In Nomine Iesu

The Last Sunday after Trinity 2026
The right hand of God saves us – Ezra 1:1-17

"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: 'Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel—he is the God who is in Jerusalem. And let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods and with beasts, besides freewill offerings for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.'"

Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the LORD that is in Jerusalem. And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the LORD that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods."

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who became the temple that was destroyed and raised up again in three days, dear fellow redeemed in Christ.

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St. John tells us that after Jesus threw the money changers out of the temple in Jerusalem, the Jews said to Him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" He answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." John records the skepticism of those who questioned Him. They said, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" Looking back those many years as he wrote the Gospel that bears his name, John tells us, "But he [Jesus] was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." (John 2:18-22)

I

From the time God gave the instruction on Mt. Sinai that Moses was to see to the building of the tabernacle with its ark of the covenant, the Lord's intention was always that He would dwell in the midst of His people. It began with the tabernacle in the wilderness, then the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem, which the Babylonians destroyed, then the oh-so-modest temple that Ezra rebuilt after the return from Babylonian exile, of which we heard today, and then the magnificent remodeling of Herod's temple in Jesus' day. All of these iterations pointed to the coming Messiah. He who is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, "God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made," deigned to dwell first in a tent, a tabernacle, made with human hands, later in temples of stone, and then at long last in the form of a

servant born of the virgin Mary, who would be – so to speak – torn down and raised again in glory, never again to suffer humiliation.

So why are we considering this text from Ezra on this the last Sunday of the church year when normally we contemplate the end of the world and judgment day, as the historic gospel lesson of the ten virgins, which we just heard, tells us? There are two reasons. Let us consider them in order.

First, it should be apparent the each of the Old Testament structures that housed the ark of covenant over which the pillar of cloud and fire that concealed the God who led Israel out of Egypt and then spoke to them from Mt. Sinai is a type or picture of the coming Messiah. In each of these structures and the services in connection with them, we see depicted the coming Messiah who shows His people the reality of sinful mankind and of man's righteous and holy Creator, Redeemer, and Comforter through the lens of law and gospel. The **priests**, who conducted the services of the temple, had the duty of showing the will of Israel's just and merciful God to those who came to be near Him on the three great festivals of the Old Testament that God commanded through Moses, Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement. The **king** had the duty of safeguarding the temple and God's people, himself being the example of the King who would one day ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey. The **prophets** had the duty of calling the people to worship the one, true God dwelling in their midst **and Him only**. This threefold office of prophet, priest, and king would be fulfilled in the coming Messiah and Savior.

The tabernacle succumbed to destruction through time and wear after serving Israel for more than four hundred years. In its place the temple of Solomon was raised up to continue God's presence in their midst. But it too was destroyed after serving Israel for another four hundred years. Then came seventy years of exile, a warning to Israel that judgment day was coming. After the exile we come to Ezra and the construction of a very modest replacement, of which the prophet Haggai said, speaking for God, "Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes? … But I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the LORD of hosts … **the latter glory of this house shall be greater** than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace." (Haggai 2:2, 7, 9) But it too would be raised up grander than ever by Herod after another four hundred years. Each of these, dear friends, is a picture of the life, death, and resurrection of the One who was to come. This is why John said, Jesus' disciples, who heard Him say, "destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," "remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." (John 2:19)

II

Second reason we consider this text today, the last Sunday of the church year, goes to the whole purpose of worshiping Christ, who came into this world to live and die for us, rose again from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father, yet who continues to dwell in our midst, as He promised His disciples, "wherever two or three gather in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matthew 18:20)

The purpose of worship is not primarily to evangelize. No, evangelism is what we do to bring people to worship Him who dwells in our midst. Now that does not mean those who are new to or unfamiliar with Christianity are not welcome here. No, not at all. They **certainly** are. But they will probably not fully understand what is going on and will think it strange that we do what we do, as we worship Him who is not visible to the eye but who we know by faith to be present among us.

Consider how Israel was led out of slavery in Egypt and into the promised land, how they were protected on the journey from those who wanted to destroy them. In the 15th chapter of Exodus Moses taught Israel to sing - memorize, "The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him … Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea, and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea. The floods covered them; they went down to the depths like a stone. **Your right hand**, O LORD, glorious in power, **your right hand,** O LORD, shatters the enemy … Who is like you, O LORD … You stretched out **your right hand**; the earth swallowed them. You have led in **your steadfast love** the people you have redeemed; you have guided them **by your strength** to your holy abode." (Exodus 15:2, 4-6, 11, 12-13) **Your right hand**, O LORD, saved Your people from their enemies and brought them to Your holy abode. This psalm of Moses, written before the book of psalms was recorded, was sung by Israel as they recalled and observed the Passover year after year for four hundred years.

Beginning with the tabernacle and every temple that followed, God's salvation was to be remembered every Passover until the promised Messiah appeared. He would be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He alone would make the final and complete sacrifice for the sins of all people, not just for Israel, but for all nations. He would physically suffer and die while His soul would endure the very torments of hell in our place – "My God, My God, why have Your forsaken Me.?!!!" And with His death **the wrath of God toward all sin would be stilled.** The Savior would thereafter lead all who believe in Him, all who trust the salvation He won for them, out of bondage to sin and death into life everlasting.

Consider what we just confessed in the Apostles Creed, "… the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and is seated **at the right hand of God the Father Almighty**; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead." We confess this, because the Scriptures teach this. They teach that wherever the right hand of God is, there God's people will find deliverance from sin and death. You see, dear friends, Christ **did not** ascend to the right hand of God to go away from us. No! He ascended there **to be near to all** who believe in His name. So, we gather in His name to live out our baptism in His grace, to hear His saving word, to receive His body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins, for here is where the right hand of God on earth is to be found with all of its saving power.

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We have looked at this text from the book of Ezra to see that God would "shake all the nations," as the prophet Haggai said, to bring them to His temple, that is, to bring them to the promised Messiah in order to give them peace, to lead them out of death to life. In other words, to bring them to His powerful right hand where He stands ready to save all who trust in Him. There Jesus the Messiah says to those at

His right hand, “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matthew 25:34) Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria