

The Lord's Delight

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY [b]

February 4, 2018

PSALM 147:1-11

¹ Praise the LORD! For it is good to sing praises to our God;

for it is pleasant, and a song of praise is fitting.

² The LORD builds up Jerusalem;

he gathers the outcasts of Israel.

³ He heals the brokenhearted

and binds up their wounds.

⁴ **[The Lord] determines the number of the stars;**

he gives to all of them their names.

⁵ **Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;**

his discernment is beyond measure.

⁶ **The LORD lifts up the humble;**

he casts the wicked to the ground.

⁷ Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;

make melody to our God on the lyre!

⁸ He covers the heavens with clouds; he prepares rain for the earth;

he makes grass grow on the hills.

⁹ He gives to the beasts their food,

and to the young ravens that cry.

¹⁰ **His delight is not in the strength of the horse,
nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,**

¹¹ **but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,**

in those who hope in his steadfast love.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

We live in an old world, we live in a new world. We live in this old world and this new world simultaneously.

The two worlds are not the same. The old world is not becoming the new world, and the new world is not just the old world updated. It's not a matter of time, as if the old world is back before us and the new world is what is coming.

If we think of the conflict in our Christian life, of knowing that you belong to Christ but at the same time having a gut feeling that you're not a Christian, you're unworthy, is this not the source of that conflict?

The division is not about time. It's about death and life. The old world is the world of death. The new world, the world of life. The old world is of Adam and Eve and their children—it is the world of death, for that's what our sin has brought. The new world is of the new Adam, Jesus, and his Church—it is the world of life, for his resurrection from the dead has created this new world.

But it's simultaneous—we live in both at the same time. Our life of flesh is the old; our life of faith is the new. Life of flesh bound in the Law. Life of faith made free in the Gospel.

Life under the Law going toward death. The new world in the Gospel, belonging to freedom and life.

How does our Lord act toward us in the old world we live in, in this world of sin? When he comes up to the sinner, what is that going to look like? Psalm 147:4:

[The Lord] determines the number of the stars;

he gives to all of them their names.

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;

his discernment is beyond measure.

This Lord who set the stars and galaxies in their places, who has all power, and who can discern even the smallest error, what will it look like when he approaches the sinner?

It looks like nothing we would ever predict, and nothing our world can even understand.

Our world would understand it if God came in power to set straight the old world, putting in place the right rules and systems to make everything work right. That's what our old world tries to do anyway. Always figuring out what went wrong, what rules to enact, what systems to make everything work without error, that's the way our world confronts problems. But death still reigns.

Our world would understand if God worked that way too. Then, God would become the best manager putting in the best systems to improve the human condition, just the best law-giver or best rule maker.

But what does it actually look like when God approaches the sinner? Mark 1:31:

Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

Is this what it looks like when the Lord who has all power shows up in front of the sinner? It's in little Capernaum, a fishing village of less than 2,000 people? And the Lord's concern is some fisherman's mother-in-law who happens to be running a fever?

With all the big things going on in the world, the crime, the wars, the breakdown of marriage and family, the diseases—with all that, when the Lord shows up, we're going to see him concerned with an ill mother-in-law? That's the revelation of the Son of God in the flesh?

He came for her. He came for us, each of us in our own smallness. All that he did was for her, was for us and our children. His death on the cross for the sins of the world, that was for Peter's mother-in-law and for us. His defeat of the demons when he ransomed sinners from their kingdom and called them into his Church, that was for her and for us. His defeat of sickness and death by his bodily resurrection from the dead, where he established the new world of life everlasting, it was all for her and for us.

He walked up to her sickbed brought her into health.

This is the new world of health and life, of the resurrection of the body. She would still live in the old world, the world of death, the world of life lived under the Law, but she would continue living in that world according to her life of flesh. At the same time, simultaneously, she would live in the new world of the resurrected life, the world lived fully in God's gifts. She would live in this new world according to her life of faith, the life bestowed by the Word of Jesus.

Jesus comes into our little lives, too.

Our lives of sickness and fear of death, of weakness in sin—he comes into our lives, too, to he bring us into health, into the new world of life, of the resurrection of the body. We will still live in the old world of death under the Law, but we continue living in that world in our life of flesh. At the same time, simultaneously, we live in the new world of the life of the resurrection, the world of God's gifts. This is our life of faith, our life bestowed by the Word of Jesus.

He comes in his Word. He comes in his Body and Blood. In that Body and Blood, we receive all which he did for our salvation; we receive his healing of those who were sick, his casting out of the demons, his humiliation at the face of Pontius Pilate, his death on the cross, his descent into Hell to proclaim victory over Satan, his Ascension into Heaven where he intercedes for us—we receive all he has done and all he is in his person for our blessing and benefit.

This is the new world of life everlasting, of living in God's gifts, living as those belonging wholly and completely to him. We live now in this new world by faith, even while we live in the old world in our sinful flesh.

To those brokenhearted, those wounded in this world of sin, those made humble under the Law, Jesus comes in healing. Psalm 147:6:

**⁶ The LORD lifts up the humble;
he casts the wicked to the ground.**

We do not now see the humble lifted up to life everlasting and the wicked cast to the ground. Our world can't see it, either. Our world of flesh sees people built up by their own strength and power. Psalm 147:10:

[The Lord's] delight is not in the strength of the horse,

nor his pleasure in the legs of a man,

¹¹ but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,

in those who hope in his steadfast love.

Our world sees things by the strength of what man can accomplish—in the Psalm, this is the strength of the warhorse or the power of man's legs and body.

Our Lord sees this, and assigns it to the world of death—it is all under the judgment of the Law.

But the Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him. We started out fearing not him, but sickness and death; or fearing our sin and its guilt; or fearing our failure to justify ourselves.

But fear none of these, says the Lord, fear me only.

And then we find that in fearing the Lord, we finally get to see that the one we are fearing is he who has the print of nails in his hands, from going to the cross to make us his own. We fear him, and finally find we need to fear nothing else.

His delight is in those who hope in his steadfast love. Hope not in some promise that the old world of death can somehow be improved to health, hope not that we can somehow regain our life by living under the Law, but hope only in our Lord's steadfast love.

For his steadfast love—this love by which he took our sin upon himself and was humbled for our sake, this love by which he came to us in Baptism to bring us into the new world of life-everlasting, this love by which he is with us every day in his Word of forgiveness—this steadfast love is his care for all those

broken by guilt, those wounded by fear, those humble in their sin, this steadfast love our Lord brings to us in his Word of Gospel. This is our new world of life-everlasting, the world we now belong to by faith, and which we will belong to by eyesight in the resurrection of the body.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.