

Advent III
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Concordia Lutheran Mission
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**“God Prefers to Rule through the Liturgy of the Church,
i.e. through the Gospel.”**

**“Blessed are they who put their trust in Him.”
Psalm 2:12**

Introduction

How does God rule the nations? Well, there are two ways God rules the nations. One way God prefers and one way He does not.

The way God does *not* prefer to rule is with a rod of iron. God rules those who reject His Messiah’s gracious rule with a rod of iron because that is how they want it and also because there is no other way to rule them.

God’s preferred rule is the Liturgy of the Church. Through the Liturgy of the Church God does His natural work which is to give men gifts, to comfort them, to forgive their sins, to give them salvation, the life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body. Because the Liturgy of the Church is the Word and the Sacraments through which God forgives sins¹, the Liturgy is the power of God unto salvation² because it creates and sustains saving faith³ and trust in God in the hearts of men.

¹“But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who

The Liturgy of the Church is God's preferred rule because it is His natural work and blesses us with the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life ever lasting. And so the Lord says, "Blessed are they who put their trust in Him."⁴

I. God Rules with a Rod of Iron those Who Reject the Liturgy of the Church, i.e. The Gospel.

A. To rule means to have the last word and its consequences.

But what does it mean to rule? To rule means to have the last word. Ruling doesn't mean to have the only say, but to have the last say or word. President John F. Kennedy once said of ruling:

preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term [liturgy] agrees aptly with the ministry." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII).39, Triglotta, p. 411*

²"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" **Romans 1:16**

³"So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." **Romans 10:17.** "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God." **Ephesians 2:8**

⁴**Psalm 2:7**

To govern is to choose.⁵

A ruler must consider all the information and viewpoints before him and then choose or decide. Consequently, a ruler is likened unto the rudder man on a ship.⁶ By his decision on the position of the rudder, the rudder man determines the direction and course of the ship.

A ruler, therefore, decides; and by his decision sets the course of events. The Lord, therefore, says in **Psalm 2:12**:

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potters' vessel.⁷

The decision has been made and the course or action set: **Destruction and ruin.**

B. Destruction and ruin is the outcome or decision unbelievers want.

But what produced this outcome of destruction or ruin? The nations themselves produced this decision. For, as we have noted earlier, they opposed the Lord and His Messiah, that is the Savior from

⁵President John F. Kennedy, quoted in **A Lamm Candidacy: Welcome but Improbable**, "Politics and People", Albert R. Hunt, *The Wall Street Journal*, 11 July 1996, p. (A)17.

⁶The word govern comes from the Latin word *gubernare* (hence gubernatorial when describing aspects of the governor or his office, e.g. the gubernatorial candidate) and means "to steer or pilot a ship, direct, command." *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, p. 788, s.v. "govern".

⁷**Psalm 2:9**

the sin and unrighteousness of men. They opposed the Lord and His salvation in the Messiah when they tried to free themselves of the Liturgy of the Church, i.e. free themselves from His Word, His Gospel, His gracious rule.

The Liturgy of the Church is God's salvation through His Word and Sacraments, i.e. the Gospel. The Lutheran Church states concerning the Liturgy of the Church, namely the Gospel:

But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term [liturgy] agrees aptly with the ministry.⁸

And the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. St. Paul writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth⁹

But why would anyone want to cast away these gracious cords and bands of God's loving embrace? Men hate God's loving embrace in the

⁸*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII).80, 81, Triglotta, p. 411.*

⁹**Romans 1:16.**

Liturgy because it also reveals to them the gravity of their sin. For the Liturgy reveals Christ Crucified. And Christ-Crucified means God died for our sins. What greater testimony against the gaping deficiencies of our righteousness and also gravity of our sin is there than just the death of God's Son for us? The Lutheran Church states:

*Yea, what more forcible, more terrible declaration and preaching of God's wrath against sin is there than just the suffering and death of Christ, His Son? But as long as this preaches God's wrath and terrifies men, it is not yet the preaching of the Gospel nor Christ's own preaching, but that of Moses and the Law against the impenitent. For the Gospel and Christ were never ordained and given for the purpose of terrifying and condemning, but of comforting and cheering those who are terrified and timid.*¹⁰

The reason, then, the nations rage against the cords of God's love and the bands of His embrace is because the Liturgy reveals our salvation and also at the same time reveals the reason we need this salvation: our sin and unrighteousness. Luther writes:

Here the Holy Spirit explains the cause of the raging, what kind of counsels they take, and what the kings and rulers discuss among themselves, namely, how with all their powers and efforts they may break the chains of Christ and of the Father. For Satan does this not only to humble us, not only to slay us who teach and believe, but to exterminate and destroy the Word, the name of Christ, Baptism, and whatever our religion contains. As a result, since we teach Christ with the greatest confidence, he begins to rage, he lays hold of the

¹⁰*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article V.12, 13, Triglotta, pp. 955, 957.*

wills of the princes, of kings, of the wise, the powerful, finally of the multitude. Here by common counsel all apply themselves to breaking these bonds, that is, to extinguishing the Word and protecting idolatry.¹¹

What then is the result if someone reject the forgiveness of sins and salvation? The result is condemnation for their sins and unrighteousness and thereby destruction, death and dying in their sin and unrighteousness. By rejecting God's pardon in the Gospel, they leave nothing but the dreadful condemnation of God. Jesus speaks in the midst of His Passion of the dreadful consequences of rejecting the Gospel in **Psalm 69**:

Draw nigh unto my soul, *and* redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries *are* all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness; and I looked *for some* to take pity, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them; and *that which should have been for their welfare, let it become* a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them. Let their habitation be desolate *and* let none dwell in their tents. For they persecute *him* whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou has wounded. Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into thy righteousness. Let them be blotted out of

¹¹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 14, 15.

the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.¹²

By rejecting the Gospel they have by their own request asked not to be judged by Christ's perfect righteousness, but by their own sin and unrighteousness. And God obliges them with the dreadful condemnation of eternal damnation.

The impenitent, then, Jesus rules them with a rod of iron, i.e. the rod of His wrath, because there is no other way to deal with those who reject the Gospel than with force. Luther writes:

For even if the world has great power and this King by contrast is completely weak, since He has nothing with which to fight except the Word of the Gospel, which we see thoroughly despised by the world; nevertheless this very Word, so despised and neglected by the world, will at last destroy all His enemies. It is truly, as the prophet says here, a rod of iron, whereas the world is a potter's vessel. Consequently the earthen vase will be shattered with a light blow of the iron.

Why, you will ask, does the Holy Spirit call the Gospel by this name, since it is truly a word which refreshes and saves souls, just as Christ also came not that the world would perish, but that He might save the world? But here the Holy Spirit foretells something quite different, that He will devastate the world. I reply: It is true that Christ's office is to save, to free from sins, and to give eternal life. Thus Paul also correctly speaks of the Gospel as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith" (Rom. 1:16). For those who receive Christ and believe His Word will truly obtain salvation. On that account the Scriptures also call Him the

¹²Psalm 69:18-28.

“cornerstone” (Matt. 21:42) which sustains the whole weight of the building, on which the whole building rests, lest it fall. Those who do not receive Christ, however, and hate His Word—because they thrust away their own salvation, how can they escape destruction? Those who do not wish to lean on this stone, but audaciously go against Him, will either fall on this stone, or this stone will fall on them. So how can they fail to be injured?¹³

Because many reject God’s pardon and righteousness in the Liturgy of the Church, i.e. the Gospel, they invite upon themselves the only rule left: the rule of the rod of iron. So, God the Father let’s them have their way, grants them their wish, and says:

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.¹⁴

II. All Who Trust in the Messiah through the Liturgy of the Church are Blessed with Eternal Life.

A. The Messiah forges the saving Liturgy of the Church by His Passion.

The sad thing about all this is there is no need for this dreadful end for men. For Christ took upon Himself the dreadful judgment of God’s eternal damnation for our sins. Jesus says in **Psalm 22:1**:

MY God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?*¹⁵

¹³Luther’s Works, Vol. 12, p. 63.

¹⁴Psalm 2:9.

¹⁵Psalm 22:1.

David writes in **Psalm 8:5**:

Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while....¹⁶

The *Catechism* teaches us:

He suffered the tortures of the damned in hell.¹⁷

Luther writes of Christ's being forsaken of God:

In this verse¹⁸ David describes how miserably Christ will be forsaken. No human words can describe this as clearly, briefly, and simply as it is here. He is not speaking of the physical suffering of Christ, which was also great and difficult, but of His sublime, spiritual suffering, which He felt in His soul, a suffering that far surpasses all physical suffering. He describes the highest degree of this suffering and says: "Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while." What this is, no man on earth understands, and no man can reach or express it in words. For to be forsaken of God is far worse than death. Those who have tasted and experienced a little of this may ponder it, but people who are carnally secure, coarse, untried, and inexperienced know and understand nothing of it. When God gives us a purse full of money, a field full of grain, and a cellar full of wine, and when He lets us be without cross and temptation and enjoy ourselves, then we have a good time and come to think that

¹⁶**Psalm 8:5.**

¹⁷Question 138 B.

¹⁸**Psalm 8:5.**

everything is rosy and that we are sitting in God's lap. But when God conceals and hides Himself and lets the devil do with us what he pleases, then there is trouble and sorrow, yes, there is death itself.¹⁹

And in the midst of His suffering the agonies of soul for men, Jesus was ever mindful of us and was fashioning the Liturgy for us in order to deliver the benefits of His Passion on the Cross for us. St. Paul, therefore, writes of the Holy Baptism, and therefore the Liturgy:

... Christ ... loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of the water by the word.²⁰

Christ gave Himself, i.e. He suffered and died, in order to save us through Holy Baptism. When we look at our Baptism, we need to remember that it was fashioned by the suffering and death of Christ our Savior. Our Baptism was purchased at a great price. When we see the Liturgy of the Church, then, we must never be dismissive of it but must remember at what a great a price it was purchased for us; for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ fashioned the Liturgy and its power to save through His deep agony of body and soul.

B. Jesus' rules His Church with scepter of His Liturgy.

And the Liturgy of the Church is the gracious scepter through which He rules His Church. The prophet Zechariah says:

¹⁹*Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, pp. 124, 125.

²⁰**Ephesians 5:25, 26.**

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he *is* just, and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion *shall be* from sea *even* to sea, and from the river *even* to the ends of the earth.²¹

Through the Gospel Jesus speaks the peace of absolution to the nations and rules, thereby, the nations. The Lutheran Church states that the Gospel *is* absolution and therefore peace:

Moreover, the power of the keys administers and presents the Gospel through absolution, which [proclaims peace to me and] is the true voice of the Gospel. {The word of absolution speaks peace to me and is the Gospel itself.} Thus we also comprise absolution when we speak of faith, because *faith cometh by hearing*, as Paul says Rom. 10, 17.²²

Luther writes of Christ's Rule through the Gospel, i.e. the Liturgy:

It is for this reason that He will need neither chariot, nor horse, nor bow, nor battle. For He will be a "Prince of Peace," as Is. 9:6 also says; and this peace is to be not only among the Jews, of whom only a few will accept it, but also among the Gentiles. Therefore His rule will consist in the

²¹**Zechariah 9:10.**

²²*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.).39.*

Word or in speech, because He says here that He will speak, or teach, peace to the Gentiles.²³

The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes of Christ's *staff*:

In the 'rod and staff' we can see God's Word and Sacraments, by which God supplies His believers with fortitude and stamina for the worst perils of their heavenward way.²⁴

Jesus' rule through the Liturgy of the Church, then, is one of mercy, grace, and forgiveness. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes of Christ's rule, i.e. His final Word, in the Church:

It is therefore a part of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel that the Gospel be recognized as the "higher Word", which is to be God's *final Word* for the terrified sinner. Luther adds: "For as the lesser Word it [the Law] should and must give way and place to the Gospel. Both are God's Word, the Law and the Gospel, but the two are not equal. One is lower, the other higher; one is lesser the other greater."²⁵

And through this gracious final Word or rule, the Lord does His natural work, which is to comfort and give gifts to men. The Lutheran Church states:

²³Luther's Works, Vol. 20, p. 288, 289.

²⁴Lectures on Select Psalms, p. 88.

²⁵Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 232.

Therefore the Spirit of Christ must not only comfort, but also through the office of the Law *reprove the world of sin*, John 16, 8, and thus must do in the New Testament, as the prophet says, Is. 28, 21, ... *the work of another* (reprove), in order that He may [afterwards] do His own work, which is to comfort and preach of grace....²⁶

And this grace creates saving faith which receives all the blessings Christ has won for us. St. Paul writes:

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God....²⁷

And St. Paul writes:

So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.²⁸

The Lord, therefore, says of the blessings of Christ given through the His Liturgy:

Blessed *are* all they that put their trust in him.²⁹

The rule of the liturgy is God's preferred rule, for where there is forgiveness of sins, there are the gifts of God of life and salvation³⁰. Luther writes:

²⁶*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, V. The Law and of the Gospel*.11.

²⁷**Ephesians 2:8.**

²⁸**Romans 10:17.**

²⁹**Psalm 2:12b.**

There are two worlds, as it were. The one is the devil's, in which men are secure, proud, neglecting God and the Gospel. The Holy Spirit warns them that they must get rid of their false security, or they will perish on their way. The other is Christ's. In it are the afflicted and miserable men who are disturbed by the sense of their sins and fear punishment for their sins, eternal death, and the wrath of God. And yet, because they see that the Son of God was made a sacrifice for their sins, they have hope for mercy. The Holy Spirit comforts them with the marvelous word: "Blessed are all who take refuge in Him," or hope.

At the same time, however, He teaches about the true worship of God. To worship God means nothing else than to put one's whole trust in this King and to depend upon His aid and support against death, sin, and Satan. The word "hoping," then, explains the kiss about which He spoke above; as if He wished to say: "Behold this King, be joyful and happy, and fill your heart with good thoughts about God through this Son, whom the Father proposes you should kiss. For everything else in the world, even the most holy life, good works, or your righteousness, will make you sad, will not offer consolation or aid against death and sin. In this Son, however, you will find the fountain of salvation and comfort. Do not only hope in Him, then, but firmly believe that."³¹

³⁰*The Small Catechism, VI. The Sacrament of the Altar.6. "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? Answer. That is shown us by these words: Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."*

³¹*Luther's Works, Vol. 12, pp. 92, 93.*

Conclusion.

God, then, rules in two ways: God rules with a rod of iron and with the Liturgy of the Church.

God rules the impenitent, i.e. those who persist in sin and unbelief, with the rod of iron.

The penitent, i.e. those who recognize they are worthy of the rod iron, God rules with the Liturgy of the Church. This rule of the Liturgy of the Church God prefers; for through this Blessed and Gracious Rule He does His natural work to comfort men with the remission of sin, the life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.

Amen.