

Vespers, Lent II
17 February 2008
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

"The Gospel Creates Saving Strength In the Mouth of Babes."

"Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings has thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger."

Psalm 8:2

Introduction

Last week we saw how verse one of Psalm 8 shows that the Risen and Ascended Christ is praised in all the earth. While verse one reveals the *extent* of the praise of Christ and thereby the extent of Christ's Kingdom, namely all the earth, verse two reveals the *nature* of the praise: *it is the praise of babes and sucklings, namely those who are considered naive and weak in worldly terms.*¹ And, remarkably, the praise of babes and sucklings slays the Devil and his minions.

Such astonishing praise and strength which slays the Devil and his minions is born of the First Babe Promised in the Garden of Eden and born in Bethlehem. Because we are reborn in the Christ Child's Image by our Baptism, our calling upon God is heard and answered by Him; and the Devil and his angels thereby are forever silenced and stilled². And because Christ's birth is a birth unto everlasting life so we too enjoy a birth to eternal life.

I. The Strength of Babes: Strange Language to the Natural Man.

A. Babes and sucklings are the epitome of weakness.

Passages like verse two of Psalm 8 sound strange to our ears. After all, babes and sucklings are not the epitome of strength, but of weakness and inability.

¹"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes." **St. Matthew 11:25.**

²Luther: "He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me." The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p., 372.

All the stranger is that these babes and sucklings slay not mere earthly enemies but the enemies of God. Babes and sucklings are no match for worldly foes let alone the opponents of the Almighty. Yet here in verse 2 of Psalm 8 babes and sucklings overcome the enemies of God.

Finally, these babes and sucklings slay the enemies of God, the Devil and his minions, not with might of earthly arms, but by the Word of their mouth.

B. The Gospel speaks strange language to the ears of the natural man.

That passages like these appear as nonsense to us reveals how much the Old Adam is with us and how wont we are not to think in the ways that God does. For these passages go absolutely against the grain of our natural knowledge, thinking, and experience. And indeed this passage goes against our experience because it is formed by that which we cannot know by natural knowledge or experience: *The Gospel*. St. Paul writes:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish, foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.³

Hence, when we come across passages like Psalm 8:2 which seem strange to our ears, we must stop and consider that it may be the Gospel or formed by the Gospel. This reaction calls us again to repentance; for it reminds us how much our flesh is still with us and how wont we are to doubt God's Word and not believe it.

II. The Strange Language of the Gospel was Formed by the First Child in Eden.

A. Christ is the Babe Promised in the Garden of Eden.

The strange, remarkable and marvelous sight of babes and sucklings overthrowing the prince of this world⁴ and his legions stems from the Babe Promised in Eden.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve followed the doctrine of the Devil and thereby became children of the Devil⁵, slaves of the Devil, and enemies of God. But God in pronouncing judgment upon the Devil *declared*⁶ Eve an enemy no longer of God *but of the Devil*:

³**I Corinthians 1:18**; also see **I Corinthians 2:14**.

⁴The Devil, **St. John 12:31**.

⁵**St. John 8:44**.

⁶This act of declaring a sinful creature righteous is called *forensic justification* (**Romans 4:5**). God by His Word declares the wicked Eve righteous (**Romans 4:17b**: "[God] called those things which be not as though they were."). Because God's Word defines and creates all things (**St. John 1:3**, **Romans 4:17b**), Eve must therefore be righteous by God's declaration, even though she is

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her Seed....⁷

Here God declares Eve righteous even though Eve is evil; for declaring enmity (warfare) between her and Satan means she must be on the other side in the only struggle there is: the struggle between Good and evil.

And Eve is declared righteous *not* arbitrarily nor unjustly nor unrighteously, but rather she was declared righteous based upon her *Seed*, her Child, her Babe and Suckling, which Child would crush the head of the serpent. And so we see it is the human nature conquered and held captive by Satan in sin which overcomes Satan in the Seed of the woman. Again God says of Eve's Babe:

guilty. Eve therefore is *re-created* a righteous creature by God's *creative* Word, namely by God's *declarative or forensic act*. "...to be justified does not mean that a righteous man is made from a wicked man, but to be pronounced righteous in a forensic sense. ..." (*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article III.131*)

Luther writes: "It was through Satan that man fell into sin; and so now the judgment of Satan and that of man are not the same. God does not link them together in the punishment, as He had a right to do, but separates them to the utmost. Although He is also angry with man for obeying the enemy of God against God, yet His anger against Satan is far greater. He simply condemns and convicts him before the eyes of Adam and Eve, so that through the condemnation of their enemy Adam and Eve may regain their composure to some extent and realize that their situation is better. So the first part of the comfort lies in this, that because of Adam and Eve the serpent is accused and cursed, and Satan together with the serpent. ... Thus the sun of comfort, previously enveloped by black clouds, rises above the clouds and with its most welcome light shines on their frightened hearts. For Adam and Eve not only do not hear themselves cursed like the serpent; but they even *hear themselves drawn up*, as it were, *in battle line against their condemned enemy*, and this with the hope of help from the Son of God, the Seed of the woman. Forgiveness of their guilt has been forgiven; they have been won back from death and have already been set free from hell and from those fears by which they were all but slain when God appeared." *Luther's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 191.

7Genesis 3:15a.

He shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His Heel.⁸

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

... the Son of God became Man to destroy the works of the devil *in and through the human nature*.⁹

This blessed work Christ accomplished by doing in the human nature what we had not done and now cannot do. And Christ did this in the human nature for us. Christ, for example, enjoyed a pure human conception¹⁰ and birth to deliver us from our impure conception and still birth in sin. Luther writes:

This is the meaning of Isaiah 9[:6]: “To us a child is born, and to us a son is given.” To us, to us, born to us and given to us. Therefore see to it that you derive from the Gospel not only enjoyment of the story as such, for that does not last long. Nor should you derive from it only an example, for that does not hold up without faith. But see to it that you make his birth your own, and that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive, instead, his. This happens, if you have this faith. By this token you sit assuredly in the Virgin Mary’s lap and are her dear child. This faith you have to practice and to pray for as long as you live; you can never strengthen it enough. That is our foundation and our inheritance; on it the good works are to be built.¹¹

8Genesis 3:15b.

⁹*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 274, emphasis added.

¹⁰Christ’s conception was the *Immaculate conception*. “The once exception is Christ. He is exempt from original sin because He assumed the human nature not by natural generation, but through the operation of the Holy Ghost. Matt. 1:20: ‘That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.’ ... Therefore, according to His human nature, Christ is called ‘that holy thing which shall be born of thee’ (Luke 1:35). ... The Virgin Mary does not form an exception. Not Scripture, but the decretal of Pius IX, 1854, took her, in the interest of Mariolatry, out of the category of sinners and ascribed to her an immaculate conception.” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. I, p. 550.

¹¹*Luther’s Works*, Vol. 52, p. 16. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes: “Moreover, according to Scripture, this very fact that the Son of God became an embryo and a little child and thus passed through all the stages of the development of the human nature belonged to the work of our redemption.... Kromayer: ‘Christ passed through all stages of our existence that He might fully remedy our unclean conception and birth.’” *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 84.

Christ in His conception, birth, and entire life kept the commandments perfectly for all men. Because Christ's keeping the commandments perfectly is ours through Holy Baptism, then Satan's power is destroyed because he can no longer accuse us of sin. Luther writes:

He satisfied the Law; He fulfilled the Law perfectly, for He loved God with all His heart, and with all His soul, and with all His strength, and with all His mind, and He loved His neighbor as Himself. Therefore, when the Law comes and accuses you of not having kept it, bid it go to Christ. Say: There is the Man who has kept it; to Him I cling; He fulfilled it for me and gave His fulfillment to me.¹²

Finally, Christ's Passion, wherein He suffered the eternal punishment for all our sins, likewise removes Satan's power to accuse. For if there be no human guilt, how can Satan accuse. St. Paul writes:

Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.¹³

In and through the human nature Christ fulfilled all righteousness and took away every point at which Satan could accuse us. Now we no longer flee God and His protection because we know that He has forgiven all sins in Christ and has now sided with man. In and through the human nature, then, Christ crushed Satan's head by establishing perfect human righteousness free of any and all sin. It is a man, therefore, that crushed Satan's head. This is our heritage as men by the Gospel through faith.

B. The Gospel conforms us to the Image of the First-Born, Jesus Christ.

By Holy Baptism infants and adults are incorporated into Christ¹⁴ and thereby we are conformed to the Image of the Babe and Suckling, namely Christ, the Promised Seed in the Garden who crushed Satan beneath His feet. So St. Paul writes:

[the Father] hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. In whom we have redemption through His Blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the

12The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p., 372.

13Romans 8:34.

14Romans 6:3, Galatians 3:27 .

Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature.¹⁵

Again St. Paul writes:

For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the Image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren.¹⁶

Because the Gospel conforms us to the Image of Christ, the Gospel forms the Words of our mouths and the praise of our lips. And so calling upon Christ for the remission of sins delivers us from sin and Satan's power. St. Paul writes:

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.¹⁷

And where there is deliverance, there is the stilling of the enemy and the avenger, as Psalm 8:2 states:

Out of the mouth of babes thou hast ordained strength, because of Thine enemy, that Thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.

Christ also calls such Strength in the mouth of babes and sucklings praise:

Yea; have ye never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou has perfected praise?"¹⁸

Indeed, calling upon Christ for the remission of sin is the Highest Worship and Praise of Christ. The Lutheran Church states:

... with [Christ] the remission of sins should be sought. This worship is the highest worship of Christ. Nothing greater could [be ascribed] to Christ. To seek from Him the remission of sins [is] truly to acknowledge the Messiah. Now, thus to think of Christ, thus to worship Him, thus to

¹⁵Colossians 1:13-15, amplification added.

¹⁶Romans 8:29.

¹⁷Romans 10:10.

¹⁸St. Matthew 21:16.

embrace Him, is truly to believe.¹⁹

This calling upon Christ is the Highest Praise, for it conquers Christ's enemy, the Devil, whether called upon by adults, children or babes and sucklings, and we all, adults, babes, and sucklings, crush Satan under our feet shortly by grace through faith. St. Paul writes:

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.²⁰

Luther writes:

How does He found such a power and kingdom, and what sort of people does He use? "Out of the mouths of infants and sucklings," he says, "hast Thou ordained strength. Thou hast ordained a strength or established a kingdom full of might and power against sin, death, devil, and world, not with physical weapons, armor or sword or gun, but with the mouth of men, and of infants and sucklings at that." This is the way Christ's kingdom is established, namely, not with human force, wisdom, counsel or power, but with the Word and the Gospel preached by infants and sucklings. The Turkish emperor strengthens and fortifies his kingdom with the sword. So does the pope. But Christ founds, strengthens, and fortifies His kingdom only through the oral Word.²¹

Through the peace of the Gospel, i.e. through absolution of all sins and the knowledge, therefore, that God is no longer angry with us because of our sins but rather He has forgiven us and now pleased with us on account of Christ's righteousness, the enemy and the avenger is stilled and we overcome him and gain eternal life. St. John the Apostle writes:

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony....²²

¹⁹*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article III.33.*

²⁰**Romans 16:20.**

²¹*Luther's Works, Vol. 12, p. 108.*

²²**Revelation 12:9-10, 11.**

Conclusion.

The strange language of Psalm 8 is the language of the Gospel, of the Babe born in Bethlehem. Such language sounds to be foolishness only to the natural man who is perishing.

But to those who believe, this language is the strength to conquer the world, the flesh and the Devil and to enter Our Father's Kingdom. So Jesus says:

I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes.²³

Amen.