

## **“A LIFE SQUANDERED; A LIFE RESTORED”**

4<sup>th</sup> Sun. in Lent, C

Sunday, March 14, 2010

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Sermon Text – Luke 15:11-32 & LSB #686 *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

Old Testament Reading – Isaiah 12:1-6

Epistle Reading – 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel Reading – Luke 15:1-3a, 11-32

### **NOTE TO THE READER:**

You may go to this link <http://www.lutheran-hymnal.com/nlh/NLH2.html> to play the tune of the text of the hymn *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. Once on that page, scroll down until you find the hymn title. Then click on the word “Nettleton.”

In the name of Jesus. [Amen.] Today’s sermon is driven by the Gospel reading and the Hymn of the Day. I know that it’s difficult to do so, especially if you have little ones in the pew, but if possible, you may wish to have your hymnal open to #686 during the course of the sermon. May the Spirit of Christ bless us in our encounter with His Word of Life.

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

If you’re looking at the hymn, first notice in the upper left hand corner that our Hymn of the Day is found in the “Sanctification” section. That means that this hymn is primarily written from the standpoint of a person who is *already* a child of God.

And so, with that in mind, let’s consider the first few lines of stanza one:

**1. Come, Thou fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
Call for songs of loudest praise.**

The hymn begins with the Christian calling on Christ, who’s the source (or “**fount**”) of every good thing in his life, asking Christ to make his heart to be like that of Christ. “**Tune my heart...**” that is, “shape it” so that my *every* thought, my *every* action, would be lead by Christ and would be pleasing to Him. All this, is because the Christian *also* knows how precarious life on this earth can be.

St. Paul, in last week’s epistle reading, hit us all square between the eyes when he warned us: “**Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.** (1 Cor. 10:12, ESV) Left on our own, we’re an easy mark for the devil, for he is, as Scripture *also* warns us, always prowling the earth looking for someone who’s let his guard down.

In the next few phrases the Christian acknowledges that God’s mercy is a needed and welcome constant in his life. His mercy is “**never ceasing...**” and from his gratitude... God receives the “**loudest praise.**”

The first stanza concludes:

**While the hope of endless glory  
Fills my heart with joy and love,**

**Teach me ever to adore Thee;  
May I still Thy goodness prove.**

The promise of God of eternity with Him through the merits of Christ gives the Christian an incredible **“hope of endless glory.”** It consumes the Christian, **“filling his heart with joy...”** and, at the same time, giving him a heart full of **“love”** for God and his neighbor.

Please turn to hymn #686. We'll sing the 1<sup>st</sup> stanza.

Now, in verse two, the Christian looks back on his life with a touch of dismay... *and even shame*. Here are the words:

**2. Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
Hither by Thy help I've come;  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,  
Safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wandering from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed His precious blood.**

Perhaps like last week's epistle reading that we just mentioned, today's Gospel reading also hit you dead center in the forehead. For who of us can't identify... *easily and fully...* with the younger son who wished his loving father were dead so he could have his inheritance? Who of us can't identify with wasting our life... at least for a while?

How about it...? Have you ever woke up in the middle of the night with a shudder, when you recalled something in your past, for which you were bitterly ashamed?

It's true, isn't it? You've been... *we've all been...* on a track to squander our life... and all the blessings that our gracious God has lavished upon us! And then, by God's incredible mercy and at His **“good pleasure...”** He brought you back to your senses.

As you were running with the wolves, thinking that life apart from your loving Father was better than being with Him, you came to see that you were crazy... you were wrong... you were foolish... *you were sinful*.

And then you remembered what you'd been taught, that our God is a gracious God, full of love and mercy... *and forgiveness!* You realize that you *thought* that you were running with the wolves, but found yourself in reality eating with the pigs!

And so you... *just like the younger son...* gingerly and with much trepidation tried to come home to your heavenly Father – all the while wondering how He'd react.

In your beaten down state, you threw out all notions of making excuses for your behavior, for you *knew* that there was *no excuse...* that would stand up before the all-knowing Lord of All.

You approach the Lord your God coming to Him in humility, confessing your sins, and hoping that you'd caught Him on a good day. Letting your imagination run wild, you tell yourself that you'd be content if He'd give you just an outhouse in which to live... just so you can be back near Him!

But instead, His actions stun you! He *runs to you*... meeting you on the way. He welcomes you back into His life! He's so glad to see you that He doesn't look down on you and grill you with: **"OK buddy! Just where have you been? And tell Me every last embarrassing and humiliating detail!"**

No! *Instead of that*... He embraces you and holds you. He plants a kiss on your cheek, reassuring you that His love is real, it's genuine... and that no matter what sin you've embraced... it matters no more to Him!

As He embraces you... His mouth next to your ear... He whispers: **"Wherever you've been... whatever you've done... it's all in the past. You're here with Me now. You've safely arrived at home!"**

Furthermore He says: **"I've allowed My Son to 'interpose His precious blood' on the cross for you. 'His Body and Blood, given and shed for you makes up for all... every one of your sins.**

**"Whatever you've done... it's not too bad... it's not too horrible... it's not too dirty... that the sacrifice of His life on the cross *can't more* than make up!"**

Dear beloved of God, although we might make ourselves to be a stranger from Him... His love endures... it lasts. All the while that His Kingdom of Grace lasts, He's ever watching for **"wandering hearts to return to His fold..."**

And once there, the wandering one is restored fully. He or she is given sparkling new garments of salvation... their sin-stained clothes that betray where they've been are burned on the spot.

They're given a ring that identifies them as a son or daughter of the Father, Himself.

And a royal feast is given, and among the celebrants, the Father is the most happy of all!

It's because of all this that the **Christian "raises his Ebenezer."** For **"Ebenezer"** literally means **"a stone of help"** which is what Samuel set up as a reminder to the Israelites following God's rescue of them from their enemies. (1 Sam. 7:12-14)

We formerly wayward children are now restored to be His own, and we gladly raise our own **"Ebenezer"** as a wonderful reminder of how far we've come by God's help!

We sing verse 2.

The words of stanza three:

**3. Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be;  
Let that grace now like a fetter  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it;  
Prone to leave the God I love.  
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.**

After verse two, the Christian now, in gratitude for the new life that's been restored to him, pleads to God to preserve him in the one true faith. He realizes "**how great a debtor**" that he is to God and "**daily**" recognizes the gift of God in Christ Jesus, his Savior.

In a sense, he desires what are sometimes called "golden handcuffs" that would "**bind his wandering heart**" to God... *never* to be apart again.

While doing so, the Christian prayerfully begs his loving Father to change his heart, "**take and seal it with Christ**" he prays, until he may enter the "**courts [of heaven] above.**"

We sing verse three.

In the last verse before us, the Christian's heart is yearning... *it simply can't wait...* to realize the goal of faith – the salvation of one's soul.

Let your ears hear... *and your heart believe...* what's awaiting those who die in repentance and faith in Christ:

**4. Oh, that day when freed from sinning,  
I shall see Thy lovely face;  
Clothed then in the blood washed linen  
How I'll sing Thy wondrous grace!  
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,  
Take my ransomed soul away;  
Send Thine angels soon to carry  
Me to realms of endless day.0000**

God's redeemed ones long for "**that day**" when they're away from this earth and are in heaven. Once there, they'll mercifully be "**freed from sinning...**" for it will be impossible for that *to ever* happen again! Once there, they'll "**see the Savior's lovely face...**"

And still wearing their Baptismal robe of righteousness... they'll sing! They'll sing like there's no tomorrow... for in heaven... in eternity... every day is "today." Joy, peace, and contentment go on without end!

And so, we who remain on this side of eternity, we pray "**Come, Lord Jesus!**" "**Come**" and "**tarry no longer.**" Come soon with your angels and take "**my ransomed soul**" to the feast that goes on without end!

Dear Christians, this hymn is about you. Its words tell *your* story... your story of a life squandered... and a life restored. They tell of God's incredible love for you... *and what is now yours* through faith in His Son. "**The old has passed away; behold, the new has come!**" (2 Cor. 5:17, ESV) Thanks be to God! [Amen.]