

The lessons for this Sunday are a powerful teaching on the Mission of the Church.

Romans 11.33-12.8 is a classic because/therefore teaching.

Because the wisdom and knowledge of God is vast beyond measure,
Because His judgments and ways are unsearchable and untraceable,
Because no one can know His mind to offer him counsel,
Because no gift can be given Him that would compel Him to repay,
Because from Him and through Him and to Him are all things,
Because to Him is glory forever...

Therefore, on account of God's mercy, offer you bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, worshipping God through a life of service, using your grace given gifts according to the good, perfect and pleasing will of God.

Isaiah 51.1-6 is God's word to a nation [Israel] in disarray and disobedience.

1. ***'To the faithful people in Israel'*** [vrs.1-3] who chased after righteousness... judgment...justice. God reminds them of the promise He made to Abraham: that all nations would be blessed through the seed [Jesus] of Abraham.
 - ***'the Lord [Jesus] will bring comfort and compassion'*** [v.3] to His people.
 - ***'joy and gladness, thanksgiving and singing'*** will be the result [v.3]
2. To the whole nation of Israel [4-6] God says:
 - ***'My justice [judgment, justice, mercy, deliverance] will be the light to the nations'*** [v.4].
 - The nations are being prepared to receive God's promise [Jesus]...
 - they will ***'look for Him'*** [v.5]
 - they ***'wait in hope for His Arm'*** [power] [v.5].
 - ***'The heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like grass, the people will die'*** [v.6]
 - But, ***'My righteousness and salvation will last forever, throughout all generations'*** [v.6]

In **Matthew 16.13-2**: Jesus has His disciples near Caesarea Philippi by the mouth of the Jordan River at the base of Mt. Hermon [the Mt. of Transfiguration]. This is a spiritually evil place of infant sacrifices offered to pagan gods to produce water to nourish the Jordan valley. It is at this evil place that Jesus asks this question:

1. ***'Who do you say that I AM?'***
2. Peter responds: ***'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.'***
3. Jesus responds: ***'Upon this rock [confession] I will build my church.'***
4. ***'The gates of hell will not be able to prevail against it'***.
 - This location of infant sacrifice was called 'the gates of hell', a rock ledge near a deep crevice into which infant sacrifice was made.
 - This rock outcropping suggests Jesus as saying: I will build my church in Satan's territory.

After the Mt. of Transfiguration Jesus journeys to Jerusalem to take His perfect life to a costly, sacrificial and innocent death on the cross and, three days later, His resurrection.

- Isaiah 51.6 is fulfilled: ***'My justice will be the light to the nations'*** [Isaiah 56.4].
- His resurrection brings ***'comfort and compassion, joy and gladness, thanksgiving and singing'*** [Isaiah 51.3] to followers of Christ.

Spiritual Warfare:

Until Christ returns we live a life of Spiritual Warfare in Satan's Domain.

- It is important to know that **what is physical and visible is preceded by what is spiritual and invisible**. To understand what is happening physically and visibly in our world today, one must understand that is happening spiritually and invisibly.
- ***'Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, that his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness.'*** 2 Cor.11.14-15
- Satan is religious. He is politically religious...culturally religious...institutionally religious ...anti-institutionally religious...medically religious...and [] religious.
- His doctrine is power, control, lies, obfuscation, greed, anger, hate, rage, fear - all under the contemporary canopy of 'wokeness' and 'cancel culture'.
- Satan's churches have no room for God's Justice; the salvation and righteousness He brings through His perfect life, innocent death and resurrection, and the fair and impartial life-style that bears witness to being saved by grace.

Yet, it is in Satan's domain that Christ builds His church with His promise that ***'the gates of hell cannot prevail against it'***. ***'For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of instruction.'*** 2 Timothy 1.7

Greg Finke is an LCMS pastor who comes alongside pastors and leaders to help them intentionally disciple their people to join Jesus on His mission in the places they already live.

- He writes: "Most congregations have their focus on worship services, teaching doctrine and maintaining budgets. In the gospels, Jesus has his focus on his Father's mission, discipleship and multiplication."
- Greg continues: In the gospels, we see that Jesus' training process includes three parts – proclamation, imitation, replication:
 1. Proclamation = hearing Jesus' teachings (Mark 1:14-15). This leads beyond daily devotions, but is mining the truths of God's Word to live it and share it.
 2. Imitation = imitating Jesus' lifestyle, i.e., imitating the way Jesus lived out his teachings for the good of others as he pursued his Father's mission (John 13:15). This involves practicing and perfecting [with no excuses] the daily discipline of thinking, speaking, and living only Jesus' thoughts, words and actions.
 3. Replication = training others to do the same (Matthew 28:19-20). This means identifying, praying for, developing relationships with, having the specific intention of disciple-ing at least one other person. That person[s] will then repeat Proclamation, Imitation, and Replication with at least one other person.

The 'gates of hell' cannot prevail against Proclamation – Imitation – Replication.

We pray that Jesus living in us and through us will bring God's justice to the nations; that those waiting in hope for His salvation to be revealed will receive His comfort and compassion with joy and gladness, with thanksgiving and a song of praise.

Grace and peace to from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Heavenly Father, thank you for Peter' confession! As you used him, we ask that you would also use us, to do your work of forgiving, confessing, and proclaiming Jesus as Lord to a disbelieving world.

Establish the Church upon the solid rock of Christ, and on the faithful witness of your apostles to stand against the gates of hell. By your Holy Spirit, make it wise, gracious and steadfast to rightly forgive and retain sin; and to bring salvation that will last forever.

– Protect your servants who are persecuted for naming Jesus as the Christ. We ask that their witness draw their tormentors to salvation.

– Conform the people and programs of this congregation to your good, acceptable, and perfect will. Help us to not think too highly of ourselves, but with sober judgment to use our talents according to the grace you have given each of us. Build up the body of your beloved Son among us through sound preaching, faithful teaching, generous giving, cheerful service, and loving kindness.

Teach the world's rulers listen to you, the giver of justice and the author of salvation. Conform their decisions and deeds to your righteous will, so that they care for the lowly and give hope to all who cry out to you. Heal the divisions that fracture families, communities, and nations; and help us to live at peace with our neighbors.

Bless all who risk their lives to protect, defend and rescue others. Give them the gifts of valor, loyalty, wisdom, and competence; and help them to use those gifts according to your will and for the benefit of your people.

Graciously answer the prayers of everyone who calls upon you for help, including: {List}. Keep them safe in the midst of all that troubles them; increase their strength within them; and let them lift up their eyes and see the light of your salvation.

Most gracious Father, we praise and glorify you because your love endures forever. In your great mercy, draw near and make good your purpose for us. Keep us steadfast in faith, bold in witness, generous in sharing, cheerful in helping, gentle in exhorting, frequent in forgiving, and constant in thankfulness to you, our rock, and our salvation. Lead us into presence of Christ our Lord. Give to us, and to all whom he has redeemed, eternal joy and gladness; thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Hear our prayer, O Father, and grant all that glorifies you and builds up your people. This we ask for Jesus' sake. **Amen.**