SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — May 25, 2025

Bold Proposal: In today's world, the heart and soul of God's gracious Gospel is *the healing of racism*. It isn't a side issue. It's the center of what God's reign coming into world looks like in our historical moment.

To be clear: I'm proposing nothing less than a new version of the Gospel for our time in history. So the corollary is that Martin Luther was essentially wrong. He got the first part right: the Gospel is about Grace. We are saved as a free gift from God, an act of pure grace on God's part through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. But he was wrong about what that salvation looked like. It's not something called "Justification by Grace through Faith." To fully demonstrate this is a big task, let me begin with a quick example from Ephesians 2:

Verse 8: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. . . ."
Verse 11: "So then . . . ."
Verse 15: "that the Messiah might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace . . . ."

Luther got the first part right, but he mainly missed the "so then" part about healing all division in the human family, creating "one new humanity."

But the task of presenting a more faithful version of the Gospel means finding it throughout the Bible. It's a week-to-week task of preaching. So let's begin with this week's readings from Scripture. Where do we see the Gospel as the grace of one new humanity?

Start with Rev 21:24: "The nations will walk by the Lamb's light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." To appreciate how amazing this verse is, we need to know where last we saw "the kings of the earth":

> Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against the rider on the horse and against his army. And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. And the rest were killed by the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth; and all the birds were gorged with their flesh. (Rev 19:19-21)

The last we see of the kings of the earth is that they are "killed" because they followed the beast and false prophet. So how is it that they walk into the New Jerusalem in Rev 21:24? Because their death is as metaphorical as "the sword of the rider on the horse, the sword that came from his mouth." The sword which comes from the mouth is the *testimony* of the Lamb Slain and that of his followers. The fate of those who follow the beast is not being slain by literal swords but being 'slain' by Gospel testimony, so that they might one day be able to enter into the New Jerusalem, where even the tress give leaves of healing for the nations — in our case, healing for white racism.

Who causes the division in the Book of Revelation? Satan, "who accuses our friends day and night before our God (Rev. 12:9-10). "Satan" is actually a title meaning the Accuser. The one who brings the accusations which divide us. In today's Gospel Reading, the Greek word behind the Holy Spirit as "Advocate" is *Paraclete*. That word *Paraclete* is a title for the Defender of the Accused — the opposite of the Satan.

Where do we see the work of the Paraclete today? From people like William Barber II, *The Third Reconstruction: Moral Mondays, Fusion Politics, and the Rise of a New Justice Movement*:

> The greatest threat to our coalition was not the power of our opposition. They could threaten us. They could hurt us. They might, in their blind hubris, even try to kill some of us. But they could not, in the end, deny us. Because ours was a moral struggle, we knew we would win *if we didn't give up*.
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> *. . . A nonviolent struggle has two possible ends: winning the opposition as friends or giving up the battle.* Though our coalition included the full spectrum of North Carolina's diversity, we had come to recognize a common vision for our future in the history of the South's antiracist freedom movement. Our relationships with one another were not simply transactional — a means to achieve our various organization's goals. They had become transformational, lifting each of us to a new understanding of our interconnectedness as human beings and living members of one family. None of us would be free until all of us were free. (pp. 93-94; italics added)