

Lord Jesus, who in Your childhood *did more than* set an example for the young to follow, *You provided a lifelong righteousness for us, therefore* by Your Holy Word teach *us and* our children, and all the rising generation, the beginning of wisdom, which is the fear of God. Cause our young men and women to shun the byways of vanity and vice, and to walk in the straight path of godliness and virtue, *that they may be who they already are in You making* them ornaments of Your Holy Church. Amen. (Reading the Psalms with Luther, Ps. 71, CPH, p.166)

For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why He is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, "I will tell of Your name to My brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise." And again, "I will put My trust in Him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given Me." 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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that He helps, but He helps the offspring of Abraham.

In Christ Jesus, the lifelong Righteousness of the children of God, dear fellow redeemed:

Jesus declared that anyone who would hold to His Word would be set free. His enemies in Jerusalem vehemently objected and said they have been slaves of no one. They were children of Abraham and thus children of God. But Jesus rebuked their false self-assessment and said if Abraham were their father they would believe in Him as did Abraham. But now they were children of the father of lies, namely Satan and slaves to sin and the Law.

Knowing their hearts and their hatred of Him, Jesus challenged them by saying: "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" This caused them to make wild accusations against our Lord, calling Him a demon possessed Samaritan. When Jesus finally made it abundantly clear that He was the true God come in the flesh to save them, they picked up stones to stone Him. But His time had not come to suffer and die, so He righteously walked through the midst of them.

You and I would be in this same sorry state as Jesus' enemies, remaining enslaved as children of Satan with our stones of rejection in hand. But by the gracious working of the Spirit, you and I believe in the One whom the Father has sent for all sinners. On this day of the Church year when we behold the 12 year old Jesus righteously fulfilling especially the Third and Fourth Commandments in our

behalf, let us observe with great joy and relief: **Our Brother in the Flesh Delivers Us from Our Lifelong Slavery.**

I

Jesus, by taking on human flesh and blood, did not live in this life from infancy to childhood, and on to adulthood, so that He might merely set us a good example. Surely He did that too, but He entered our world as our brother for the purpose of bestowing upon us His lifelong righteousness. As we read: “For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.” – that one source is the heavenly Father who sent His Son to be our holy Substitute. God’s holy Son is not ashamed to call us siblings. Through His work in our behalf we become coheirs with Him of eternal life.

It would have done us little good, if God came and walked in our midst as He did in the Garden after Adam and Eve sinned. We would be filled with fear as were that first couple, attempting to hide our shame and guilt. No, God needed to enter our world as one of us, expected to fulfill all righteousness, just as we are expected to do. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things.”

Look at how desperate Mary and Joseph were when they thought they had lost their Son. In her great fear Mary scolds the boy Jesus, attempting to convict Him of sin. But shifting the blame of her feelings of irresponsibility would give no solace, even with all her bluster. Clearly Jesus pointed out to her His fulfillment of all righteousness, for her, for Joseph, for the teachers of the Law, for you and me, and all sinful flesh. He truly was about doing the Father’s business, fulfilling the holy Law for us all, so that He would have a holy life to sacrifice.

What sinful child consistently and gladly goes to the House of the Lord holding God’s Word sacred to learn it? What adult does this consistently? Do you? The business of this world presses down heavy upon us all pushing us to other cares and concerns, thinking peace will be achieved by replacing God’s call to hear and learn of Him to find rest for our souls with the many calls of distraction in this life.

II

You see there is the other half of the Good News that God the Son took on human flesh to save us: “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, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” Our many sins against God’s holy law must be paid for through death; “the wages of sin is

death". For you and me that death would take forever to receive, but not so for this Righteous One. He was able to endure our entire eternal death during those three hours of darkness on the cross.

Those who do not know Christ Jesus as Savior, young and old, are subject to the fear of death their whole life long. This fear enslaves holding them in the shackles of work righteousness, thinking that their only escape is to improve their behavior. But it never gets any better, no matter how many personal resolutions to improve are made, no matter how many times they are committed to turning over a new leaf. Sinners are enslaved by their own unrighteousness. I knew of a Lutheran pastor who asked his grandfather who was in his 90s, when adulterous lusting finally subsided for him. The grandfather responded: "*It subsided?*"

Without Christ our lifelong slavery to sin persists. But do not misunderstand, that grandfather was a Christian, and while he remained a sinner, the enslavement had ended for him on account of His righteous Savior, who was perfect in his place and who paid the eternal price for all his sins and evil lusts.

III

Jesus is not ashamed to call you His brothers and sisters, my fellow believers, for you have been sanctified through Him by the work of the Spirit. You stand right and holy before the throne of heaven right here and now. You have been made holy by the blood and righteousness of God's Son made flesh and blood.

Do not be intimidated by that perfect Boy standing in the midst of the teachers in the temple. He was standing there fulfilling all righteousness for you, so that you might be sanctified for all eternity. You are set free from the burden of the Law with all its demands to be perfect. You now get to be who you are already in Christ, God's holy One sent for you.

You do not have to be compelled to go to the house of the Lord to hear His Word, you get to go. You do not have to keep track of your deeds of righteousness in an attempt to build your case when you die and must answer to your Creator. Your righteousness is found alone in this perfect Christ Child, this perfect Child of a sinful mother, this perfect Tradesman, this perfect Pastor and Teacher, this perfect Sufferer. He produced a lifelong righteousness for you and all sinners of all time and in every place.

As the devil sought and successfully corrupted God's first creation through death, so he seeks to do the same to this second creation, our new birth in Christ. The allurements of becoming slaves to sin again can actually seem enticing to the sinner. After all, if you

and I can imagine producing our own righteousness for which we are to be commended, it is appealing to our proud sinful flesh. But seeking our own self-righteousness leads away from Christ. We may lose our status as children of God and become again Satan's children.

Going back to that episode of Jesus confronting His enemies in Jerusalem who frequented the temple and sought to find righteousness in their father Abraham, Jesus told them: "Everyone who practices sins is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever, the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Brothers and sisters of Christ, who are even now in God's house, by His Word you have been set free. Amen.