

VII Epiphany C 2022 (Service)

Prelude (Prelude in F by Johann Krebs) Roswitha Masson

Welcome to our pre-recorded service for today, February 20, 2022, the Seventh Sunday After Epiphany. I'm Pastor Curtis Aguirre. As many of you know by now, I am retiring as of the beginning of March, so this will be my last pre-recorded Sunday service. Next Sunday's service—Transfiguration Sunday—is a joint endeavour being put together by the congregations of the Southern Interior Region of our British Columbia Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, in which I will have a few small parts.

Nevertheless, this is essentially my final service as pastor of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church. As such, there are a few extra pieces to mark this ending and new beginning. First, we have several musicians taking different parts of the service—Roswitha Masson, Lorraine Cameron, Elizabeth Tribe, Christa Keppel-Jones. Other members of the congregation and our Synod Bishop will also appear in this video.

Having said all that, let's begin now by singing together the hymn, "Songs of Thankfulness and Praise" #310 in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship books. We will sing verses 1, 2, and 4. (Roswitha Masson)

1. Songs of thankfulness and praise, Jesus, Lord, to thee we raise;
manifested by the star to the sages from afar,
branch of royal David's stem in thy birth at Bethlehem;
anthems be to thee addressed, God in flesh made manifest.

2. Manifest at Jordan's stream, prophet, priest, and king supreme;
and at Cana's wedding, guest, in thy Godhead manifest;
manifest in pow'r divine, changing water into wine;
anthems be to thee addressed, God in flesh made manifest.

4. Grant us grace to see thee, Lord, present in thy holy word;
grace to imitate thee now, and be pure as pure art thou;
that we might become like thee at thy great epiphany,
and may praise thee, ever blest, God in flesh made manifest.

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The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all... And also with you.

Let us pray.

O Lord Jesus, make us instruments of your peace, that where there is hatred, we may sow love, where there is injury, pardon, and where there is despair, hope. Grant, O divine master, that we may seek to console, to understand, and to love in your name, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 25*)

Special Music (Elizabeth Tribe singing "Where E'er You Walk" by G.F. Handel, accompanied by Lorraine Cameron)

The Lessons

The first reading is from Genesis 45:1-11, 15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood before him, and he cried out, "Send everyone away from me!" So, no one stayed with him when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Come closer to me." And they came closer. He said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you

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many survivors. So, it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

“Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there--since there are five more years of famine to come--so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.'” And Joseph kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Holy word, holy wisdom... Thanks be to God!

Psalm 37:1-11, 39-40

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,
for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.
Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.
Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.
He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like
the noonday.
Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who
prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.
Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret--it leads only to evil.
For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the
land.
Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their
place, they will not be there.
But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.
The salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their refuge in the time of
trouble.
The LORD helps them and rescues them; he rescues them from the wicked, and saves
them, because they take refuge in him.

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The second reading is from 1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man, Adam, became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven.

Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Holy word, holy wisdom... Thanks be to God

Luke 6:27-38

The Gospel according to Luke, the 6th Chapter... Glory to you, O Lord!

[Jesus said] "But I say to you that listen: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone

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takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

The Gospel of the Lord... Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

All of our readings for today could be summarized in the words of Paul in his letter to the Romans:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Before I get into the details of the readings, I want to step back and look at what these words from Paul are really saying, because I think that will help us to get a better sense of what is going on in our Genesis reading with Joseph and his brothers; what the Psalm is getting at when it says, "Do not fret because of the wicked...Commit your way to the LORD," and "He will make your vindication shine like light"; also the larger significance of the discussion on the resurrection in I Corinthians; and finally, how to appropriate Jesus' impossibly idealistic instructions in our reading from Luke.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

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The verb that is translated here as "overcome" is the Greek verb *nikein*. This verb is derived from the word *nikē*, which means victory. *Nikē* (or Ny-kee as it is often pronounced in English) is the same word you see as the name of the ancient Greek goddess of victory, Nikē, and thus the athletic shoe brand Nike, implying victory on the athletic field.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

Here the verb *nikein* is translated as "overcome", but to me the English word "overcome" hardly does *nikein* justice. *Nikein* is a much stronger word than that. It means, "to conquer, to be victorious, to defeat." At heart, it is a military term. The English word "overcome" can be understood in military terms too, but it can also be a much softer word, like when we say, "we've been overcome with emotion", or "we were overcome by the fumes". *Nikein*, by contrast, is about defeating something, conquering it, being victorious.

So we might translate this as, "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good." That, I think gives a better sense of the power and urgency of what Paul is talking about.

But let's look at two other key words here: evil and good. The word for evil here is *kakós*. *Kakós* is a general term for bad, unfortunate, unseemly, or undesirable things. At its root, *kakós* conveys the sense of rottenness. It doesn't have the very specific sense that our English word "evil" has, with its associations of Satan and demons and figures from history whom we love to hate.

Here, *kakós* is contrasted to *agathós*, which is the word for "good" in this verse. There is another word for good that we also see in the New Testament, the word *kalós*. *Kalós* is a more general term for all that is good and admirable and commendable and—very importantly for the Greeks—beautiful. It would be a perfect counterpoint to *kakós*, and if Paul had used it he would have created this lovely alliteration with *kakós* and *kalós*. But Paul chose *agathós* instead. Why?

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I think it is because Paul is not talking about some generic good or nice thing, he is talking about a goodness that comes from God. The word *agathós* is the kind of goodness that we admire and marvel at. It is not just something that looks good or tastes good or sounds good. *Agathós* is goodness in the deepest and most exalted sense, the kind of goodness, that when you see it in action, it often makes you cry, as when someone lays down his or her life to save or rescue or defend someone else. It has the sense that Paul expresses at the end of his letter to the Philippians when he writes:

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

That is a perfect expression of the sense of *agathós*, "the excelling and perfect good."

So we might translate, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good," as, "Do not be conquered or defeated by bad, undesirable, or even calamitous things, but rather conquer and defeat them with the noblest good."

So, we are talking about a kind of warfare, a struggle between the good and the bad, that from ancient times was called, "spiritual warfare". And that warfare begins inside each of us, as we can see in our readings for today.

In the Genesis reading, we come in on the long saga of Joseph and his brothers at the point at which Joseph reveals his identity to them. Many years earlier, out of jealousy, Joseph's half-brothers had thrown him into a pit and sold him into slavery, and then told their father that a wild animal had killed and devoured him. Meanwhile, the merchants that had bought Joseph, sold him to an Egyptian official, and through a series of developments Joseph had come into high office in Pharaoh's court—essentially, Joseph had been elevated to what we would now call Prime Minister.

But when a famine struck the region and Joseph's half-brothers came to Egypt looking for food, Joseph recognized them. He was torn between his anger

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toward his brothers and his love for his father and his one full brother, Benjamin. Joseph wanted in the worst way to take revenge on those who had sold him into slavery and teach them a lesson. He toyed with these half-brothers who had hurt him and their father to make them suffer.

But then—at the point where we come into the story in today’s reading—Joseph's love for his family conquers his hatred for them, and as often happens when a great inner battle comes to an end, there are tears. But his love for his family could only have this victory over his feeling of having been wronged and his desire for revenge because of an insight he had. He saw his half-brothers and his own situation for the first time through the eyes of God. Having looked on them through God’s perspective, he says to his half-brothers:

And now, do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God... (Genesis 45:5-8a)

What Joseph is also saying here is that God was able to take the jealousy and evil intentions of Joseph's half-brothers and use them to bring about good. In this way, God conquered the negative and selfish tendencies in human nature, redeemed them, and turned them into good—into a mysterious good that transcended or even conquered the evils of the moment to prepare a legacy for the future. God works in mysterious ways.

So too the Psalm for today:

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. (Psalm 37:1-5)

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It is so easy for us to lose heart when we look around and see all the bad stuff and cruel behaviour around us. Giving up or surrendering to resentment or anger are great temptations. If we give in to these temptations, all we do is allow the negative, the bad, the "evil" around us and within is to have the victory.

No, don't cave into those temptations. Fight that inner fight, and "Do not fret because of the wicked...Trust in the LORD and do good." Let the good have the victory; let the good conquer. First let the good do the conquering inside of you, because then the good will spill out and be victorious in your sphere of activity and influence through your good and admirable words and actions.

God has the final say, and all things of this world are temporary. This is the important thing for us to remember in this discussion from the Second Lesson where Paul talks about the resurrection of the dead. He writes:

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. (I Corinthians 15:50)

The good endures to eternal life, the bad is washed away or burned away at the resurrection. That's the big picture perspective we have to keep in mind. As the classic theological explanation goes, when evil came into the world, God introduced death to limit the reach of evil.

In this world we have free will to choose our actions, and so the war between the bad and the good are always raging, within us and around us. In that war, faith is the supply train that keeps us connected to God, the source of Living Water, the Bread of Life to keep us going as we struggle here. And the measure in mercy that we give in this struggle is the measure in mercy that God we will give to us (Matthew 6:14; 7:1-2; Luke 6:37-38).

And so, I come to these instructions of Jesus that can seem impossible to follow:

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Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who malign you [*I'll come back to that word in a minute*]. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you, and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)

[Just a footnote here about the word that in our translation is "abuse" but which I translated as "malign". When we hear the word "abuse" today, we think especially of domestic or sexual abuse, but the verb *epëreázēin* refers especially to people saying bad things about you. It has more to do with gossip, slander, character assassination, and so on, than with physical attacks. That is why I chose the word "malign".]

At any rate, what Jesus is getting at here is that in this life we will be confronted by all kinds of bad stuff: people who hate us or are out to get us, people who attack us, both verbally and sometimes physically, people who steal from us, and people who are looking for a handout, whether that be out of a legitimate need or from dishonest motivations. It's going to happen, so how do you respond?

Jesus' answer: You respond with good. Overcome all the evil that gets thrown at you with good. As Michelle Obama famously said, "When they go low, we go high."

It is a struggle that begins within. Our basest human instincts are to lash out, to take revenge, to become defensive, or to play the victim. But our calling from God is to take the high road, to rise above, to aspire to "whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable...any excellence and...anything worthy of praise."

But it doesn't take long in this struggle to realize that we cannot do this on our own. We need to stay connected to God to have any hope of succeeding. As Jesus said:

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I am the vine, you are the branches; those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

And so, in the spiritual warfare, which is our continual struggle in ourselves and in this world, don't be conquered by the bad, the harmful, the cruel, the petty, the exploitative, the false, or whatever it might be; rather let us conquer and vanquish the bad within us and around us with the most excellent, admirable, and praiseworthy good that comes from God. Amen.

Let's sing the hymn "O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate" #722. We will sing verses 1, 2, and 3. (Lorraine Cameron)

**1. O Christ, your heart, compassionate, bore ev'ry human pain.
Its beating was the pulse of God; it's breadth, God's vast domain.
The heart of God, the heart of Christ combined in perfect rhyme
to write God's love in human deeds, eternity in time.**

**2. As once you welcomed those cast down and healed the sick, the blind,
so may all bruised and broken lives through us your help still find.
Lord, join our hearts with those who weep that none may weep alone,
and help us bear another's pain as though it were our own.**

**3. O Christ, create new hearts in us that beat in time with yours,
that, joined by faith with your great heart, become love's open doors.
We are your body, risen Christ; our hearts, our hands we yield
that through our life and ministry your love may be revealed.**

Let us confess our faith using the words of the Apostle's Creed.

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.**

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**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen**

United in the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught:

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.**

**Greetings, Tributes, and Farewells read by Brita Park and Elizabeth Tribe
Greetings from Bishop Kathy Martin**

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Irish Blessing (sung by Christa Keppel-Jones)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favour (+) and give you peace. Amen.

Postlude Trumpet Voluntary by Gordon Young based on an old English dance (Lorraine Cameron)