

Vespers II
7 December 2008
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“The Gospel is the Strong Arm of the Lord.”

“He hath shewed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

St. Luke 1:51

Introduction

What is the Arm of the Lord? The Arm of the Lord is the Gospel.

But how can that be? How can the Gospel be the Arm of the Lord? Should not the Arm of the Lord be some big hunk of sinew? Well, indeed, the Arm of the Lord is sinew, for God truly became man, flesh and blood, in Jesus Christ. Through this flesh and blood Jesus Christ redeemed the world.

But that redemption goes nowhere unless it is delivered to us. Hence, Scripture speaks of the Gospel as the Hand of the Lord¹, the Arm of the Lord², and the power of God unto salvation³.

St. Mary, then, speaks of the Mighty Arm of the Gospel scattering the proud, for the Gospel reveals that our righteousness in which we invest so much of our pride is nothing, indeed even offensive to God.

But for the faithful, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, fully able to vanquish our foes of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and to preserve us steadfast in His Word and faith unto the life everlasting.

I. The Gospel is the Arm of the Lord.

¹**Isaiah 11:11.**

²**Isaiah 53:1.**

³**Romans 1:16.**

A. The Power of the Arm of the Lord is the Cross of Christ.

Last week we saw how the Gospel enabled St. Mary and enables all Christians to magnify or make great the Lord by faith. The Gospel indeed is a great power because it can expand the universe of faithful hearts and roll back the frontiers of darkness and unbelief of sin.

By this alone we see that the Gospel is the Strong Arm of the Lord for it takes us out of the darkness of sin and death into God's marvelous light and eternal kingdom.

The underlying power of the Gospel, however, is the Cross of Christ. There we see God's Arm in the flesh. God was in Christ redeeming the world in and through the human nature. St. Paul writes:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.⁴

The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, past President of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, writes:

... the Scripture truth [is] that the Son of God became Man to destroy the works of the devil *in and through the human nature* ...⁵

Through the human nature God destroyed the power of the devil over men. Moses writes:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.⁶

A human heel crushes Satan's head underfoot. That is a powerful heel. And it is powerful because while it is truly a human heel, it is also at the same time the heel of the Almighty Son of God. Hence, the heel of a man crushes the head of Satan. This victory is the heritage of all men because Christ accomplished it as a man in and through the human nature for our benefit.

Of this massive and almighty power of Christ exercised in and through the human nature the Lord speaks in Isaiah:

⁴**II Corinthians 5:19.**

⁵*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 274.

⁶**Genesis 3:15.**

It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.⁷

It's a light thing to save Israel from their sins? That's an infinite task that takes forever. How can that be a light thing? Indeed, it is a huge work beyond comprehension, but here the Lord does not speak of the task in and of itself, but the work in relation to the infinite power and majesty of the Son of God. *While the work of salvation is huge beyond imagination, it nevertheless pales in comparison to and is dwarfed by the infinite power and majesty of the Son of God to save in and through the human nature.* This great power in Christ's Arm is the infinite power and majesty of the infinite and almighty Son of God exercised in and through the human nature for our salvation.

We see this immense majesty and power of Christ exercised, for example, in His Passion. Christ suffered for a relatively short time on the Cross compared to the eternities of eternal damnation all men have racked up by their sin. How could that short time equal the eternal damnation of all men? While the time was indeed short relative to eternity, the majesty of the Person who suffers in that same short time is without boundaries or limits. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

Scripture teaches plainly that the very punishment which we should have suffered on account of our sins was meted out to Christ. The very curse which was denounced against sinful man ("Cursed is everyone that continueth not, etc.," Gal. 3:10), fell in its full weight upon Christ: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, *being made a curse for us*" (Gal. 3:13). Yes, the suffering of Christ was of comparatively short duration. But observe God's method of computation. When Scripture measures the value of Christ's Passion, it does so by the exalted dignity of the Sufferer. It was the suffering of the Son of God. 1 John 1:7: "The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Acts 20:28: "His [God's] own blood." The teaching of the "orthodox theologians" that the brief suffering of Christ, as that of the Son of God, is equivalent to the eternal suffering of mankind is not a "dogmatic" construction," but it is the doctrine of Scripture. ... ["The eternity of human suffering is compensated for by the majesty and excellence of the Person (Christ)."] Christ "fully balanced our account," the settlement is "mathematically" correct as God views the matter. ... The full weight of His deity ... attached to His death ... made it infinitely meritorious.⁸

⁷ **Isaiah 49:6.**

⁸ *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, pp. 354, 282.

Likewise, Christ pressed His divine majesty and power into keeping the commandments for all men. The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper writes:

He had to attach the full weight of His deity to His obedience, suffering, and death, as Scripture tells us Gal. 4:4-5 and Rom. 5:10.⁹

The Cross of Christ, then, is the power that lies beneath the powerful Arm of God to save.

B. The Arm of God is the Gospel, which conveys to men the work of Christ on the Cross.

But how do men gain the benefit of Christ's work on the Cross for them? The work of the Cross is given to men through the Gospel. Hence, St. Paul writes that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.¹⁰

The Gospel is God's power unto salvation. The Gospel can then be nothing else but the powerful Arm of the Lord. Hence, we read elsewhere in Scripture:

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? ... He shall see the travail of his soul, *and* shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.¹¹

Here, plainly, the Arm of the Lord is revealed and reported. And by this reporting comes that knowledge that justifies man, i.e. faith coming by hearing that justifies and saves.

Again, in Scripture, we read of the Arm of the Lord:

And it shall come to pass in that day, *that* the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, ... And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.¹²

⁹*Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 288.

¹⁰**Romans 1:16.**

¹¹**Isaiah 53:1, 11.**

¹²**Isaiah 11:11, 12.**

The Lord's Hand or Arm is the ensign that is set up to draw the people to Christ. That ensign or standard is the Cross. St. John the Apostle writes:

Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.¹³

Wherever the Gospel is preached, there the Cross of Christ is raised up which destroys the power of the devil, casts him out, liberates us from him, and draws us to the safety of Christ's powerful Hand. Jesus says:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.¹⁴

The Gospel, then, is the powerful Arm of God because it delivers us from our sins, our flesh, the world, and the devil. St. Mary, therefore, says:

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.¹⁵

II. The Gospel Scatters the Proud but Preserves the Faithful unto Life Everlasting.

A. The Gospel scatters the proud because they reject Christ's righteousness for them in favor of their own.

But why does this scatter the proud? The Gospel scatters the proud because they imagine themselves to be worthy of God on their own and not based upon Christ's works. St. Paul writes:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural

¹³**St. John 12:31-33.**

¹⁴**St. John 10:27-29.**

¹⁵**St. Luke 1:51.**

man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.¹⁶

The Spirit works through absolution for the sake of Christ and Him-Crucified for men. Jesus says:

Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and *whose soever sin ye retain, they are retained*.¹⁷

The natural man rejects the work of the Spirit because the Spirit absolves for the sake of Christ-Crucified for all men. And Christ-Crucified means our sins are so great that they caused the death of God. 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 all 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....*¹⁸

The natural man can see nothing in absolution but the death of God. And God's death came about because of the natural or fallen man's sin. God's death is the cost for the natural man's sin and the cost of fallen man's absolution. This fact obviously lays bare the utter corruption of his righteousness. It explodes the vain fancies of his imaginings to justify himself before God. The death of God for his sin drives the natural man away from the Gospel like oil flees water or the north pole of a magnet drives itself away from the north pole of another magnet. Hence, St. Mary says:

He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.¹⁹

B. The Gospel preserves the faithful unto the life everlasting.

¹⁶**I Corinthians 2:12-14.**

¹⁷**St. John 20:22-23.**

¹⁸*The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article V. The Law and the Gospel.*12.

¹⁹**St. Luke 1:51.**

But for those who believe, the Strong Arm of the Lord, i.e. the Gospel, preserves them steadfast in God's Word and faith unto the life everlasting, for they rest securely in the Hand of the Lord. Jesus says:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. I and *my* Father are one.²⁰

And this security of the Gospel should not surprise, for it 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 believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.²¹

Conclusion

What, then, is the Arm of the Lord? The Arm of the Lord is the Gospel. For the Gospel forgives our sins and restores us to God's loving embrace.

The Arm of the Lord, however, scatters the proud because they imagine themselves worthy of God by their own works and ideas and are offended by God's Arm, the Gospel. Of course, fleeing God and His embrace in the Gospel, they did not flee to life, but to eternal death.

For the faithful, however, the Arm of the Lord keeps them steadfast in God's Word and faith, ensconcing them safely in His protective Arms now and forever.

Amen.

²⁰**St. John 10:27-30.**

²¹**Romans 1:16.**