**May 5th 2024 Rogate Sunday**

**Text: John 17:20** 0720

**Theme: The Mediator.**

May the Lord our God ever grant that we believe in the Mediator who offered Himself for us, and sits now at Thy right hand to intercede in our behalf, even Jesus Christ. Amen. Dear Christians: In the Old Testament our Lord, through the prophet Ezekiel declared plainly and bluntly: *“Thou art the land that is not cleansed, nor rained upon in the day of indignation. There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof. Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them. Her princes in the midst thereof are like wolves ravening the prey, to shed blood, and to destroy souls, to get dishonest gain. And her prophets have daubed them with untempered morter, seeing vanity, and divining lies unto them, saying, thus saith the Lord God, when the Lord hath not spoken. The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy; yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none.” (Ezek. 22:24-30)* The words of God to the people of Jerusalem and to her priests and prophets is a scathing rebuke of their thoughts, words, and deeds. The prophets do not declare the Word of the Lord, but preach lies; the priests do not follow the covenant of God for the Temple, but practice lies and take glory unto themselves; and the people themselves practice oppression against the poor and the stranger. Do these things sound familiar to us? Yes, it sounds very similar to the things we see today. There is no justice, no sound judgment; men make merchandise of God’s people, and the many pastors care only for money and treasure; the people of our land are devoid of love and mock the name of God, even daring Him to judge them. Yet in Ezekiel God seeks for a man, or men, who will work, out of love for the souls of men and their Savior Jesus Christ, to make up the hedge and to stand in the gap for the people. God had determined that it was necessary to destroy Jerusalem and much of the people because of their evil and wicked deeds, but it was not the will of God to destroy her. Rather, He desired that she be His people and He their God, and thus He sought out among the land any who would make up the hedge, meaning any who declare faithfully the Word of God, both Law and Gospel, which makes up a hedge to protect the people and the land. He sought for one to stand in the gap, to intercede for the people in their behalf, as Moses had done long ago, to pray for them, to work for their salvation, to preach unto them the truth of God. But God did find no one to do so. Not one man to serve the Lord with fear. Not one man willing to sacrifice his own life to serve God and the church. Not one man to intercede for the people. Not one man to pray for them, standing in the gap.

As I look around this country I often fear that the same is becoming true now in this country, among the people and visible church. Today we will see the perfect Mediator, one who makes up the hedge and stands in the gap to intercede for His people. We will then examine the example of our Savior, and thereby make the call for the men and women of this congregation to make up the hedge and stand in the gap, at least insofar as we are allowed by God to do so in His Word. Let us then see this example of the Mediator. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the seventeenth chapter of the Gospel according to John, verse twenty.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O most glorious and gracious Lord Jesus Christ, grant today that we learn of Thy mediation in our behalf, by Thy intercession with the Father, by Thy suffering and death in our behalf, and by giving Thy Word and the preaching of Thy Word for our salvation. Teach us to be Thy true and faithful servants. Help us to follow Thy pure example, interceding for one another, for our nation, and for the spread of the Gospel. Keep us from being as the men of Jerusalem in the day of Ezekiel, but give us courage and strength to do follow Thy good and gracious will, praying for the coming of Thy kingdom of grace and Thy kingdom of glory. Forgive us, O Lord, for any idleness which is found within us, and we confess that we are not faithful in prayer, nor to intercede in behalf of our neighbor. O Savior, cause that courageous men stand up and make up the hedge round about our nation and our own congregation, and cause both men and women to stand in the gap and pray for the souls of the nation and the congregation. Keep us from denying the power of our faith, but rather cling to it and believe it. Grant all those things, O Lord, in Thine own saving name. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn of the Mediator, seeing first that He is:

1. **Between God and man.** We hear our text: **read text here.** Our short text is part of the High Priestly prayer of Christ, wherein He first prays for His twelve disciples, and then prays for the entire invisible Church. When Jesus, in our text, says that He does not pray for ‘these alone’ He is referring to the disciples. He then declares that He also prays for all those who will believe through the Word of the disciples. Who is being spoken of here? It is none other than you and I. Jesus is praying for us here, praying for our salvation! This text in the book of the apostle John is one of the most personal in all of Scripture, for each one of our names is included here. These words are also a demonstration of the High Priestly office of Christ. In that priestly office Jesus stands between God the Father and sinful man. Jesus Christ is the only One who can possibly do this in its fulness, for the gulf fixed between God and man is due to the rebellion of man against God, and so no man can stand between, for He is not God, and God will not stand between because He is not man owing the debt. Thus ONLY the God-Man can do what Jesus is doing in our text for only He is both God and Man. It is this magnificent truth which is here shown in our text. Like the priests of the Old Testament, Jesus stands between the people and God putting the sins of the people on the head of the sacrifice who is to be put death in payment for that sin. That is the very thing that Jesus did for each one of us, He accepted our sins upon His own head, and then offered Himself upon the altar of the cross in payment for them. This is the work of Jesus as the High Priest, and He does this for each of us individually, and then prays that His work come to fruition in our hearts through the Word of the Gospel, and the preaching of that Word.

Now we also heard in Psalm 110 that Jesus sits on the right hand of God, meaning on the hand of the Father’s power, and He there intercedes for us at the throne forevermore. This is as a great a work as His death on the cross, for it is there that each of our prayers for forgiveness, for help and comfort, are mediated before the Father. This coming Thursday is ascension day, and one the comforts given in the ascension of Jesus is that He goes to intercede, to plead, for us before the throne of the Father. Now it is apparent that this is necessary for us, for we need daily forgiveness of sins, the hope of salvation, and the assurance of eternal life. This is Jesus standing between us and the Father as the Mediator. Now He is also the Mediator in:

1. **Sending forth His Word.** We read our text: **read text here.** We are all very familiar with the word apostle, designating one of Jesus’ disciples who later zealously taught the Gospel with courage. Yet many do not know what the word apostle means, it means ‘to send forth,” in this case to send forth with a message to be boldly declared in all the world. Now there are no more apostles in the first and primary sense of the Word as those who wrote the inspired Scriptures and were commissioned by Jesus Himself directly. Yet in a secondary sense all Christians are apostles, that is, those sent forth with a message to spread abroad on the face of the earth. The Church is the new bearer of the Gospel, and any who thus bear that Gospel are the servants of Jesus Christ. As His servants we desire to do the will of God, which as we know from the great commission is to spread the Gospel. Now any good servant will undoubtedly desire to follow the example given to him by His Lord, in this case by the Lord Jesus Himself, to intercede in behalf of the souls of our neighbor and of our nation. Now it is obvious that no Christian, on his own authority or on his own merit, can intercede for anyone, for he himself is utterly guilty. However, one who has been forgiven of his sins and is covered by the righteousness of Christ, are given power to intercede in behalf of others, and are even desired to do so by God. Many times throughout Scripture, prayer is exhorted for preachers, for the weak, for the sick, for those who are tempted, and the like. Now if these intercessions held no power, for the sake of Christ, before the Father why would such intercessions be exhorted? It is obvious then that prayer by Christians in behalf of others holds great power. The book of James says clearly: *“the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (Jms. 5:16)* Now many will ask, why does God wait for the prayer of a Christian before He acts? Couldn’t He just perform His will without petition being made? As we saw earlier in the book of Ezekiel, there are a couple of reasons for this, first He desires His Church to carry out the commission He gave them, to spread forth the Word of the Gospel which work necessarily includes prayer; secondly he desires that Christians would have the love of their neighbor in their heart, the same love that Christ demonstrated in His prayer, and to show that love by standing in the gap and making intercession for all men, for those in authority, and for the faith of Christ to be imparted to many.

Now the Lord also desires that men make up the hedge round about His people and His Church, and this is done by the preaching of the Gospel courageously and without reservation, and therefore to bring the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation to souls. There are few that will stand up and do this, and fewer still that stand up and declare the whole truth. Therefore, we here make the call for men to stand up and do this, to understand the importance of preaching the Gospel Now not everyone is called to be a preacher, but when a man is called to do so, it is necessary that Christians hear him, support him, and do all they can to ensure that his words are heard far and wide. Now we do not want to pretend that ministers have a monopoly on preaching the Gospel, for the great commission was given to all believers, not just the ministry, and therefore all Christians should bear forth the Word to the world, not with their own interpretation, but the pure Gospel as we have it in Scripture and taught in our confessions.

Let us then, dear Christians, as God sought at the time of Ezekiel, make up the hedge and stand in the gap for Christians, for authority, for our nation. Each one of these needs our prayer, each one needs our intercession, and God desires it from us. Let us be men and women of courage, zeal, and of worship of God’s name, work, and being. May we give thanks for all these things, and let us glorify and praise Him forevermore. Amen.