



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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First Sunday of Advent

November 27, 2016

“No Provision for the Flesh?”

(Romans 13:12-14)

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“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:12-14).

Collect of the Day: Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

One of the things I love about the transitioning from fall to winter is the transition that takes place also in the kitchen. In the hot days of summer, we eat a lot of cold food, or food that requires very little cooking like stir fry or garden salads or things off the grill. In the summer, I don't like having the oven fighting the AC.

But you don't have to worry about that this time of the year. Today when you get the oven and the burners going, you're giving the furnace a breather. So bring on the soups and the stews. Bring on slow roasted chicken and turkey and that favorite meatloaf recipe. Bring on the baked bread and pies.

It's fair game now to bring out some of the Christmas music for its first hearing, but it's also time to turn to that stained page in the cookbook. It's been about a year, but that recipe is like an old friend. It will not betray you, and after 2, 3 minutes, it's as if you've never been apart.

I love cooking this time of the year. The only trouble is they say between now and New Year's, most of us will gain about five pounds. And not all of it will come off. Some of it will stick like slush on the mud guards. And moreover, here comes Paul saying, "Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." And next week we'll hear from John the Baptist, and we know about him. His main message was "repent!" and his diet, in large part consisted of locusts.

Today marks the beginning of Advent, a penitential season of preparation, a season where it's not at all out of line to be fasting! Such a contrast in cultures! In the church we're singing ancient and weighty Advent hymns with phrases like, "ponder nothing earthly minded", while in the

world our mail boxes are stuffed with catalogues which are stuffed with all things earthly minded.

In the church, we're deliberately holding back from singing Christmas carols, because it's not Christmas yet, while a couple of weeks ago already, at the Piggly Wiggly, over the house speakers chipmunks were singing a particularly nasty version of "Christmas time is here."

In the church, God's Word is telling us to "cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light", while on T.V. the Radio City Rockettes are kicking it up as Santa's helpers.

In the church, the message is "wake up" and "repent" and "prepare". In the world the message is "buy now and pay no interest for twelve months!"

There is no other time when the contrasts between church and world are as stark and vivid. And if you're like me it feels like you have one foot planted firmly in both.

"Make no provision for the flesh" Paul tells us, precisely in the season when the cultural norm is to indulge the flesh.

We coddle it with lotions, we nuzzle it with heated car seats. We cater to it with rich food and gladden it with wine. We gratify it, satisfy it, pamper it and requite. And there is no end to the demands of the flesh. It is the ultimate entitlement.

But watch out! Here comes Paul: "Make no provision for the flesh." And Isaiah is just around the corner. "All flesh is as grass" he says, "and all its glory as the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass" he warns (6:6-8).

The graveside liturgy also holds no punches. "Dust we are, and to dust we shall return" a direct quote of Genesis 3:19. That is, we put so much effort and money into eating well, and clothing our flesh with beautiful, fine things, we put so much effort into gratifying the desires of the flesh . . . but when it's all said and done it's just a couple of handfuls of dust.

Our flesh is part of that unholy trinity warring against God: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. So Paul writes, “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” He’s calling for discipline, self-control, for moderation and restraint and obedience. Paul’s worried that when the Lord returns, we’ll not be ready. We’ll have been too busy pampering our flesh.

And Paul’s not holier than thou. In Romans 7 he becomes very vulnerable and admits, “I don’t [even] understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. I know that nothing good lives in my flesh, for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out . . . Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (v. 18).

Paul knows he cannot rescue himself. No man can save himself through works of discipline, self-control or moderation. If there is to be any help, any rescue, it will have to come from the outside. So Paul despairs of himself, and sees Jesus Christ as the only answer. “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

That is our Savior has rescued us from the sins of the flesh, and he did it in part by taking on flesh himself.

Normally “flesh gives birth to flesh.” One sinner begets another. But the miracle of the incarnation is that a fellow sinner named Mary gives birth to the holy child names Jesus.

Satan tried for all his worth to bring evil out of him. When Jesus was starving, Satan tempts him with bread. When he was weak and vulnerable, Satan tempts him with power and authority and plush comfort. When he was worn out, overwhelmed, Satan tempts him with unrighteous anger. But there was no sin to be found in Jesus; never did he succumb to temptation. In him there was no darkness. He shows us what a human being is supposed to look like, without being enslaved to the sinful flesh.

He became flesh to save flesh. Think of all the flesh

he healed on this earth. On Thanksgiving we heard about the ten lepers whose flesh was literally rotting, but he sent them home clean. I'm thinking also of all those who reached out to touch him because of some sickness, and all those he reached out to touch and heal, even the dead. And remember how he stooped down to pick up the bloody fragment of an ear of a soldier and reattached it? He's not interested that the flesh even of his enemies should be harmed, for he came to save them too.

He shows us what a human being is supposed to look like. He disciplined his body, controlled it rather than letting it control him. He allowed his innocent flesh, holy and pure, to take on all our sins of the flesh and be crucified. 1 Pet. 3:18, "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh." This is good news, not just for your soul or spirit, but also for your flesh. He rose again not as a spirit or ghost or teaching. He rose in the flesh, and promised his resurrection, is the first of many to come. Acts 2, "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my flesh also will live in hope" (v. 26).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is to save also for our flesh. It's our flesh that gets washed and marked in Holy Baptism. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ" says Paul. That's how it first happens, in Baptism. That's why as part of a baptism we wrap that little one up in a white garment to show he or she has been clothed with Christ, clothed with the robe of Christ's righteousness that covers all your sin.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for our flesh. "Take eat, this is my body. Take drink, this is my blood." His flesh and blood for our flesh and blood. His forgiveness for our sin. His life and death for ours.

And so, on the last day, in a flash, in a twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (not just our souls), but our flesh will be raised, this time not as grass that will wither or flowers that will fall (Is. 6:6-8). On that day our bodies will be raised "imperishable" (1 Cor. 15:43) so we can stand before the judgment seat of Christ without fear or shame.

Again, the graveside liturgy holds nothing back, but quotes Philippians 3, word for word: “Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body by the power that enables him to subdue all things to himself” (Phil. 3:21). And it ends with “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!”

“Make no provision for the flesh” the Bible says. We don’t have to, because God has already made provision for the flesh. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is for the flesh! Amen

