

The Twenty-sixth Sunday after Pentecost
The Reverend John H. Brock

November 13, 2005
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18; Psalm 90:1-12
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; Matthew 25:14-30

Grace and peace to you from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen

I have a confession and an apology to make to you all: my message this morning is not based on the scriptures that we just heard. I am going to try to tie in just a part of the second lesson to it, but it is a little bit of a stretch and I ask your indulgence. I say this because something happened this last week and I need to talk about it and you all are stuck listening to it.

As many of you know, my mother had some minor heart surgery this last week. She had three stents inserted into her heart. I flew down to Florida to be with Dad while this was happening, and to be with her when she got home from the hospital. She is doing fine, and thank you to all of you who knew and cared and kept her in your prayers. I really appreciate that. But, this isn't about her. While I was at my parents, I brought my handy-dandy notebook computer and I was able to do a lot of the work that I normally do, such as work on my sermon, and keep in touch with the folks back here through e-mails. I was able to get almost as much work done at my folks house on my computer as I normally do here. I was just free of all the guilt that I would normally be feeling, like why am I not out visiting with people. So that was kind of nice. I didn't have to worry about that.

But as I was sitting there, I think it was Wednesday morning, Dad and I were still waiting for Mom to be released; I read an on-line article from Reuter's News Service. It was entitled "The Tele-evangelist Robinson warns a town of God's wrath".

Now I have to admit that I did not follow the trial all that closely. The trial itself is over. We are waiting for the ruling, which according to the articles I read will be coming out around January. One of the things that struck me all along with that whole trial with the Dover Board of Education and their desire to bring in to science class the concept of Intelligent Design, is that the Dover Board of Education needs a little bit of education themselves as to what the difference between science, philosophy and faith might be.

So let's take a moment and talk about the difference between science, philosophy and faith. My handy-dandy and ever trust worthy American Heritage Dictionary defines them as:

Science: the observation, identification, description, experimental investigation, and theoretical explanation of a phenomena.

Philosophy: love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self discipline.

Faith: confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, an idea, or a thing. Belief does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.

We could through in some definitions as well. We could talk about religion, theology, belief, reason, and wisdom, but we are just going to stick with those three. So I am sitting there at my folks, with my computer on my lap (incidentally in my shorts & a t-shirt because the temperature was in the 80's), in my folk's apartment and I come across this news article concerning the recent election and a particular individual's understanding of

what that election means. An individual who apparently sees himself as a prophet. Not profit, although I think that is what that individual is very good at. No, I think he sees himself as a prophet. A prophet of God along the lines of Elijah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, or even Jonah. He thinks he is speaking for God, although he coaching his message in a way that was very careful. He crafted his words so that he would have a way out.

But let me first say, do you know how to tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet? Anybody willing to venture it out? We have one waving hand. "We know a true prophet by if what he/she says comes true." Now, the drawback to that is that sometimes it takes a while to find out if a person is a true person of God. But that is O.K., we can wait. Let me say, though, that it is my belief (and this is not a reflection of my politics), it is my belief that Pat Robinson is not a prophet of God. The God that I worship, the God that I study about in scripture, the God that I see present in the world around me, the God that I see active in the lives of those around others, does not rule my fear or punishment. The God that I worship, as a Christian in the Lutheran tradition, cannot be voted out of a town. That is like saying we are going to vote the air out of our town. It can't be done. God is still there.

The God that I worship is about love and grace and forgiveness. The death that Christ died on the cross is not so that I will be punished because I have not followed to the letter everything that God has said. If that was the case, if that's the means then that God punished me, by killing my son. If God is indeed a God of punishment, then God punished the Rouse's, Pastor Easton's family, when her brother was killed in an automobile accident. If God is a God of wrath and fear and punishment, in that order, then all of us here who are suffering cancer, or all of us who have loved ones who are suffering cancer, are suffering because God is punishing us.

But I thought that **those** things came from the opposite end of the spectrum of love, good, and grace. The God that I worship did not kill my day and a half old son. The God that I worship does not give people cancer because we have done something to tick that God off. Because if God honestly and truly does that, I got a few words for that God, and they aren't real nice.

A wonderful theologian who I have the honor and privilege and honor of hearing quite often said to me once, the thing that she enjoys most about being a Christian in the Lutheran tradition, is that we are not required to park our brains at the door as we come into church. We are encouraged, and we are inspired to think, to read, to learn, to educate, and to understand God is this grand capacity. To know that all the while that we never will understand God, because who are we, we are human, we are finite, and we cannot comprehend all that the living, amazing, infinite, loving God is.

Now, you might be thinking that just a few minutes ago, up here on the screen, we had those words from the Psalm that talked about the God of wrath. Well, we did. And, didn't we really have that really weird parable that Jesus talked about with the talents? Well, yes, we did. I have to tell you, that I have been studying that parable for years and I still don't understand it. What I think it is basically about is that we each of us have something we are good at and if we don't use it for God's grace, we are wasting it. It is not about fear, it is not about punishment. It is about love and grace and forgiveness. In our second lesson, we heard the wonderful words, God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who brings about punishment and wrath and fear, is not the one who gave his life on the cross; it is the other one, the one who walks in the darkness. That invidious voice that always causes us to doubt. That is where fear and punishment and wrath truly come from.

"You are all children of light and children of the day. We are not of night and darkness." (1 Thessalonians 5:9) It is beautiful day out, the light is shining, we are called to be as that light out there. A beacon in this dark world

that does not know the God of grace, and love, and joy. To be the God, to bring the light to those in the darkness who would preach wrath and destruction in my God's name. I can't even say that because it is not my God, it is somebody else's God. Those who preach wrath and destruction. I don't see that in scripture. Let us let them walk and live as children of light and children of the day.

We have been reminded, especially this morning, of the promises of life, thanks to Noah and Lucas and their baptism. We have been reminded of what those promises are. Not: you better follow me or else. No, those promises are that as we watch these two wonderful little boys, the promises that they are going to grow in faith, that we will teach them, that we will eventually learn from them that some of us will join the church eternal well before them, but that we never have to say goodbye to Noah and Lucas. For like their family, they are joined to us forever, as are all those who have gone before us in the faith. The promises, not of wrath, not of punishment; the promises of joy, and light, and love.

So today, today let us not concentrate on someone who would break the commandment and take our Lord's name in vain; but let us focus rather on the new life in Christ. The new life Noah and Lucas have experienced, the new life that we can see and the sunshine outside, the new life in all of us around. Let us go forth this day truly as children of the light.

Amen.