

The living water of Christ shall ever refresh and sustain us

Zechariah 14:8-11

And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. ⁹ ¶ And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one. ¹⁰ ¶ All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses. ¹¹ And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

God's Word is a living water. It is the only water of life — the fountain of eternal youth for which men have sought for generations. It is a hidden fountain, because it can never be found by seeking it, for it has never entered into the mind of man that God would provide something so rich and free as to cleanse men entirely from the guilt of sin. But it is also easy to find, because though men do not seek God's Word and cannot believe in His grace without it, God brings His Word to them. In fact, he puts it before their eyes, in plain sight, but so few know what it is that they see. That is why it is a hidden fountain, for before they even know what God's Word is He must reveal it to them by the power of His Spirit, and transform their understanding, and open their eyes. We cannot peer into the mind of God and understand how He works, or why He chooses to reveal Himself as He does. But we can be certain that He wants all men to drink of the river of everlasting life, and live.

For a time, God hid His Word in plain sight through His people, Israel. And there, in plain sight, some came and drank, many in Israel, and a few from other parts of the earth. By and large the fountain stayed within the borders of the nation, for that is the place where those waters bore fruit, and God caused His eternal Word to become flesh in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Among the few outside Israel who knew the Lord, and looked for the incarnation of His Son, were wise men from the east. Where in the east they lived we are not told, but the historical tradition of the church holds that they were the remnants of a school of learning which which survived from the days of Chaldaeans, Medes, and Persians. Where such men would have learned of the true God is easy enough to determine, for when Israel was made captive in Babylon, God's sent them His own wise man, the prophet Daniel, who carried the Word of God with him, and proclaimed it both to his own people, and to the Babylonians all the days of his life. Because God's word is a living spring, and not a dead pool,

that word remained among them, even if only a few heard and believed it. And so it is that it finally bore fruit when the men from the east, guided by the divine sign of a moving star in the heavens, came to seek out that child who was to be born. Did God promise such a star in the Scriptures? Most certainly. He made this promise in our Old Testament lesson, Isaiah 60, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." True, the text does not say "a star", but the wise men never claimed that God had specifically promised them a star. He had promised them a Savior, and when the fulness of time came, a time which the book of Daniel plainly reveals to anyone who cared to take it's prophecies literally, God sent these wise men who looked for the coming of Christ a sign which they, being astronomers, would not fail to understand. Quite literally, they saw His light rise in the west, and though they were strangers to the kingdom of Israel, they sought that light, knowing what they came not to find the light of a star, but the light of Christ Himself. So it is that these men were the first to come and fulfill a prophecy made so many times in the Scriptures, not the least of which is Isaiah 60, and here also in Zechariah.

But Zechariah speaks of far more than a few coming to the kingdom of Israel to seek the promised Christ. Rather, it declares that the living waters shall *go out* from Jerusalem. Half of them will go east, and the other half will go west. Nor will those waters ever cease to flow. They will continue in winter as well as in summer, until there is not a single kingdom in the world where men do not lift up their voices and praise the God of their Salvation. So the Lord will be king over all the earth, for His Word will reign everywhere, and not just in Jerusalem, or Israel.

Almost two thousand years ago, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed. It was set upon by Rome, who ruled over all the nations of the known world. But warned by God that this would occur, the Church, which was centered in Jerusalem, had already dispersed throughout the known world, and preached the word of God wherever they went. In this way God sent His living water as a river heading to the east and to the west, until every kingdom of the world had received it.

Today this promise of God is still being fulfilled, and will continue to be fulfilled until the end of the world. Christ has promised that His Word will not ever pass away, but will continue even to the day that the earth is melted with fervent heat, and the heavens evaporate, and the present sinful order of this world is utterly destroyed. And because of this, there will never be a time, until the end, where the preaching of the Gospel ceases, even in the darkest and most forbidding regimes in the world, even amid persecution and death.

Would that we would always consider the wondrous nature of our inheritance as the children of God, who drink from the water of life. This world is a rocky place, a rough landscape filled with mountains and gorges, sinkholes and dangers of every kind. Faithfulness to the God of our salvation is a rare and endangered treasure. You no doubt worry about your own children's future in this world, as did your parents worry about you. They brought you to the Lord in baptism. They committed you to the care of your Savior, and yet, they worried what your life in this world would be like, whether you would persevere in the faith of Christ, or like so many of your peers succumb to the temptation to be godless, to give yourself over to the sinful pleasures of the world, or to fall into unbelief because there are so many forces of government and education working tirelessly to destroy the foundation of your faith. And they had good reason to worry. We live in a marvelous age, and yet every invention which could be put to good use, such as the internet, music, and television is used for the most wretched evils, such as the filth of pornography, violent and hateful expression, or even just endless mind-numbing distraction. We have all experienced it, and have at times even opened our minds and let the filth of this world into our souls willingly, where it festered like a poison. By the grace of God we were brought back, though we may still be sorely tempted. Perhaps you or those you know and love are still tempting God by dancing with the devil's delights. May God graciously awaken in each of us the horror of sin, and the dread of eternal death, that we might cling to His grace in the hour of temptation.

But what of others who do not return? What of our children who will no doubt face far worse? I suppose that every generation of parent looks upon the future of this world with dread, and fears for what their children must endure. Experience teaches us that our fears are not unfounded, for we witness once-faithful friends and family falling away. You think within yourself, "It happened to them. It can happen to me. It can happen to my children." Yes, to our mortal human eyes, the landscape looks bleak and forbidding. Who can survive it?

But there, even in the worst wilderness, God has sent out His streams of mercy. And to everyone who drinks of that stream, God transforms this world from a broken and bleak landscape into a smooth plain, where the people of God can dwell in safety. There all fear is wiped away, for their sins are cleansed in the water of life. In that place, death has been banished. They dwell in joy and gladness for that is their heritage as children of God. No, this is not the world as men see it, but the world as the people of God see it, for God has not left us barren and hopeless, but has given to us sure and everlasting promises which no power on earth can take from us. Yes, even in the middle of the wilderness, He creates a refuge, where we are kept by the power of His Word.

When Herod sought to take the Christ Child's life, the Lord preserved Him and Mary and Joseph by fleeing into Egypt, a foreign land, the very place which once held God's people in slavery, yet for the Christ Child it was a haven of safety, for the Lord had made it so. So it is for us and for our children, and for everyone who has the fountain of life, who drinks from the Word of God. We were already in the wilderness, lost and barren. God's Word came to us, out of the New Jerusalem, His holy Church, whether we were in the east or west, in Egypt, Babylon, or the farthest reaches of this world. We are blessed to be free from most persecution in America, but the persecution of our souls could hardly be worse than it is in our nation. How then does the living water make us to dwell safely in such a place as this? It is by repentance and the remission of sins that the living water does its work in us, and transforms the landscape of sin and temptation into victory and life. That is the refreshment that it offers, for it offers us not merely a drink of water in a dry place, a temporary cure for the symptoms of sin, but the real and everlasting refreshment of Christ Himself, who perfectly and completely ends the reign of sin and death by His death and resurrection.

Sin makes this world a treacherous place, and nothing else. Name any threat to your soul and at its root is sin, whether it is your natural desires or the many temptations, electronic or otherwise, which surround you every day. It has often been the case that an epidemic would infect the food or water supply of a land and thus perpetuate the disease. Sin is a disease that infects all the various forms of spiritual food and enlightenment which men take into their souls. But we have better waters! The water of life is given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not only a clean and refreshing water, it has the power to cleanse us of our sin. It is this that makes it the water of life. It offers you life when your sin has condemned you to death. Christ Jesus comes to you in this water and reveals that you, a stranger of this world, are beloved of the Lord. He loved you while you were yet in your sins and offers His own death as the cure for your sin. He has indeed already taken your sin upon himself, and given you His righteousness in exchange.

All who have this water of life have no reason to fear, for themselves, their children, or any future generation. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of Christ's mercy will abide with us forever, and shall continue to transform the treacherous landscape of this world into a plain of safety. And even the nature of this world will finally yield to the Word of Christ when ever temptation, every sin, and even death, is overthrown, and nowhere will anyone ever threaten the people of God again. May God so grant that we continue to drink from this stream, that our souls may ever be refreshed. Let us also never neglect to give it to our children, that they too may never thirst, but be filled with the righteousness of Christ and be fruitful in every good work. Amen.