

Psalm Study 114
November 25, 1988

It has often been noted that many Psalms swing from lamentation over into praise. These are actually recorded answerings of prayers. The pivotal point in the prayer occurs when the prayer, ie. person praying, feels that his or her prayer has been heard and anticipates deliverance, even before any external change has occurred in the person's situation. Psalm 126 shows this phenomenon nicely, because in the anticipation of restoration, the nations recognize the change before the person praying, and then the prayer still pleads again for the change. Sometimes scholars feel that the pivotal point in the Psalm is a divine oracle of a priest addressed to the person praying.

In rereading Artur Weiser's commentary, The Psalms, ie. those places that treat Psalm 114 and those that relate to the phenomenon of answered prayer in the Psalms - ie. 6; 13; 22; 28, 30... "Thou hast turned my mourning into dancing!" Psalm 30.v.11. and continuing 31; 41; 54; 55; 56; 61; 63; 64; 69; 71; 86; 94; 102; 120; 130; and cf. Jeremiah 20:7-13. (This list of Psalms is copied from A. Weiser, page 84.) In the latter poem of Jeremiah we do have a felt answer to prayer, but then he swerves into cursing the day he was born. (verse 14.)

What occurs to me here is that the power of God's salvation is also at work even in our present everyday lives, that the Gospel preached in church is a reemergence of the same mighty acts God performed then in a unique and new way for us now. There is a reactualization of God's power to save that comes about by the word for our contemporary unique and individual lives.

What does this mean? It means that each of us receives a little exodus story, a passover, a resurrection. Not only does the history of the origin of Israel synchronize with "Heilsgeschichte" (history of salvation), but each nation will get its unique exodus, each person in Christ their own little exodus - which is no little matter for the individual person concerned.

From the standpoint of the reactualization of God's saving acts, the Word, the Gospel, the "representation" - actually the real presence or sacramental theophany, the heilsgeschichte - is continued, the saving acts of God are distributed into the lives of the faithful, into the stories of a people, of a community. These are the new exoduses, the new passovers, the latter also comprehending, ie. including the resurrection penetrating even to the individual, which once were the events of the collective origin of Israel, the beginning of the history of salvation.

These considerations give me hope. The prospects of our little congregation are so dim... The prospects of many people prominent in my ministry are so hopeless and so desperate that my heart tends to sink. But it is where our sins overwhelm us, that God comes to our rescue with forgiveness. (Psalm 65.v.3) And God does come with "dread deeds of deliverance" to rescue us. Psalm 65.v.5: "By dread deeds Thou dost answer us with deliverance, O

God of our salvation, who art the hope of the ends of the Earth...."

(Here the possibility of deliverance for a cancer victim, a difficult shut-in, some mentally challenged church members are treated individually, and need not be elaborated here. Except to mention that for the latter, a passover from a mind full of delusion into a mind stayed on God and ready again to cope with realities, is necessary.)

And in the same way our congregation, St. Paul's Ev. Lutheran Church of Coney Island also has an exodus in store for it, ie. a passover, a power raising it into new life, God's saving power that deals the death blow to death, and lets it rise up in a foretaste of eternal life.

Common sense, all evidence, reason and rationality, and hard cold calculations to the contrary, God will answer us with deliverance, by dread deeds God will deliver our people - and eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor does the heart contain sufficient imagination to anticipate the wonderful things God has prepared for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. (1 Corinthians 2.v.9. "who are called according to his purpose" does not stand there, but I've combined it in my memory from another similar verse, ie. Romans 8.v.28) Take the Isaiah passage which St. Paul is quoting:

From of old no one has heard
or perceived by the ear
no eye has seen a God besides thee
who works for those who wait for him.
Thou meetest him that joyfully works righteousness,
those that remember thee in thy ways.

(Isaiah 64.v.4-5.)

Perhaps it is glib of me to speak of church members and of our congregation itself. What about my turning around? What about my change of mind and heart through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Can I also believe that God has dread deeds of deliverance in store for me? Will God help me be the Pastor of this congregation? Will I also arise, rather than become buried in myself, shut in nursing my own wounds and not coping with my own disappointments?

Psalm 114 shows the power of God and by God's Word brings about this representation, reactualization for us today. My sermons on the Psalm go into a highly Christocentric proclamation: to move mountains by faith, to turn back death by turning back the river Jordan, to melt even the hardest hearts down into tears, even hearts made of flint!