

The First Sunday after Christmas  
Sunday, December 31, 2017  
Psalm 111:9, **“He sent redemption to His people...”**

Dear Christians,

It’s been quite an end to 2017. These last two, two-and-a-half weeks, we have been harshly reminded that in the midst of all the lights and the carols and the gifts and the celebrations and the good cheer and well-wishing—sin is real, sickness and old age are real, death is real.

First, it was Margaret Scarlett (“Punkie”) who died early in the morning on Thursday, December 14. Then early in the evening of that same day, Dennis Eakin died. Then Tuesday, December 19, Elaine Strako died. And now, this past Thursday, all too soon, death claimed Molly LaMar. In addition to our members who have died, there has been a parade of Trinity members in and out of the hospitals during December—some of whom are still very sick, some for whom we will pray this morning.

Redemption. Redemption for our bodies. Redemption for our souls. That’s what we need. We need to be redeemed, to be rescued from sin and its wages of death and all the other nasty stuff that sin has foisted upon us. But then, that’s why we are celebrating Christmas. On Christmas Eve that’s what God sent us—redemption. The good news of Christmas is that the very redemption we need is the redemption God has provided us.

Redemption runs like a thread through today’s readings. Of course, that is the great theme of the entire Bible—the redemption of sinners! Listen again to Psalm 111:9, **“He sent redemption to His people...”** Of course, when the Psalmist wrote those words he was looking back into Israel’s history. He was looking back to a time when Israel was enslaved in Egypt; a time when they toiled beneath their oppressor’s whip; a time when their baby boys were routinely put to death by the Egyptians; a time when their cries of suffering and their pleas for mercy continually rose to God in heaven.

God, in His mercy, redeemed Israel. He sent Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the Promised Land. But the Psalmist, when he penned Psalm 111, wasn’t just looking backward into Israel’s history; he was also looking forward in time to an even greater act of redemption on the part of God. It’s that coming redemption the Psalmist speaks about in Psalm 130, **“O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love and with Him is plentiful redemption. And He will redeem Israel from all his sins.”**

It was that redemption—the redemption from sin, the redemption from its wages of death—that Israel waited for throughout its history. It’s that redemption that Simeon, who had one foot in the grave, was waiting for. It’s that redemption that Anna, a long-time widow, along with others, was waiting for.

And then it happened. The day came when the waiting was over. The day came when God again sent redemption to His people. St. Paul writes in Galatians, **“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law...”** Simeon no longer had to wait for the consolation of Israel. He saw it with his own eyes. He held it in his arms. Anna no longer had to wait for the redemption of Jerusalem. She spoke of it openly and proclaimed it publicly in the Temple.

That redemption came in the form of a Redeemer--Jesus. Jesus is our Redeemer. His flesh and blood is our redemption. When Simeon held the infant Jesus in His arms, he was holding the consolation of Israel in his arms. When Simeon looked upon baby Jesus, he was seeing the salvation, the redemption that God had sent to His people. When Anna spoke of Jesus, Mary's newborn son, she was speaking of the redemption of Jerusalem. Yes, our redemption is bound to the person of Jesus, to His flesh and His blood. Apart from Jesus, His flesh and blood, there is no redemption.

Jesus redeemed us from the Law by keeping it for us; by living a sinless life in His sinless flesh. Unlike us, out of His heart there came no evil thoughts; no murder or adultery; no sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. Unlike us, He used His mind to think only those things that are pleasing to God. Unlike us, He used His mouth exclusively to pray to God and to proclaim God's Word to sinners; to speak forgiveness to the repentant, health to the sick, freedom to the demon-possessed, and life to the dead. Unlike us, His hands became the instruments through which His neighbors received the help they needed and the blessings they sought.

Jesus redeemed us from sin and death by bearing our sin for us and by enduring in His own human body and soul the suffering and the death that our sin had earned and that we sinners deserved. On the cross, He gave His sinless flesh into death for our sinful flesh. On the cross, He poured out His holy blood for us whose bloodlines are polluted by sin. The resurrection of His body from the dead was a clear testimony to the world that His sinless flesh and His holy blood were the all-sufficient price to purchase our forgiveness and to redeem us from sin and death.

Now, through the preaching of the Gospel and the Sacraments, God has sent and continues to send this redemption to you. Your head and your heart have been marked with the cross as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Jesus has covered you with a robe of righteousness and adorned you with the garments of salvation. Now, in Jesus, the Law can no longer accuse you. In Jesus, sin can no longer condemn you. In Jesus, death has no claim whatsoever on your soul and only a temporary claim on our body.

Because Simeon and Anna saw in Jesus the redemption that God had promised them and had now sent them—because of that they died in peace. Simeon, as he cradled Jesus in his arms and gazed upon his Redeemer's face, said it so beautifully, **“Lord, now let your servant depart in peace according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation...”**

So it has been for every Christian who has found in Jesus their Redeemer and their redemption. So it has been for all our faithful members and all your Christian loved ones who have lived and died trusting in His redeeming work. So it was for Margaret, for Dennis, for Elaine, for Molly. They all departed in peace. They had seen the Lord's salvation. They were baptized into their Redeemer and marked with His cross. They heard and believed the good news of His redeeming work for them. They ate and drank in the Lord's Supper the very price Jesus paid for their redemption—His body given for them, His blood poured out for them.

And so it will be one day for you who have been marked with your Redeemer's cross in the waters of Holy Baptism. So it will be one day for you who have heard and who believe the good news of your Redeemer's death and resurrection for your salvation. So it will be one day for you who eat and drink the body and blood of your Redeemer and receive the chief fruit of His redeeming work—the forgiveness of your sins. You will depart in peace according to God's Word. When death comes calling you will find rest in Your Redeemer and refuge in His redemption. Your soul will go to be with Christ, your Redeemer, which is better by far.

And yet, like Simeon and Anna and all the saints who have gone before us, we are still waiting. We are not waiting for another Redeemer. We are waiting for Jesus, our one and only Redeemer, to come again. We are not waiting for another redemption. We are waiting for the redemption that Christ has accomplished to be brought to its full and glorious fruition.

We are waiting for that day when the Father will send His Son back down from heaven to this world that He has redeemed. We are waiting for that day when our eyes, like Simeon's, will see Jesus, our Redeemer. Jesus says, **“They will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with great power and glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, for your redemption is drawing near.”**

We are waiting for that day when the graves of the redeemed shall be opened. We are waiting for that day when Jesus will issue His call to all the redeemed, **“Come out!”** We are waiting for that day when the mortal bodies of the redeemed will be raised up to life everlasting. We are waiting for that day when death will be swallowed up in victory. We are waiting for that day when all our tears will be wiped away and death and mourning and crying and pain will be no more.

But even now, as we mourn our dead, as we contemplate our own death, as we wait for the resurrection of the dead, we have peace. Peace because God has sent redemption to His people. Peace because He sent us a Redeemer—Jesus. Peace because we are numbered among the Redeemed.

In Jesus' name  
Amen