



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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June 10, 2007

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: 1 Kings 8:22-23, 41-43

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100

Second Lesson: Galatians 1:1-10

Gospel: Luke 7:1-10

### **Lord, Use Your Church to Reach Others**

It's been what, a little over five years that I've been here now? In the five years I've been here, one thing I've heard fairly often is that every time I suggest that we do something, we have pie after it or we have some other kind of food with it. Some people say, "Why do we have to eat every time we get together?"

Well, the prayer I just read to you came from the dedication of the temple, right? Do you know what they did after this prayer was done? Do you know what they did with the 22,000 cattle? Do you know what they did with 120,000 sheep? They gave them as fellowship offerings. A fellowship offering is where you simply took the fat and burned that to the Lord, but the meat would go to support the priests and those who served in the temple, and the people who brought it would have a fellowship meal together.

How long does it take to prepare 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep for a meal of that size? Yet, they spent the time and they did it because something special was happening. They were dedicating the temple that they had built where God would cause his glory to dwell, and on that day, the glory of the Lord came down in a cloud and went into the Holy Place and settled above the outspread arms over the Ark of the Covenant. God's glory was there. He had caused his glory to live in that house, in that temple, and the people were excited. The people were thrilled. And one of the ways they expressed their joy was by eating together. They were eating together, not just because they had good cooks—they were eating together because of the glory of the Lord.

That is reflected in Solomon's prayer if you listen. What is he praying about? "Lord, let the place where you cause your name to live, let your temple bring God's glory to many nations" is the section of seven petitions that he has in this prayer that we are focusing on today. "Lord, use this temple to reach out to others" was one of his prayers. That is what we just read. He wanted others to know the glory of the name of the Lord.

Now the temple is long gone, but God tells us some great truth about the temple. The temple is where God caused his glory to dwell. The temple wasn't a place where the people gathered. You wouldn't have found the people together inside the temple like you are this morning. They weren't at that temple like we think of when we come to church. They would have been out in the courtyard. No one entered the temple in the Most Holy Place except one a year. Then he only did it with blood to cover his sins and the sins of the people. The temple was where God dwelled.

Where does God dwell now if he isn't in a temple? God is everywhere you say? Sure, but Scripture also says that the kingdom of God is not here or there, it is within you. It is God's rule in your hearts through his grace. God, the One who lived and died in your place to take away your sins so that now when he looks at you, he doesn't see your sin. He sees Jesus' perfection and Jesus' holiness. That is his glory.

So if we were going to pray this part of the prayer of Solomon, we would say, "Lord, let your church, let your people reach out to others. Use your church to reach out to others. Why? So that they can hear of your great name and so then also they can believe your faithful covenant of love."

If you were to walk into what was going on in that courtyard of the temple that day, as they were out by the altar, as the Lord had said Solomon was, which was out in the front of the temple—a big bronze altar where they burned the sacrifices on. Solomon is there evidently on a platform before the Lord in front of the whole assembly of Israel. He spread out his hands toward heaven to pray. What does that mean? He spread out his hands toward heaven—he would have been standing there like this praying. If during the prayer of the church this morning I face the altar and stand with my hands raised to pray, are some of you going to think I'm weird and what is going on? You have never seen it before. It's not that it's wrong. It's just that you've never seen it, right?--except in other places because we don't do that. There is nothing wrong with it. That is certainly what Solomon was doing.

He was standing with his hands outstretched and he prays this prayer of seven petitions, and the one of them that we look at talks about the foreigner. The foreigner from a distant land—not the Moabites, not the Edomites—they are kind of shirt-tale relatives that live close by—but those from far away. "When they come and they pray at this temple—Jesus, Father, Son, Spirit—when they come, they say "yes" to their prayers so that they will see your glory"—that is Solomon's request, right? He knows that God hears and answers all prayer "yes", "no" or "not now", but he is asking "Lord, grant their prayers so that they see your glory so that they might fear your name."

When Solomon built the temple, he just didn't want people to know about Solomon. He wanted people to know the Lord—that *"there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below—you who keep your covenant of love"* (1 Kings 8:23). He wanted that to be heard—which assumes something, doesn't it? If people were going to hear of the great name of the Lord—the great "I Am"—it meant his people, Israel, were going to have to tell it to the distant nations. You notice he doesn't say to the people, "Now you should go and tell other people about this. He simply assumes they will. And really, when you think about it, that is no different from what Jesus did, is it? Jesus didn't say, "You SHOULD be my witnesses in Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth." He didn't say, "You SHOULD make disciples of all nations." He just said, "Do it." He just said, "You ARE my witnesses." He didn't SHOULD or OUGHT to us and try to guilt us into it. He said, "Because of who I am and what I have done—how I have taken away your sins—because you know I have touched your life and given you purpose and meaning, forgiveness and eternity—now, be my witnesses."

We are always witnesses. We are either witnessing well or we're witnessing poorly. There is no doubt about whether or not we ARE his witnesses. We are. We today are the ones that are to make his name known. It's not something we hand off to someone else just because we've called a pastor or we've called teachers or we have an Outreach Committee. God has called each and every one of us to BE his witnesses. It's what we are. We are either doing it well or we're doing it poorly.

So the question then becomes, are we preparing ourselves to do it? Are we ready to carry out what God has called us to do? If we are going to pray "God, make your name known," you have to understand that we are praying "God, use me as your answer. Use me as the answer to this prayer. Open my mouth that I might speak. Open my lips that I might speak. Guide my thoughts, my words, my actions so that I reflect your love in everything I say and think and do so that people will want to know about the God I love because they see how I live to serve him."

Are you ready? Are you prepared? Sometimes it's only an instant you have, a moment in time to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with someone. As someone said to me this morning, "Things can change in a minute in life." And that is very true. Are you ready to seize those opportunities?

It's interesting—you know I've heard people say that our Outreach Committee doesn't do much. Our Outreach Committee is busy trying to equip people and train people to be the instruments and the hands of the Holy Spirit. You know, the Holy Spirit we talked about on the Festival of Pentecost and how he works through Word and Sacrament, and how we are his hands and how we are his voice.

It was a couple of months ago when we had a Friendship Witnessing Workshop sponsored by the Outreach Committee. Everyone that went to it, raise your hand. Well, there are no liars here. All the time and energy that went into preparing it and no one was there. So, are we all prepared and ready to witness or do we all think it's someone else's job?

We have another one coming up on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 9:00-11:00 in the morning, learning God's Great Exchange—drawing stick figures and math equations on the side of the page so that if you have the chance, you can share Law and Gospel with someone that doesn't know it and then the Spirit, the Pentecost powerful Spirit, can work through those scribbles and your faulting hesitant words to bring people to faith. Two hours. It's not as long as most baseball games. It's certainly not as long as a football game. And we are even going to hold it indoors. It won't even be snowed on. Two hours on a Saturday.

Have you and I failed God in carrying out this task of making his name known? You bet we have. We have at times failed him miserably where we have changed the topic, we have turned to something else, and we have said that we hope someone says something to that person about what is going on in their life because otherwise they are going to hell. That is the truth. One of the things you see is that our school grows because I think our parents aren't afraid to talk to others about our school and that it is a

blessing and that the education the kids receive is good. So they tell others to come to our school. That is a good and wonderful thing!

But our Savior has done even more for us. He lived and died in our place. He took away every one of our sins. And to those parents that we are concerned that their children get a good education, if those parents don't know Jesus Christ and their children don't, they are going to be in hell. So let's bring Christ to them, not just invite them to places, but bring Christ to them so that his great name may be known.

As I said, we have failed Christ in this many, many times. But this is the amazing thing about our God. Our God washes away our sins. Our sins of failing to be good and faithful witnesses as he has called us to be, our sins where we have been silent, our sins where we have ignored God and ignored his Word, our sins where we have put ourselves ahead of God—Jesus took them all to the cross and he took them away. In our baptism, we were clothed with his perfection. When we come to his Supper, we receive his very body and blood so that we are certain that our sins are taken away. The God that loves us THAT much that he takes away ALL of our shortcomings, ALL of our failures, ALL of our sin, THAT is the God that we want to tell others about. THAT is why his name is great, because of what he does for us. And THAT is why we want others to know his covenant of love—his covenant of love which is faithful and eternal.

God doesn't speak and then not act. It doesn't matter who we are or where we have been or what we have done or how we have failed him, he says in Christ we are forgiven. And that message, that message is SO powerful that even in a few whispered words over a hospital bed God's power can work in the hearts of his people. God's power can work in the hearts of those who are not his own and make them his own. That is the covenant of love that is SO powerful that it's not up to us. We simply proclaim it. We speak it. We make it known. We want the people's of the earth to know his name and to fear him as we do—not be afraid of him, but stand in awe of him that he loves that perfectly, that intensely, in spite of our so many shortcomings.

In his love, he has said to you and me that even as we stumble and stutter, even as we sweat and stammer as we try to talk about our Savior, he blesses our efforts because the power is his. The knots in the stomach, those might be ours, but the power is in the Gospel and the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Pentecost—and HE is the One that brings people to faith as his church reaches out to others.