

Sermon for the 5th Sunday after Pentecost (C), 1.vii.2007  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
8:30 (Missa Brevis), 10:00 a.m. (LBW/ Setting 2), Holy Eucharist  
I Kings 19:15-16, 19-21, Psalm 16, Galatians 5:1, 13-25, Luke 9:51-62

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

**For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore,  
and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**

**-- Galatians 5:1**

Some amazing things are said and done in the Word of  
God as it comes to us in today's Lessons, incredible deeds  
and words that are hard to hear. There is the story of the  
calling of Elisha, with Samson sure one of the Paul  
Bunjan's of the Bible. Imagine slaughtering twelve oxen  
single-handedly, preparing a fire with their yokes and  
feeding a multitude of people with the meal cooked from  
their meat! It makes our church picnic and the boiling of

many chickens look effortless! And, in today's Gospel, what on earth does Jesus mean by speaking the way He does to people who want to follow Him? As far as I can tell, it all has to do with the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom that is coming, as Martin Luther says in the *Small Catechism*, with us or without us, a reign of God, a ruling of God in the lives of men and women that is so urgent there is no time to lose.

Elisha is called to continue the work of resistance that Elijah has begun, and there is no time to lose, no time even to finish plowing the field in which he is working. Our Lord has set His face to go to Jerusalem, to not be late for His appointment with destiny, and all He meets upon the way must now either go with Him immediately or step aside. The goal is in site and it is God's goal. There can be no holding back.

Though we may be able to visualize these Biblical scenes, it is hard, for me at least, to understand what they mean for us until we turn to Saint Paul's teaching in Galatians as we heard it read just now. That freedom for which Christ set us free is always moving *forward*, not looking back in fear and bondage. Many, if not *all* of those sins and vices Paul lists are the result of looking *back*, of nursing old guilt and grudges, of living in fear of becoming a new person, that 'new creation' in Christ Paul refers to in Galatians. There is no *time* for that if we are living with the whole Church and leading our lives according to God's schedule. And there really is no time for such foolishness in any of our lives, short as they are.

Christ has not set us free for *that*, but for something new, to be created all over again by the Holy

Spirit of His Heavenly Father. Our Lord wants each of us to know personally what it felt like for Him to feel the Spirit filling and surrounding His whole being and to hear the Father's voice of delight as He did in His Baptism by John. He wants us to live in that Spirit and to move forward, not to turn back toward our sin in shame or to slip back into our bitterness, wrath and greed through mindless sloth. There is something better, infinitely better than that, and it was for that godly life and that true freedom that we were created in the first place.

Today is our last service of worship using the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, and next Sunday, as we hold a new, red hymnal in our hands and set about learning new songs to sing to the LORD, the green of the *LBW* will be part of our past. It has served Lutherans in the United States and Canada well, though not as well as it might

have. The names of the publishing church bodies listed in the forematter of the *LBW* remind us that it represents a dream that did not come true, the dream of uniting all, or at least most American and Canadian Lutherans in a single Church. The Canadians have since gone their own way, we ours and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod seems as distant from us now as ever, and we from it. The dream and hope the green hymnal represented for very many of us who witnessed its birth and both its acceptance and rejection is a dream yet to be realized. Though it will most certainly realized through the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, none of us knows what the future will hold, as long as God still has a purpose for the Lutheran Church, a purpose which Lutherans are not afraid to fulfill.

But, regardless of that, I hope that the new hymnal will represent in this congregation your trust in

God that God can bring you to a new place, and that that is something for which to give thanks, not something to fear. That new place can be the very freedom for which Christ set you free, but you will have to decide whether you really want to walk that path, for it leads to the Cross. Though Our Lord walked that way *because* of you, for the sake of His great and eternal love, He cannot walk that way *for* you. No one can. He invites you to walk *with* Him in freedom.

The green hymnal, and the little blue hymnal too, have done their work through our hands and voices and God's Holy Spirit, and they will now be given places of honor in the choir library and in our homes where they can be taken down from their shelves from time to time for family devotion, a choir anthem or solo, or even for you to sing a few hymns of which you have grown fond but

which could not be included in the new, red hymnal. If you really believe in the coming Kingdom of God, and that that Kingdom includes us, that it is not a Kingdom of shame but a Kingdom of forgiveness and hope, you will have the strength someday to show the same loving respect toward the old brown 'Sunday School hymnal' as well, singing from it *in* Sunday School as you gather hungrily for the study of God's Word.



Now to Him Who love us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to Our God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ✠Amen.

S. D. G.

