

Genesis 18:22-33 (Friday Vespers)
KELC Retreat
Lutherstadt Wittenberg
September 2, 2022

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived in Sodom (Gen 14:12) and at one point, Abraham even joined forces with the Sodomites to rescue Lot. That's when Abraham actually met the King of Sodom personally (Gen 14:17). But "the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD" (Gen 13:13). The LORD heard the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah, whose sin was very grave (Gen 18:20). The sin of Sodom was not just sin in general. It was a specific sin. When the two angels visited Lot in Sodom, "the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them'" (Gen 19:4-5). As punishment for the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, the LORD rained down sulfur and fire out of heaven (Gen 19:24). "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth" (Rom 1:18). Because of their idolatry, "God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves . . . God gave them up to dishonorable passions . . . the men gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error."

Like Abraham, we, too, dwell near Sodom. All around us in the western world we see the sin of Sodom not only permitted, but even praised, increasingly so in the last ten years. What was once considered shameful is now looked upon with pride. What was once kept secret is now

shouted from the rooftops. Like Abraham, we see our relatives surrounded and overwhelmed by the men of Sodom. The warning signs are everywhere, yet our loved ones linger in sin city (Gen 19:16). They are in danger of being swept away with the multitude of the unrighteous. Even in so-called Christian churches today, those who know God's decree not only do such things, they also give approval to those who practice them. All can begin to seem hopeless as the church and the world are infiltrated by unclean spirits. And all we can do is wait for God's righteous judgment from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. And even as God sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt 5:45), so does God rain down fire and brimstone on the just and the unjust. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD" (Ps 33:12), but "the wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God" (Ps 9:17). Indeed, the LORD "will execute judgment among the nations," including ours, "filling them with corpses" (Ps 110:6). But God's judgment against Sodom also teaches Abraham, and us, how to pray.

Abraham drew near to the LORD and said: "Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Abraham pleads to God to have mercy on Sodom for the sake of the righteous within it. In the same way, we look around us and see how the nations have fallen, we see how our nation has fallen, yet we pray that the LORD would preserve order in the world for the sake of the Church. In His wrath, the LORD could destroy the United States, or Germany, or any country in an instant on account of unrighteousness. Yet in mercy, the LORD preserves His left-hand kingdom and continues working good through it. When we see God's judgment about to pour out over a nation, we are reminded to pray like Abraham. We cry out to the LORD to hold back His wrath for the sake of the righteous in the land.

Abraham says: “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Man was formed from the dust, and because of sin, man will return to the dust from which he came (Gen 3:19). Like Job, who humbled himself and repented in dust and ashes (Job 42:6), so does Abraham recognize his lowliness compared to the almighty God. Abraham knows that he, too, is a sinner, and is in no place to approach the LORD. Yet he counts on the Lord’s mercy and compassion. Six times Abraham asks God to spare Sodom for the sake of the righteous therein, but it turned out there were not even ten righteous people. Only Lot and his family would be spared.

Like Abraham, we approach the LORD in humility, recognizing we are but dust and ashes. We, too, are sinners, who will return to the dust from which we came. But we lean on the Lord’s compassion and mercy. The Apostle Paul urges Timothy and us “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim 2:1–2). We pray for the repentance of the nations and that God would hold back His righteous anger. And we intercede for the world in this way because God Himself “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” There is only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all. In Christ Jesus, we, too, stand before the Father’s throne of grace, praying in the Holy Spirit that we and the nations of this world might receive mercy and grace to help in time of need (Heb 4:16). We pray that the LORD would preserve us and the world for the sake of the only righteous one, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God’s judgment against Sodom taught Abraham how to lean on God’s mercy in prayer. God’s judgment against all the nations of the world also teaches us how to pray. We count on

God's mercy in Jesus Christ our LORD as we intercede for the world. When we see sin and iniquity increasing at an exponential pace, when we see the truth of God exchanged for a lie and natural relations exchanged for what is unnatural, we cry out to the LORD to lead our nations to repentance and renewed trust in our Triune God, who creates, redeems, and sanctifies us. In the midst of a culture of death, we pray for the righteousness of Christ that gives us life, knowing that the LORD desires that same life for all people, here in time and there in eternity. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.