**Hebrews 2:14-18**

**14** Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. **16** For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. **17** Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. **18** For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

**“Fleshly Fear Removed”**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen. Many are familiar with the famous saying used by Benjamin Franklin. It is certainly fitting for this time of the year, “Two things are certain in life-death and taxes!” Even if good old Ben was a founding Father of this country, he was by no means a Christian. His famous saying reflects a certainty in life that is only half-right. He leaves out what Jesus says, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). You see, Caesar is to take care of the welfare of the state in this life. However, death is not an end in itself for Jesus has shown God’s deeper desire is to save the lives of sinners.

The first Sunday in February this year marks forty days after Christmas. It might feel like we are taking two steps back in order to take one-step forward. Yet, celebrating the minor festival of the purification of Mary and presentation of Jesus at the temple shines light on the season of Epiphany. We hear it with Simeon praising God for Jesus would be, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.” The purification of Mary was necessary for any women who gave birth. Of course, her son was God in the flesh born sinless of a virgin. Likewise, the presentation of Jesus showed the Lord’s claim on the firstborn male in every family of Israel. Of course, this child was already God’s one and only Son. It is now in the purity and presentation of the Gospel man has more than the certainty of death and taxes. Jesus removes all that we fear by His flesh on the cross for our life.

Now taxes might receive the attention, but the Devil knows the deeper truth. We hide it away from the public eye with borrowing more money or never facing the consequences. We manage to find a better explanation for it all from something like evolution. We play around with it watching horror movies and action films. We even pretend with dyed hair, face-lifts, and some more pills to take from the doctor. Yet, the facts are the facts and the devil knows what all fear. He has watched it happen since Adam and Eve fell into sin. We should believe in the right to life, but the truth is none has a right to live. The Law brings a stinging judgment of death from one generation to the next. The Devil gladly uses this darkness to get a one up on God. “…By appearing as the constant accuser of all men, he creates in them the fear of the punishment of death. Without the certainty of Christ’s redemption, this servility and fear is found in every man’s heart by nature” (Kretzmann 44)

If we had control over death, we would not need more safety, more laws to govern, more cures to create. Trying to consume this darkness with our works or more material goods is amusement to the devil. The writer from Hebrews tells us who truly puts to shame what we fear. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things…” God does the dirty work to bring us comfort. Jesus had no sin as a man and yet was humble in life as God. He did not fear the Law but fulfilled it perfectly. Yet, taking on our flesh had a larger purpose than pleasing the Father. It would be “…that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” No other man can remove the fear of death not even an atheist. None can take the Devil head-on even a “good” person. As St. Paul says, “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (Romans 6:8).

To have died with Christ means the baptized face how Jesus comes to destroy all that we fear of death in this life. Now what man tries to ignore, seeks to explain away, puts off to very end, God places at the center, talks about all the time, and celebrates as His victory. God does this because man cannot. This kind of relief allowed Simeon to sing, “Lord, Let your servant depart in peace.” It is what let the poor widow Anna,

“…give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.” They knew the hands of man were not enough to save, often failed from sin, and finally faded away. Jesus as man would do far more than good. He used the deepest darkness that we could ever fear to show His glory as Savior. As Luther states, “…He destroyed the devil, not by a work of God but by a work of the devil himself. For this is the most glorious kind of victory, namely, to pierce the adversary with his own weapon and to slay him with his own sword…For in this way God promotes and completes His work by means of an alien deed, and by His wonderful wisdom He compels the devil to work through death nothing else than life…[[1]](#footnote-1)”

The redeeming work of Christ is for our comfort today. Skirting of sin lets us watch it consume our lives, churches, and culture. Despair hangs over many no matter the social networks, cell phones, or happy faces. Sadness over loss in health, over a job, a loved one takes away the prosperity all seek. It is this sharpness and reality of life that lets us look to Jesus. “Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.” This likeness is more than God becoming flesh as a man. It is God stooping below every man, even you, to be the sacrifice. Since Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest, forgiveness for all had to be by what he could give. It means His mercy makes all evils and sufferings of any person to be His own. It means His faithfulness is able to share with sinners all His goodness as Savior. Rather than death’s judgment, face the fact that Jesus’ died. He now lives to identify with your life by His forgiveness.

Such mercy and faithfulness from God lets us live by faith alone and not fear of death for Jesus is trustworthy. It is a false delusion to claim faith is an act of my will, a decision I make. To do this only turns us back to resting on my work, my deciding, and my effort. How long can I keep that up? How do I know I make the right choice every time? The truth is that we are daily tempted, daily struggle, and daily need saving. This has more to do with Jesus than how we want to view of ourselves in life, “For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.” This truth hidden in Christ and His cross promises there is no shame to pray in our weakness, “Lead us not into temptation.” Christ is trustworthy allowing faith to abound from what He says and gives to remove all that we fear. He does this by His true body and blood given and shed for you.

Because Jesus has drawn close, the Father looks upon our lives as forgiven, perfect, and holy because of His Son. If you turn to your life be ready to see sin, death, and struggle more than one success after another. As the book we are studying in Home Fires puts it, “This Good News of the Gospel is the promise that God does not expect you to find abundance (or even happiness) in this dying world. Christian contentment is knowing that both to be brought low and to abound are godly for the sake of Christ, for the sake of His cross, and for the sake of His atoning blood” (138). In the darkness of death and taxes, God shines a great light upon sinners. He forgives in the Name of Jesus letting us see, like Simeon and Anna, that our salvation is secure by His Word and Sacrament. Jesus removes all that we fear by His flesh on the cross for our life. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.

1. Luther, M. (1999, c1968). *Vol. 29*: *Luther's works, vol. 29 : Lectures on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Ed.). Luther's Works (Heb 2:15). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)