

Prayer For Deliverance.

Text: Psalm 70:1-2

Suggested Hymns:

392, 452, 426, 320, 157

- 1) Life Has Its Difficulties
- 2) God Our Great Helper
- 3) Our Greatest Needs Are Spiritual
- 4) God Will Demand an Accounting on Judgement Day
- 5) Our Sins Condemn Us
- 6) Christ Our Only Hope

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 70:1-2, *¹ Make haste, O God, to deliver me! Make haste to help me, O LORD! ² Let them be ashamed and confounded Who seek my life; Let them be turned back and confused Who desire my hurt.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

As we have seen from the recent articles, the Lutheran church is a liturgical church. Our Orders of Service follow a definite pattern each Sunday. There is beauty and dignity in our services and a special purpose behind each of the various parts which make up our liturgy.

In our day of many and frequent changes, some may wish for greater variety, something different each Sunday. However, such thoughts would be entertained only by people who have never become acquainted with our liturgy.

The fact of the matter is that our Orders of Service have been carefully thought out, and if we will but concentrate on what we sing and say, we will learn to appreciate how meaningful the liturgy really is, and from it experience many blessings.

The sermon this morning has its background in the Introit for the day. This Introit is taken from one of David's psalms and is a *Prayer for Deliverance*. In the Gospel for today Jesus healed a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech.¹ May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Life Has Its Difficulties

One of the problems confronting the church is to remind and assure people that they need God. This may sound like a blunt statement, but the fact of the matter is that many live from day to day with very little thought about God.

When their backs are to the wall, they will pray, to be sure, but otherwise they do not feel a particular need for Him. Instead, they take a great deal of pride in their ability to take care of themselves. If you question this statement, ask yourself, *“How often does the average person actually call upon God for guidance and direction in his daily tasks?”*

No one can say that he does not need God. We know, of course, that life varies with the individual. Some people have such a *“happy-go-lucky”* existence that God’s help does not seem necessary. Sooner or later, however, everyone will find himself face to face with a problem.

Almost any pastor will tell you that he knows of few families who have not at some time or another had some moments of anxiety. We see people who seemingly were indestructible suddenly lie helpless upon a bed of sickness.

We see people of means, who apparently had everything their own way, weep because of some heartache which unexpectedly has come to the family circle.

Various agencies have been called into being to help people in the hour of need. Examples are the many institutions of mercy, such as the Red Cross and other charities. Medical science has made great strides in the care and treatment of the body. Psychiatrists help straighten out people in their thinking. Bankers give advice on financial matters. All these agencies are valuable and serve their purposes.

2. God Our Great Helper

There comes a time, however, when we will need more than the help which mere human beings are able to give. And blessed and fortunate is that person who has learned to know what it means to turn to God in full trust and confidence. The hymnist wrote, *“Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.”*²

What comfort, what assurance, what peace of heart and mind can be ours when we have come to feel ourselves in a personal relationship to God, when we have the conviction in our hearts that God is our heavenly Father who loves us, is able to help us, and has the will to help us!

If you or I do not have this faith, why don't we? Is it possible that we do not know God well enough? No one, of course, is born with faith in God. By nature we are spiritually blind. To be able to believe in God, we must become acquainted with Him.

Perhaps you have heard someone say of an individual: *"I believe in that person. I know all about him. I have all the confidence in the world in him."* Such statements are not made regarding strangers, but only regarding people whom we have learned to know well.

Applying this to our relationship to God, is it possible that we do not go to Him often enough and with enough confidence, simply because we are not well enough acquainted with Him?

There is no greater blessing which can come to an individual than a deep and abiding faith in God. And if our hearts are yearning for a stronger faith in Him, there is one way in which it can be received. It will not come by just wishing for it or by merely thinking about it, but *"faith comes by hearing"*³ — or by reading — *"the Word of God,"* the Gospel of the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Saviour. The more familiar we become with the Word of God, the greater blessing of faith we will receive.

David had learned to know God well. He lived close to Him, and it was only natural for him to go to God with his problems. His prayers were answered wonderfully, and the important truth we can learn from this is that this same God to whom David prayed for deliverance also desires to bless us.

When God said: *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you,"*⁴ He did so because we constantly need this reassurance, this strengthening of our faith. God meant every word of it, and we can trust Him fully.

3. Our Greatest Needs Are Spiritual

Another problem confronting the church is to teach people that while they have needs of the body, their soul needs are much greater. The Scriptures tell us:

“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”⁵ And “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”⁶

Most of us know these words from memory. They are very clear, and yet, I am afraid, we will have to agree that there are many people, even in Christian churches, who do not take them seriously.

If you doubt this, take a look at an average individual. Isn't it true that he spends by far the greater portion of his time, energy, and abilities on matters purely affecting the body?

By way of illustration, we almost burst with pride when our sons or daughters make the school honour roll, but care little whether they make God's honour roll.

We spend money freely to develop grace and charm and to beautify our faces, but give only passing thought to the development of a beautiful Christian soul.

We cry when a health problem occurs, and we are so thankful when a cure has been brought about, but show little concern when a soul has become sick.

There is nothing wrong with a desire to make the honour roll and to be attractive and to enjoy health. As long as we live in a material world, we will have material desires. However, it still remains true that spiritual needs, the needs of the soul, are of much greater importance and must always be given first consideration.

We live but a short time on this earth. Every hundred years the world receives three new sets of humanity. When we think back only 75 years, there were quite a few people on this earth. Some were rich, some were poor. Some were highly educated, some were uneducated.

Some died at seven, others lived to be seventy. But in the final analysis, what difference did it make? They are gone, and with but few exceptions, we can add, forgotten. How often do we today talk about individual people who lived 75 years ago?

Seventy-five years from now most of us will also be gone. And when that time comes, do you suppose people will be talking about us, the kind of homes in

which we lived, the jobs we had, the cars we owned, things that occupy the major portion of our time, energy, and thinking today?

One of the women of a congregation evaluated the material things of this life correctly several years ago. She knew that her days were numbered because of a fatal disease.

Shortly before her death she remarked: *"To think that a year ago I became so angry and was so terribly upset because I could not find drapes to match the colour scheme of our living room! Today this entire house does not seem like mine any longer."*

Surely, as one pastor has put it, we need to raise our sights, and as we work and play, plan and build, laugh and cry, keep our eyes focused more intently on the life to come.

4. God Will Demand an Accounting on Judgement Day

There is a life to come. Job declares: *"And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God."*⁷ St. Paul wrote: *"The dead will be raised incorruptible."*⁸ I don't think there is anyone present at this Service who would try to deny this plain truth of Scripture.

And yet there are those whose behaviour and general outlook on life would create the impression that they expect to remain on earth indefinitely. This is folly. Even heathen believe in some sort of existence after death.

When the Indians were discovered in America, it was found that they believed in *"a happy hunting ground."* In parts of Asia it is believed that when people die, their souls leave the body, wander around from one animal to another, until they finally find their way back into some new-born baby.

Not only is there an existence after death, but St. Paul further tells us: *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body."*⁹

It makes no difference what you or I, or anyone else may say or think, the time will come when we will have to face God to be judged. And God has said in Leviticus 19:2, *'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'*

Here again is a truth which should drive us to the highest pitch of concern. Unfortunately, however, the church is again confronted with a problem, the problem of getting people to realise that this is nothing to be treated lightly.

There are those who think of God as a weak and kind-hearted grandfather, who says to his grandchildren, *"Now, boys and girls, you know it isn't nice to do that,"* but then closes his eyes to what they are doing. They do not take God seriously.

There are also those who are too well satisfied with themselves. They may not say it in so many words, but their general attitude is: *"What's so wrong with me? I know I am not perfect, but who is? Surely, God does not expect me to be perfect. Look at the many people who do many more wrong things than I do. I may forget myself from time to time, but I also do many things that are good, and as long as the good counterbalances the bad, I feel I will be taken care of."*

You and I need to learn that it is not so important what we or other people may think of us, but it is extremely important what God thinks of us. To one criminal, another criminal may be a great fellow, but to the rank and file of people in a community he is still a criminal. Our fellow men may regard us very highly, but the important question still is, what does God think of me?

5. Our Sins Condemn Us

Do we meet God's requirements? There are times when we go to a photographer to have our pictures taken. When the proofs are handed us, our first reaction is one of utter disappointment. There are those wrinkles on the forehead, the hair out of place, the mole on the chin — all our flaws and defects reproduced exactly as they are.

We examine the proofs repeatedly and finally, after a process of elimination, take those that are left to the photographer and sheepishly ask whether it would be possible to cover up or brush out all the defects. These days it is done digitally.

Now, when the completed pictures are returned, we are truly elated. We have words of praise for the photographer, pass the pictures around to friends and relatives, and experience great satisfaction when we hear them say, *"Isn't it beautiful!"*

Have you ever wondered what you would do if it were possible for a photographer to take a picture of the soul, a picture that would show all our blotches of character, those secret sins we hope will never be found out; a picture which shows us as we actually are, without being touched up? I am quite certain we would not want to show that picture even to our closest friend.

And yet we find people so completely satisfied with themselves. We know, of course, that there are those humble, penitent souls who are greatly disturbed by their failures to meet God's requirements, and like David in our text, cry out, ***Make haste, O God, to deliver me!*** But we also know that there are those who do not seem to be disturbed at all, do not feel the eye of God focused upon them.

We need to remind ourselves that nothing is hidden from God, and that it is useless for us to try to cover up. He is in earnest when He says, ***"You shall be holy."*** He also means every word of it when He tells us that we must all appear before Him for judgement.

In Rev. 20:12 John writes about the ***"books that were opened."*** Each one of us is writing a book, a book of our lives, and in this book God has a record of all our thoughts, words, and deeds. It is really a frightening thought to contemplate.

If I could tell you no more than has been said thus far, the outlook for us all would truly be hopeless. We could just as well forget about our churches and throw our religion out the window. We stand exposed before God, eternally condemned.

6. Christ Our Only Hope

But thanks be to God in all eternity, a way has been prepared for us to escape the awful consequences of our failures. God has given us a heavenly Redeemer who is able to blot out all the spots and blotches of our souls, a Saviour, Christ the Lord, who has taken the responsibility for all our guilt and has atoned for it on the cross.

Christ loved the church as His bride ***"and gave Himself for her, ²⁶ that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷ that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."***¹⁰

You have heard this message often, but it is still the greatest message which can be told. That is why Christmas is such a joyous festival for us. It tells us of our Saviour born for us. That is why Good Friday has such great significance for us. It tells us that our Saviour was forsaken by God so that we need not be forsaken eternally.

That is why Easter is such a high festival in the Christian church year. It tells us that God the Father was satisfied with the sacrifice offered by His Son in our behalf and that our redemption is complete. We know that we have a living Saviour, a loving Saviour, a forgiving Saviour, who desires to bless us for time and eternity.

In all the world there is nothing which can compare with this comforting and assuring truth. David had learned to know God well. He knew that he could turn to Him and be delivered from every evil of body and soul. God grant that this same blessing may be experienced by us all. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 7:31-37

² Hymn 426

³ Rom 10.17

⁴ Psalm 50:15

⁵ Matt. 6:33

⁶ Matt. 16:26

⁷ Job 19:26

⁸ 1 Cor. 15:52

⁹ 2 Cor. 5:10

¹⁰ Ephesians 5:25-27