteousness of God. That is what you prayed. They did not understand. You prayed in the most outstanding power of negative thinking. "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him," because the righteousness that is good before God's eyes is the one He gives, and they were ignorant of that righteousness.

They thought the righteousness was how right can we be in what we do for God, and secondly, they drove with might to establish a righteousness of their own. They were going to make themselves right, better than the Romans, better than the Gentiles, better than the blacks, better than the whites, better than anybody. They would not submit to the righteousness of God. "That is not worth a farthing. Ours is what counts. Our plan, our program, our conduct." Their robbery was not merely cheating in money exchange. Their robbery was that they had robbed the people of the life, the glory, and the grace of God.

The True Cleansing of the Temple

So cleansing was not merely clearing up the money changers and getting the cattle out and the manure with it. Cleansing was a purifying of the hearts of us sinners, all of us, to receive that pure sacrifice of the Lamb of God. He is the one who makes peace. He is the cleansing of the temple.

For first of all, he took into himself all the corruption of all of us. He took it into himself, and he suffered it perfectly. The law did everything to him. It condemned him until there's no condemnation left. It cursed him until there's no curse left.

What is left is innocence, cleansing, purity, forgiveness.

Peace Begins with Penitence

So peace begins with penitence. Hearts that are caught and do not find some way to wiggle out by excuse or blaming somebody else. Hearts that are without claim.

They don't, like the young man, jingle a little change in the pocket and say, "Make me one of your hired servants, God." The Father doesn't make hired servants in His house; He has free children, free men and women. So there is no escape for penitence. That's where peace begins.

The shame of our rebellion leaves us without claim, and it does no good to hide behind our fig leaves, to hide behind our spouse, to hide behind the children or the parents. Peace begins with that heart that is sunk in the wounds of Jesus. That's where the contrite heart is driven. For His work is to be wounded for us.

He sowed in tears and he reaped in joy. For that first Easter night, he stood in the midst of his frightened people, and he opened his mouth and said, "Peace be with you." And He showed them His wounds in His hands and in His side. And they who were scared in their breeches now had joy, because the Lord of peace had just given them peace, and it is in those wounds that is our joy.

For we too are wounded in heart and soul and mind, and those wounds are festering. If you don't believe it, just be married for a couple of hours, or just have children for a few days, or just get a job somewhere, the wounds are there, and where God's wrath does its full condemnation is in the wound of Jesus, not in our wound. But He suffered perfectly, innocently, and fully.

Thus, Paul says, "He is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth." This is a righteousness that God gives to you, and He wants you to trust Him and to receive it. This is the place then of your healing. So peace begins with penitence in the wounds and work of Jesus.

Peace Nurtured by His Word

Peace is nurtured by His Word, for He gives the Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of sins. He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven," so that we may have life and salvation.

Peace then is listening to those words and saying those words. If you can't ever hear them, you won't ever be able to say them. Are you going to tell your children or your spouse or the people who have hurt you at work if you never listen to them yourself?

There is no faith that does not hear. Faith does not live on itself. It receives the spirited word of forgiveness. Thus, the temple of the Lord is the house of prayer.

For what He gives when He comes to us, faith receives, faith clings to. God says, "This is exactly right. It's the way I want you. I have you now, right where I want you, in My care and in My life and under My name." Thus, if you are enlightened—that is, if God's Holy Spirit has taught you by the gospel—then you are given that life. You are made alive, and it is there, in that place, that peace is to rule.

No Faith without Contrition

Where there is no contrition, there can be no faith. For the heart that is like Israel or like our natural heart, we will trust ourselves, or any lie, or some fun, or this, or behavior, or that religion, we can trust almost anything.

Our hearts are like a Ford assembly line; they make one god after the other, day and night. But it is where there's contrition, where God's own word has cut our heart down to the bare bones that does not cling then to anything else, but only Him. That is the heart of faith. So penitence is crowned with its clinging to the peace-giving Word of Jesus in His wounds and Spirit. Therefore, God's house is the house of prayer.

Prayer: Let God Be God

For where God chooses to come and give His gifts to us, there by the Spirit to reveal that we are the recipients, and we by that Spirit trust His giving, receive His love. There is where prayer is at work.

Prayer: we say to God, "Yes. Do what You have promised. Give what You give. Keep what You have said You would keep." That is, let God be God to care for us with His own favor and to do it in His way.

So prayer is faith asking God to do that, asking God to bind us to His promises, asking God to open our eyes so that we see Him as the giving God.

Let the Peace of Christ Rule

Thus it is that the peace of Christ is to rule in your heart, in the midst of the rough and tumble that goes on in everyday living, trying to live, work, and be for the others a mirror, something reflecting what God's grace is like. You never know for sure who's in charge. You are to say, "The peace of Christ is in charge here," for you are bound together in Him with that bond of perfection, and you are to be teaching one another, admonishing one another, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and you to do this with the wisdom that is with Christ as your wisdom.

So do not be arrogant or indifferent or lazy, never teaching your children anything, never learning anything, but growing in this, that in all you do you may be thankful in your heart to God. That takes a lifetime of living.

To be thankful when it seems all the evidence is to the contrary, and if you don't believe there's a lot of evidence, just listening to the grumbling, the bitterness, the sourness in the hearts and souls and mouths of people. But for you, the peace of Christ is to rule, so that whatever you do, in words or in deeds, you may do it in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. "My house is a house of prayer."

You have been washed and cleansed to be that holy house. He lives here. He lives in you and among you. And in Matins, we are disciplined to learn to sing, "Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells."

Learning to Weep with Jesus

So, my beloved, from Jesus, we learn to weep. Learn to weep at the hardness of heart that will not repent. Learn to weep, not for Him, but for ourselves and those around us.

For it is in His holy church, as a groom in His bride, that He plants the seed of His word of deed. We are to learn to let that peace rule over us, praying and petitioning God, giving thanks as we urge God to keep His promises to us and to our children and to all people. Asking him to bless and prosper his word.

"All you who love Jerusalem"—that is, the church—"pray for her, and for her sake I will bless you," man, woman, and child in the congregation and in the neighborhood. Asking God to bless and prosper that word in the hearts of all, so that faith may give glory to God and be active in the work of prayer and service.

The peace of God be with all of you.

SOURCE

Kenneth F. Korby · 3 August 1997 · Tenth Sunday after Trinity · Luke 19:41–48 (Jesus Weeps over Jerusalem), with Daniel 9 and Romans 9–10

Transcribed from an audio recording of a sermon by Kenneth F. Korby (CTSF Media). [unclear] marks words that could not be made out.