

MIDWEEK OF LENT 1

February 24, 2021

INVOCATION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

People: But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Pastor: Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

All: Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God in his mercy has given his Son to die for you and for his sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Let us pray. Heavenly Father, your gift of victory comes chiefly in the weakness of our Savior's bitter suffering and death on a cross. Empower us to build our lives upon this amazing grace; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON *Zechariah 1:18-21*

And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four horns! And I said to the angel who talked with me, "What are these?" And he said to me, "These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. And I said, "What are these coming to do?" He said, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one raised his head. And these have come to terrify them, to cast down the horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter it."

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE LESSON *2 Corinthians 12:7-12*

So to keep me from being too elated by the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. I have been a fool! You forced me to it, for I ought to have been commended by you. For I was not at all inferior to these super-apostles, even though I am nothing.

The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL LESSON *Mark 8:27-38*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark, the eighth chapter.

People: Glory to You, O Lord.

And Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. And on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” And they told him, “John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets.” And he asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.” And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” And he called to him the crowd with his disciples and said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to You, O Christ.

APOSTLES’ CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

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

SERMON

Growing up, at 5:30 p.m., every day on channel 32, I would hear these words: “*It’s Tool Time.*” In the 1990s this expression was made famous by the TV show called *Home Improvement* that starred Tim Allen.

Remember that show? Ever seen it before it? Each episode of the show would include Tim’s home improvement show, called *Tool Time*, which was a meta-program, or a show-within-a-show. Tim was then joined on the program by his friend and mild-mannered assistant, Al Borland. They were always introduced with the question, “*Does everybody know what time it is?*” And the response was always what? “*It’s Tool Time!*”

The prophet Zechariah is also concerned about time and tools. The three dates in his book (Zech 1:1; 1:7; 7:1) make it clear that, because Darius the Persian is the reigning king, it’s a time of discouragement and despair. This was the first time in almost 500 years that Israel didn’t have a Davidic king ruling on the throne. There was deep despair and excessive misery!

One night, God gave Zechariah eight visions. Could you imagine that? I think I would be like Ezekiel, who was overwhelmed and speechless for a week! In the first vision, Zechariah meets the Messenger of the Lord on a red horse who announces that God has returned to Jerusalem with mercy, and that the temple will be

rebuilt. As Zechariah lifts his eyes up, the second vision immediately follows and begins. In the second vision, God shows the prophet four craftsmen. What's the gist of the vision? What is the summary? *"It's Tool Time!"*

That would have to sound strange to Zechariah's contemporaries. We wouldn't be surprised if they were a bit cynical and sarcastic, especially when we understand more about **"the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem"** (Zech 1:19). What are the horns? The horns are the enemy nations. But, why describe enemy nations as horns?

Think of horns of bulls and goats. Think antelope, rhino, deer and elk horns. Animal horns capture and kill. They gore and gouge. Their horns torture and tear. That's why biblical authors employ horns to symbolize ultimate enemies. For example, in Daniel, horns represent ruling empires that crush everything that stands in their way. In the book of Revelation, John describes both the dragon and the first beast, as having ten horns. Horns announce destruction, devastation and death. And Zechariah says that four craftsmen are the solution? *"It's Tool Time?"* Really? You can see what there was deep despair and excessive misery!"

What enemies—like maiming and mauling horns—have ripped your life apart? Is it rejection? Have your friends voted you off the island? Is it frustration? Has raising children more than you can handle? Is it desperation? Has a dead relationship broken your heart? Trying to defeat enemies that destroy us like animal horns, using the tool of God's Word, can sometimes seem pointless and hopeless.

We can hear voices that say, "Everyone with their head on straight and eyes wide open knows that reading and studying the Bible doesn't change a thing. It's a quaint, antiquated activity that's completely irrelevant. If you really want to change things, take matters into your own hands; be tough; be rough; stick it to 'em." And so we walk around with our shoulders slumped and our spirits downcast—add to that a chip on our shoulder. We get up in the morning, put in our time, do our duty, and then go home—defeated and discouraged. We can know deep despair and excessive misery! We don't stand a chance against **"the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem"** (Zech 1:19). They will scatter us, too.

Verse 20, though, say, **"The LORD showed me four craftsmen/blacksmiths."** The craftsmen are the builders. The ESV renders the Hebrew word *charashim* with **"craftsmen,"** while others, like the NRSV translates *charashim* with **"blacksmiths."** I think that the NRSV is on to something, don't you? Doesn't "blacksmith" sound better, more powerful? Yes, maybe we have a chance against the horns after all!

Too bad, that's not what Zechariah means. Sure, *charashim* may refer to blacksmiths in some texts, but the prophet's second vision isn't about pulverizing metal it's about building the temple. In fact, all eight of the prophet's visions are connected to rebuilding the temple. So, as much as we want to see ourselves as blacksmiths, it's not the right translation.

We're back where we started; craftsmen taking on the big, bad, beastly horns. That is Moses against Pharaoh. That is Joshua against Jericho. That is David against Goliath. That is Elijah against the prophets of Baal. That is Jeremiah against the false prophets. That is Josiah clearing the land of idolatry.

And that's exactly the point. Although the craftsmen don't look like much, Zechariah's second vision ends with these words: **"The craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations."** We don't conquer evil by walking around with hard hearts—holding on to vendettas and wanting to get even. We don't conquer evil by giving people the cold shoulder and talking behind their back. No, the scattering horns meet their match against craftsmen who rebuild the temple, directed by God's Word. When the temple goes up the horns go down! *When the temple goes up the horns go down!* God's kingdom comes in victory!

And you know what, **God defeats every enemy in the book of Zechariah!** At the top of the list is Satan, the attacking accuser in 3:2. Sin also meets its match throughout the book. It is taken away in 3:5, destroyed in 5:4, removed in 5:11 and washed away in 13:1. All of this previews and predicts Christ's Easter victory when he defeats *every* enemy in the universe—every dragon, devil, all darkness, and even death!

Almost exactly a year ago this week, David Ayres was sitting in the stands with his wife at a hockey game when the starting goalie for the Carolina Hurricanes, James Reimer, was injured. Then Petr Mrazek, the Hurricanes second-string goalie, was injured. The next thing the 42-year-old David Ayres knew was that he was skating onto the ice. He had to think, "Who? Me?" Ayres was the emergency goalie; he wasn't even the third stringer! He never played a minute of pro hockey; he just played club hockey in college. His sudden debut didn't start well. He allowed goals on the first two shots. I'm sure he experienced deep despair and excessive misery. But then he stopped the next eight shots as Carolina defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-3.

There once was another group of people that also didn't look like much—they were like third-string NHL goalies, if that. Their leader—Peter—knew more about bass fish and boat docks than he did about Roman culture and Greek language. His friends also didn't have any formal education. Then, why were they chosen? Was it because they were humble? No. They jockeyed for positions of positions. Was it because they were loyal? Once, at the worst possible moment, the three leaders fell fast asleep, along with the rest. I know, it must have been because they were sensitive to the needs of others, right? Two of them called “the Sons of Thunder” once wanted their enemies torched with fire. Another occasion, they say in front of a blind man, “Jesus, who sinned? This man or his parents, that he was born blind?” At least don't ask in front of him.

Before Jesus came along the disciples were loading trucks, coaching kids' soccer, and selling Slurpee drinks at Super America. Their collars were blue and their hearts were hard. There's no evidence that Jesus chose them because they were smarter or nicer than the other guys. There is no evidence that Jesus chose them because they were humble, or because of some other quality. When Jesus called them, each disciple had to ask, “Who? Me?” It is the same for us, isn't it?

And get this. Zechariah's “*Tool Time*” was a part of their message. Only these tools weren't used to build up; they were used to tear down. Zechariah 13:7: “**Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.**” Tools of torture were used against the Good Shepherd; a blindfold, a whip, some thorns, a purple robe, a hammer, some nails and finally a spear. This isn't a syrupy, sentimental love; but a fierce love for you—written in the blood of Jesus. God's love is for you—in your rejection, in your frustration and in your quite desperation.

From Zechariah, we know that, *when the temple goes up the horns go down!* On the third day, Jesus—the Temple—was alive forevermore! When the temple goes up the horns go down! Jesus conquered all the powers that rip us up and tear us apart. Then he announced a building program. What was it? What did He say?

Jesus says, “I will build my church.” Are you ready to rebuild what's been destroyed in your life? Christ uses humble people, not the proud; He uses Davids, not Goliaths. Blacksmiths need not apply. Craftsmen, on the other hand, are most welcome; craftsmen who lay hold of their tool—God's Word—to hear it, study it, love it, believe it and follow it. And they build with great vim and vigor, joy and delight. No more deep despair or excessive misery!

“Does everybody know what time it is?” “It's Tool Time!” Let's build! Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

THE LORD'S PRAYER

All: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

BENEDICAMUS AND BENEDICTION

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. *Numbers 6:24–26*

People: Amen.

CLOSING HYMN “On What Has Now Been Sown” *LSB* 921

1 On what has now been sown
 Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;
The pow’r is Thine alone
 To make it sprout and grow.
Do Thou in grace the harvest raise,
And Thou alone shalt have the praise!

2 To Thee our wants are known,
 From Thee are all our pow’rs;
Accept what is Thine own
 And pardon what is ours.
Our praises, Lord, and prayers receive,
And to Thy Word a blessing give.

3 O grant that each of us,
 Now met before Thee here,
May meet together thus
 When Thou and Thine appear
And follow Thee to heav’n, our home.
E’en so, amen, Lord Jesus, come!
Text: Public domain