

WE SHOULD NOT BECOME DISCOURAGED**Sermon for Mission Day, 2021****Isaiah 2:2-3**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Isaiah 2:2-3: ² **In the last days the mountain of the Temple of the LORD will be established as the highest of the mountains and will be elevated above the hills and all the nations will stream to it.** ³ **Then many peoples will come and say, “Come! Let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the Temple of the God of Jacob! He will teach us His Ways, that we may walk in His paths.”**
For the Teaching will go out from Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

As we gather together today on Trinity Sunday, we have a perfect opportunity to dwell on the mission of the Church. We know what that mission is: It is nothing more than to repeat the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, “*we preach a crucified Christ*” (1 Cor. 1:23). That is our confession. “Confession” translates the word *homologia*, a Greek word with two elements: *homo*, meaning “same,” and *logia*, meaning “speaking.” When we confess our faith in a crucified Christ, we are speaking precisely the same sacred truth as confessed together by all the saints to whom it was delivered by Christ’s apostles. Confession is faith’s “Amen!” to what God the Holy Spirit has revealed to us in the Sacred Scriptures, which deliver to us our Lord Jesus Christ as their essential content.

This is why true Christians are always also true Christian missionaries. They are a blessed people who believe that Jesus is the Christ¹, and out of the abundance of their blessedness, they cannot but speak of what they have seen and heard.²

But you know as well as I that as Christians, we always find ourselves in conflict. In our everyday lives, we experience conflict with the old evil Foe, the world, and our old sinful flesh. All these will do what they can to shut our mouths to expressing our faith to the world. Often, these conflicts leave us weak and discouraged. We do not always fight courageously. Often we submit to discouragements and complain along the way. We know when we ought to speak up, but often, for the sake of peace, or some other excuse, we keep quiet. This should not be. We should never be discouraged in our missionary activity. So, through the prophet Isaiah, God shows what He is bringing about under our very eyes by this missionary activity and what He will surely accomplish by this means.

Isaiah speaks in our text in figurative language. In the opening words he says, “**In the last days the mountain of the Temple of the LORD will be established as the highest of the mountains and will be elevated above the hills and all the nations will stream to it.**” This is a picture of the Christian Church. It was in the mountains that God often revealed Himself to holy men of old. We can think of men like Abram, Jacob, and others. Solomon also built the Temple on Mount Moriah, “*where the LORD had appeared to his father David*” (2 Chron. 3:1). When the prophets began to speak of the place where God’s people met and worshipped Him, they made use of the imagery of past custom and referred to the Church in the language of our text. Referring to the ingathering of the Gentiles into the New Testament Church, speaking through Isaiah the LORD God had declared: “*these I shall bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My House of prayer*” (Is. 56:7). The prophet Joel had called the LORD God’s House of prayer “*Zion*” (Joel 2:1). This is the place where the LORD God lives and where He is worshipped.³ It is a location where righteousness dwells. It is the true Church where to live there is to walk in the LORD’s ways and to learn of Him. It is no wonder then that David wanted to dwell there forever⁴ and was glad when people said, “*Let us go to the house of the LORD!*” (Psalm 122:1).

Over against this mountain, the hills that the prophet has in mind are manifestly the competing forms of false religions. While we see these religions taking so many different forms today, perhaps the fastest-growing religion is atheism. People today are showing less and less regard for God and even less worship of Him. Everything that we hold sacred is being attacked. Such horrid things as same-sex marriage and abortion are now normal, everyday things. Now we are being asked to seriously consider putting sick people down like stray dogs in the ongoing debate on euthanasia. God Himself gives all

¹ Matthew 16:16-17

² Acts 4:20

³ Psalm 99:9

⁴ Psalm 23:6

men life and breath and everything else.⁵ Life is given by Him, and is to be ended by Him. If people would only listen and love the Lord and each other, then they would soon realise what abominations such practices are, and repent before the Last Day arrives, and it is too late. But we also see false religion in supposedly Christian churches. We see all kinds of things being taught as if it is coming from God, but it isn't. We see the headship of man being cast aside and the rise of women leadership in the church. We see churches teaching salvation by works, and even denying the real presence in the sacrament. We could go on. But all this can be answered with Christ's words: *"This people honours Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. ⁹ They are worshipping Me in vain, since they are teaching as doctrines the commandments of men"* (Matt. 15:8-9).

When Isaiah mentions **"the last days,"** he sees those future days of distress on the horizon, including the coming of the Messiah and the final judgment of the nations. For us in the New Testament era, the last days on the horizon of the future include the Final Judgment, Christ's Second Coming. We are living between the two events that Isaiah and the Old Testament believers saw as one.

Isaiah, therefore, presents to us here a glorious picture of what is going on even today. Divinely inspired, he lifts up his prophetic eyes and sees the New Testament Church established most firmly and exalted above every competing form of religion. He beholds her doors open to **"all the nations."** He sees the many people willingly streaming into it as they invite others, saying, **"Come! Let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the Temple of the God of Jacob! He will teach us His Ways, that we may walk in His paths."** Their Church *is* the **"Temple of the God of Jacob!"** It is the Church of the ages, of the patriarchs. The Church in which the God of the Covenant is the Teacher, teaching His own wonderful and gracious ways among and for the children of men. Their Church is God's Zion, the spiritual city of God, from which emanates God's Law and Gospel - surely a glorious picture!

When the LORD God gave this picture into the heart and mind of Isaiah, it was at a time of great outward national and spiritual discouragement. God's Church was especially in great distress. Isaiah compared its lot in his time to a forsaken city, *"like a hut in a vineyard, like a shack in a cucumber patch, like a blockaded city"* (1:8). Isaiah depicted God's children lamenting: *"The LORD has forsaken me. The LORD has forgotten me"* (49:14). At such a time God inspired Isaiah with the picture of that which He would most surely accomplish in the latter times.

We are living in this time. The prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled before our eyes. If ever there was a time for the Church to stand up and boldly proclaim the truth of the Gospel, it is now. Christ has come and fulfilled all prophecies concerning God's salvation. He has become *"a Light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the Glory of (His) people Israel"* (Luke 2:32). The Christian Church has been and is being built upon the truth that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen again, is God's Christ, the Son of the living God. The Christian Church is exalted above every competitive form of religion. The gates of hell have not prevailed and cannot prevail against it.⁶ Christians of all nations continue to **"stream"** into it. **"The Teaching"** still goes **"out from Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem."** In the Christian Church people hear God's Law, which teaches them the due knowledge of their sins and of the righteousness that they by sin have lost. In the Christian Church, thanks be to God, they hear *"the Word of the Lord,"* the precious Gospel that reveals the grace of God in Christ Jesus, in whom we have the forgiveness of our sins, the righteousness that Jesus has procured, life, and salvation. All this stands in glory before our eyes.

It is true the fulfilment of this prophecy, this glorious picture of the condition of the Christian Church in our times, confronts us in the setting where the gates of hell are seeking to prevail against it. The fierce battle for final supremacy is on. The forces of intimidation and discouragement are many and everywhere. But should we Christians permit them to blind us to the glorious facts of the Church's victorious course? It is going from victory to victory. It is the one triumphant power for good and salvation, meeting every opposition with unchanging confidence and prospect; in the Cross of Christ it conquers.

Therefore we say and maintain that *we should not become discouraged*. The facts of God's accomplishments are clearly and gloriously before our eyes. There is really only one question for us to answer, and that is this, "Do we wish to participate in this triumphant work, standing at our tasks and doing our bit?" God has invited us to participate. He says, *"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations by baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matt. 28:19).

What our text presents is once more presented to us by John in his Revelation. There he shows us what God will surely

⁵ Acts 17:25

⁶ Matthew 16:17-19

In his seventh chapter, John says: “*After this* (he means, after this present time, after the coming again of the Lord and the Judgment) *I looked and saw a large crowd that no one could count, from every nation and all tribes, peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and carrying palm-branches in their hands.*” John manifestly wishes to impress this reference to the vastness and the universality of the crowd. This crowd is “*before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes.*” Their sins are covered; the palms of victory are in their hands. “*They called out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb!”*” (Rev. 7:9-10).

As the vision in our text was given in a time of great external discouragement, so this one to John. John had gone out to preach the Gospel unto every nation. He had met with opposition and persecution. He was on the island of Patmos, surrounded by rocks and all alone. His voice was for the time stilled. At such a time, the Lord gave John this picture, and we thank God that it forms part of the inspired Scriptures we have today. In heavenly tones, it proclaims to John and all that read it to not be discouraged! See what God will accomplish. Even if in our lifetime it is only a few that hear and give heed to the message we have to proclaim, and even though there be strife when we speak out for the Lord, God will accomplish that for which He wishes. Jesus says, “*Stop being afraid, little flock!*” (Luke 12:32). This little flock will grow till it becomes ‘a large crowd that no one (can) count.’ An innumerable multitude will unite before Him and in inexpressible joy cry out His everlasting praises. The gates of hell will not prevent this. The Almighty will see to that.

So, should we become discouraged at the seeming lack of faith and rise of apostasy in our own backyard? Surely not! In every conflict the visions of faith should encourage us. It is never a question of victory. The only real question for us all is, “Will we do our bit; will we contribute according to our ability toward the missionary activity of Christ’s Church on its triumphant course through our time?” We plant the seed, but God makes it grow.⁷

“*My word... which goes out of My mouth... will not return to Me without results but will accomplish what I desire and be successful in what I have sent it to do.*”¹² *For you will go out with joy and be led out in peace. The mountains and the hills will break into shouts of joy in your presence, and all the trees in the field will clap their hands.*”¹³ *A cypress tree will grow up instead of the thorn-bush, and a myrtle tree will grow up instead of the stinging nettle. This will also make a name for the LORD and become an everlasting sign, which will not be cut off*” (Is. 55:11-13). God has promised to work through the external Word. May He continue to give us the zeal and passion to bring this Word to more and more by faith, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings us not only our own victory against all our foes but every missionary victory as well. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR TRINITY SUNDAY/MISSION FESTIVAL

O most holy and blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we thank and praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word as the only true and living God, Three Persons in One God, and for teaching us that You have created, redeemed, and sanctified us. Glory, worship, and praise be to You, O holy, almighty Lord!

O God the Father, have mercy on us, and gladden us with Your love. O God the Son, have mercy on us, and clothe us with Your merits. O God, the Holy Spirit, have mercy on us, and make us holy by Your continual presence. O blessed Holy Trinity, have mercy on us, and hear our prayers.

Show mercy on the millions of our fellowmen still living in darkness and under sentence of eternal death. Since You have commanded Your Church to testify to Jesus’ fulfilment of the Old Testament, that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead, give us and all Your children increased love and zeal for the task of spreading the message of forgiveness in Jesus’ name throughout the world. Especially bless the continuing work of the AELC and the ULMA in our respective countries. Fill us with Christlike compassion for all who are helpless and hopeless, outside Your kingdom. Teach us to love them not merely in words, but in deeds of true service. Do not let us grow weary in well-doing, but enable us to work while it is still day before the night comes when all work must cease. Give us the courage to speak on the basis of Jesus’ resurrection as the apostles did.

O Lord, truly the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Send out labourers into Your harvest, and uphold all those whom You have sent. Open new doors for the spreading of the Gospel, and give success to all earnest efforts to share it with others. Pour out Your Spirit so that many may accept the joyful message of life in Christ; make Your way known upon earth, and Your saving power among all nations.

We commit ourselves and all our fellowmen to Your fatherly care and mercy. Be gracious to us in every need, and do not withdraw Your saving love from us. Frustrate the evil designs of those who wish to now promote murder through euthanasia.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:6

Direct us by Your Spirit that we may daily grow in grace, until we finally come to perfect happiness and full redemption in Your eternal kingdom of heaven, and with all Your chosen people praise Your name for evermore. Hear us because of Your limitless love in Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

HOLY TRINITY

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹ In the year when King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a high and lofty throne. The train of His robe was filling the Temple. ² Seraphs were standing above Him. Each had six wings; each was using two wings to cover his face; each was using two wings to cover his legs; and each was using two wings to fly. ³ The one was calling to the other and saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts! His glory fills the whole earth!"

⁴ The voices of those who were calling out caused the foundations of the doorposts to shake, and the Temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then I said: "How terrible for me! For I have been brought to silence. For I am a man with un-clean lips and live among people with unclean lips. For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, with a glowing coal in his hand. He had used tongs to take it from the altar. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said: "Look! This has touched your lips. Your guilt has been taken away, and your sin has been atoned for."

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here I am. Send me!"

Acts 2:14a, 22-36

¹⁴ Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ...

²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words! Jesus of Nazareth was a Man whom God commended to you, as you yourselves know, by miracles, wonders and miraculous signs, which God worked among you through Him. ²³ This Man was handed over to you by God's set plan and foreknowledge, and you, with the hands of wicked men, nailed Him to a cross and put Him to death. ²⁴ Nevertheless, God raised Him and loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible for death to hold Him. ²⁵ For David says about Him: 'I have continually been foreseeing the Lord before Me. For He is at My right hand, that I may not be shaken. ²⁶ For this reason My heart is glad, and My tongue rejoices; yes, even My body will rest in hope. ²⁷ For You will not abandon My soul to Hades or allow Your Holy One to see decay. ²⁸ You have made the paths of life known to Me. You will fill Me with joy through Your presence.' ²⁹ Brethren, I can tell you frankly that our ancestor David died and was buried, and his grave is with us to this day. ³⁰ Therefore, because David was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him by an oath to cause one of his descendants to sit on his throne, ³¹ he saw what would come and said concerning the resurrection of the Christ that He was not abandoned to the grave and that His body did

not experience decay. ³² This One, Jesus, God has raised, and of that fact we are all witnesses.

³³ "Therefore, after He has been lifted up by God's right hand and has received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, He has poured out this, which you both see and hear.

³⁴ For it was not David who went up to heaven, but he says himself: 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, ³⁵ until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

³⁶ "Therefore, all the people of Israel should know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, Lord and Christ!"

John 3:1-17

¹ There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher. For no one can do these miraculous signs, which You are doing, unless God is with him."

³ Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

⁴ Nicodemus asked Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"

⁵ Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I tell you, unless anyone is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ What has been born of the sinful human nature is sinful human nature, but what has been born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I have told you, 'You people must be born from above!' ⁸ The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear the sound of it but do not know where it is coming from or where it is going. It is like that with everyone who has been born of the Spirit."

⁹ Nicodemus answered Him, "How can these things be?"

¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel without knowing these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I tell you, We speak what We know and testify to what We have seen, and you people do not accept Our testimony. ¹² If I have told you people earthly things, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has gone up into heaven except the One who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God has not sent His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world may be saved through Him.