

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

God, working through Cyrus, opened the way for Zerubbabel to take some Israelites back to begin the restoration of Jerusalem. 80 years later, Ezra led the “second return” arriving in Jerusalem with more Israelites in the seventh year of Artaxerxes. Nehemiah followed thirteen years later, arriving in Jerusalem roughly 140 years after the destruction of the Temple. The first public assembly of the Jews in 141 years is recorded in the Nehemiah text just read.

The people had forgotten the Word of God. It was to them a closed Book. So Ezra read the Torah, and the Levites stood among the people interpreting the Word to the congregation. The people wept. They had not kept God's Commands. They were not worthy of His Promises.

But Nehemiah bade them rejoice. God is merciful. He is the God of grace. This day the Word of God was returned to His chosen people. And where the Word of God is, there is forgiveness and life.

With regard to godlessness, the apostate Israelites had nothing on us. At least among them homosexuality was regarded as sin, the unborn weren't put to death, women weren't priests, and promiscuity was frowned upon. And still God removed His Word from them, and allowed them to be conquered and ruled by pagans.

Today the Word of God has been largely removed from our society. Many churches that use the Name Christian have abandoned the true teaching of the Word. Many prefer not to include a clear confession of sinfulness in their services, or celebrate the Sacrament, lest the unbelieving be offended.

But it is not they, rather it is God, that is taking His Word and His Sacraments away because of their unfaithfulness. Like the Northern Kingdom, they have substituted their own worship for the Worship ordained of God. And, like the Assyrians, now the unbelieving overrun our country, our government, our schools, and our embassies. Do you not see? Are the signs not clear?

And each of us, like the Southern Kingdom, has continued in our transgression. For every sinful thought, every angry response, every prideful emotion, every lustful urge, every hedonistic over-indulgence is a rejection of the Word of God. O faithless generation, how long shall God bear with us?

So the paraments are violet this day. Violet is the color of repentance. So repent, lest God remove His Word from us completely. Repent, lest Babylon once again enslave the people of God. Repent, for where the Word of God is absent, so is His Spirit absent, and there is only sin and death. Pray “Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief.”

But hear the Word of Nehemiah: "This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep... Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Thanks be to God, He does not change. He is merciful. He is the God of grace. The captivity every sinner has deserved was served by Christ. He was arrested and bound, He was led away as an idolater in captivity to Golgotha. But no foreign king saved Him. No distant ruler sent Him back to Jerusalem. He died in captivity.

But He rose in perfect freedom. He defeated all the enemies of God and His chosen people. He is the true Israel, the true Chosen One, the Anointed Shepherd King, the true Son of David, the only One perfectly faithful to God the Father. He is the true High Priest, who by His own power took up His life again.

He is the eternal Word made Flesh, who paid the price for your sins. He is the One greater than the Temple, who by grace makes you the Temple of His Spirit. And where the Spirit of God is, there is forgiveness and life.

He returns you to freedom and safety not by crossing the Jordan, but through the waters of the Font. There He redeems and quickens you as His death and resurrection are made yours. He places His Word in your heart and your mind, that you believe God the Father and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent.

Returned to His favor by His grace, He bids you rejoice. He invites you to eat choice Food and drink sweet Drink, as you kneel to receive Christ your Meal.

So take and eat, take and drink, dear Christian. The God of Grace gives you His Word of forgiveness and life. He

banquets you on the Holy Eucharist. He returns you to His favor. And He promises to protect and keep you until you enter the New Jerusalem, into which the true Deliverer will lead you on the Last Day, that you dwell forever in the City that is truly Holy. For there you will dwell with God.

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