

Pastor T.C. Arnold  
1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent  
2 Corinthians 6:2  
March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Lord reminds us through Paul's second letter to the Church in Corinth, "*In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*"

The day of salvation for Adam and Eve in the beginning was not needed. But when sin compromised man's salvation through the temptation in the garden with sumptuous fruit, Adam and Eve needed a day of salvation. God provided one through that promise – her offspring will crush the head of the serpent. And that was the promise of the day of salvation God made to all mankind through the seed of the woman – Jesus – who would crush the head of the devil.

That trend of sin and then needing salvation continued for mankind. Cain and Able, the sons of Adam and Eve would have their "run-in" with deadly sin. Cain became jealous of his brother, lured him out into a field and killed him. God ask Cain, "*Where is your brother?*" Cain responds in a sarcastic way, "*How should I know, am I my brother's keeper?*" God confronts Cain with his sin of murder and subsequent punishment and Cain responds, "*How can I bear this punishment?*" without so much as speaking one word or repentance. God responds with mercy, toward Cain and told him that He would protect him. "*Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation.*"

The same goes for Noah and his family in Genesis chapter six. The same goes through God's servant Abraham who rescued his relative Lot. And then Abraham pleads to God over the whole city of Sodom after Abraham negotiates with the Almighty to spare the corrupt city if he were able to find ten faithful people. Example after example of God's mercy in the midst of trouble abounds in the Old Testament. And for you today, in all of what you hear, beloved in the Lord, hear the Lord's words as you heard it from St. Paul, "*Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation.*"

It was hard for the church in Corinth to imagine that it was a favorable time when Paul was writing these words of God. There was a cultural diversity that led to a great lack of unity in the Church in that place. The conflicts were so severe in the church that back in chapter two he says, "*I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you...*" So painful was the visit to Corinth that Paul did not go there again. And yet God spouts off words like, "*Now is the favorable time; now is the day of salvation.*"

Conflicts erupting over the situation in the Ukraine and we wonder if now is the favorable time. The moral fabric of our society seems to weaken by the day and we wonder, how, God, is this the favorable time. Besides all the unrest in the world, there is unrest with our very lives. Paul gives us those words that we can identify with, "*in afflictions, hardships, calamities... sleepless nights.*" It may be as bad for some that are mentioned... "*beatings, imprisonment, riots and labors.*" For the sake of the Gospel, will we experience these things? Yes, perhaps. While being confronted with everything that life brings before us every day? Absolutely for sure. So, God, is this really now the favorable time? Is this really now the day of salvation?

How many among us today feel afflicted? What is causing this? What is causing your calamities or sleepless nights? You are having them. I know you are. Is someone pressing these

things upon you by their actions? If so, how are you addressing this? Have you spoken to them? Do they even know what their sins are doing to you? What is causing your affliction? Is it your own sins? Are you bottling up your guilt and holding it closed up inside to the point where shame overtakes most every thought you have during the day – or during your sleepless nights? What have you done? The Lord calls us to talk – to be united – especially to Him in repentance. Talk to each other? Yes. Giving each other the opportunity to be Christ-like and say, “you are forgiven.” Repent because in our repentance, our Lord, each and every time, says what Paul would tell the Church in Corinth – “*Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of your salvation.*”

Beloved in the Lord, take this opportunity in the midst of this season of Lent to reflect on those ashes we were given on Wednesday. Just as the words held true for Adam, they are still ours today, “*Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.*” In the days of old people would put on sackcloth and ashes. Sackcloth is a coarse, black cloth made from goat’s hair that was worn together with the burnt ashes of wood as a sign of mourning as well as a sign of repentance and at times of prayer for deliverance. Today our sackcloth and ashes weigh on our hearts as our sins. Those sins weigh us down and hold us back. They drive us crazy and hurt us more than they hurt others. That is why we look to our Lord for a favorable time and day of salvation in the midst of it all.

Who is the one who could go into the wilderness for forty days and perfectly resist the greatest temptations ever known? Who is the one who will teach in the midst of sufferings that His suffering will be greater than all of ours put together? Who is ‘The Mighty Fortress’ we sang about this morning? A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. A trusty shield and weapon. In the midst of the devil’s temptations – in the midst of our afflictions, hardships, calamities – in the midst of our own sin and shame, hold on to the trusty shield and weapon. That’s His Word. That’s Jesus Himself.

Those forty days that Jesus spent in the wilderness under great distress and temptation became our forty days of Lent. We hold fast during these days. Our eyes are firmly set upon the cross. Jesus resisted the temptation in the wilderness to set upon us today those words, “*Now is the favorable time; now is the day of your salvation.*” And that is true!! Jesus resisted temptation to show us the way. That way leads us by His example and by His teaching. But most important for you and me, that way leads us to Calvary’s Holy Mount.

In a letter to friend by the name of John Schlaginhausen, Martin Luther, the author of our sermon hymn, wrote concerning the death of John’s wife. He said, “I know that God’s mercy is greater than your tragedy... there is sweet sugar mixed with bitter vinegar.” That’s always the way it is with our Mighty Fortress. God’s mercy is greater which means that Jesus’ sufferings were greater. He knows our sufferings. He knows them to death. He knows them to life as well. And while we count our days to that bitter tragic, yet sweet as sugar day we call Good Friday, let us never forget that while sins defeat was there, that’s not where God ended it.

He rose. You will rise. Sin has been defeated. Now IS the favorable time; now IS the day of your salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.