

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 9 DECEMBER 2012 MORNING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 68:9

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm 89:1, 3

**Confession of faith:** Apostolic

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.  
And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, a holy universal Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting

**Amen.**

*After the reading of the Law we confess our guilt and pray for forgiveness and a new life before God with Psalm 103:1, 2, 3*

Law

Psalm: 103:1, 2, 3

**Prayer:**

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

**Amen**

Psalm 31:1, 17

**Scripture reading:** Jeremiah 1; Luke2; Ecclesiastes 12

**Scripture text:** Jeremiah 1:11

**"Jeremiah, what do you see?" And I said, "I see a branch of an almond tree."  
(Jeremiah 1:11)**

Jesus Christ is born to give us the eternal resurrection from death and the eternal re-creation and the eternal life – free! Look at Him who renders life – even when everything in our midst looks like death!

In the entire region of Small Asia, Syria and Mesopotamia the almond tree grows wild. In the vicinity of mount Sinai many of these trees grew in the desert.

- It is the first fruit tree blooming in Palestine. The almond tree flowers and blooms during January in Palestine. During the early part of the year it is covered in large hanging snow-white flowers.
- Even under difficult circumstances the tree still bore fruit – the fruit was a very precious article of trade.
- Therefore the tree is used as the symbol of man's obedience and Fruit of God.
- In the Old Testament this tree also is the symbol of God's fidelity.

What also is important is that we who speak other languages must note the meaning of the names for the almond tree in Hebrew, because should we do so then we realize that even just the mentioning of the name "almond tree" in Hebrew carried a very large symbolic value in the Jewish vocabulary of faith.

- The first name for the tree means to **be awake**.
  - The Hebrew name means that it is the first tree to awake from the winter-sleep. The meaning of the almond tree in the vision of Jeremiah is that the Lord is always awake about His chosen – also when they lay dead in their sins, like the dead fields in the winter-death around the blooming almond tree.
  - The tree is thus the symbol of awakening life: eventually symbolizing the resurrection from death under the powerful hand of the Lord.
- The second name for the tree is "**loez**", which is the original name of the village Bethel: **House of God**.

The Lord lets Jeremiah see two images.

- The one is the almond tree.
- The other is a boiling pot.

The Lord uses the almond tree as a teaching instrument for grace – indeed in front of Jeremiah's house stood an almond tree.

- Because the almond tree is the first to flower and bloom it is the symbol of fidelity: The Lord is awake about His chosen and He keeps to His Word.
- The image thus has the consolation in that God does not let His chosen become lost because He is with and over them in His glory.

Already early in His revelation the Lord uses the image of almond trees.

- When Moses received the command of making the large candle-stick with the seven stands the Lord already told him to make almond flowers and blooms to be fixed to the arms of the candle-stick.  
We read about this in Exodus 25:33, 34, 37:19,20.
- When the argument started about who the real high-priest of the Lord is, the Lord had the staff of Aaron (which was made of almond wood) blooming overnight. Herein the Lord revealed the continuation of His covenant and His calling to the people.
- In Ecclesiastes 12:5 the image of the almond tree in bloom is used as a contrast to the mourners in the street during death. The death is eventually replaced with the eternal life, because from the death of winter we bloom into eternal life:

**Also they are afraid of height, And of terrors in the way; When the almond tree blossoms, The grasshopper is a burden, And desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets.**

(Ecclesiastes 12:5)

The almond tree standing there in bloom is the sign of the eternal glory of God awaiting mankind upon his death.

The second vision Jeremiah sees is the boiling pot.

- This characterizes the contents of the Word of God that has to be ministered by Jeremiah.
- God's judgement and grace is just connected to each other.

In the passage we have read together the image is immediately released and reality takes over.

Contrasting matters describe it.

- Evil will come over all the inhabitants of the land. (V.14 –16). But the Lord is not unmerciful and cruel because He just goes over to punishment.
- Verse 16 motivates why all the miseries will arrive.
  - The faith of the children of God dwindled. They no longer believed.
  - Also it was not only just a matter of them not believing, they also worshipped idols, in other words they rejected the Lord in favor of something else they placed in His place. This is why the Lord punishes them so.

What is the connection between the almond tree and the boiling pot?

- The connection is that the Lord still has grace for these sinful people. He will punish them, but even in His punishment the grace still is accentuated.
- He even sends Jeremiah to minister against all their hatred and impatience – so large is the grace of God.

This is exactly the Christ-ministry:

- The winter-death surrounds Jeremiah. The miseries of the world lay exposed around us. But in the darkness of the night the heavens break open and in the brightest light the angels sing about our salvation! The flowers of the almond tree opened: the

image became reality! The Saviour is born for the people in which the Lord delights Himself

- The salvation grace the chosen – already in the judgement executed over them – experienced pointed towards Jesus Christ who would atone us to God.
- The almond branch is the sign that God is awake over us – so awake that He himself supplies salvation. So awake that He sends His Son to bear the punishment for our sins.

**For that the Lord Jesus comes to our world.**

- **Therefore He is born for broken people symbolized by a silly and cruel Herod and by poor shepherds and people carrying inside of them an expectation of an eternal King, like the wise men from the East.**
- **For people who, in the times of Jeremiah, had to be punished back into the faith.**

Jesus also does not remain in the realm of death. He arises from the death like the almond branch heavily blooming and covered snow-white whilst the rest of the field is still dead in the throws of the winter chill.

- What is important is that He is born amongst us, so that later He could die for us.
- Therewith by His cross death He lets us share in this eternal life He, since the beginning, has in Himself.
- The eternal life in the kingdom of God is drenched in the Triune God's glory like the almond branch is covered by an abundance of flowers.

What is the future event referred to hereby?

- The future of this text is that the battle over the believers will increase.
- The word will – as time marches on – stronger and stronger impress its winter miseries onto us.
- But together therewith will the blooming time of the Almond tree be stronger played out against this dreary background when the Lord Jesus, by His Second Coming, breaks open the full brightness of His glory over us.
- The Lord teaches us this in many places of the Bible.

But we must not go and suffocate ourselves in our knowledge of everything that is always bad and continually goes wrong.

- We must rejoice in the glory of the Almond branch that, indeed when everything is at its worst, lets its full glory bloom over us and take us up into this glory.
- The Lord Jesus, at His birth, had His saving grace already shine over us. That night the angels sang that the birth of the Child, laying in a manger, took place to the salvation of us in whom God has a pleasure. Jesus Christ saves us.

**For whom is the Lord Jesus born?**

For us.

- For people doing bad deeds and sometimes in their faith lose the track completely.

- For people whose insight and desires many times rather lead more to their undoing than serving to strengthen them in their worship.
- People whom in most cases of their worship and matters of faith are highly incapable.

Consider Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 1 the calling of the prophet is described.

- We read that he is a Benjaminite from Jude.
- His father, Hilkiah, was one of the priests at Anathoth.

Our first idea would be that Jeremiah must have been called as a prophet because his background was right, because seeing that his father was a priest, he would at least understand and know something about ministering.

- He was possibly somebody knowing everything about sin and justness and would know exactly how to handle such matters. This would be our reasoning.
- *But this is in fact not true. One matter stands out very clearly and that is that Jeremiah was not called due to the gifts he possessed, or due to his background.*

The day the Lord called Jeremiah the first thing the Lord did was to tell Jeremiah exactly where he fitted into His council.

- The Lord told him that He knew Jeremiah long before the Lord made Jeremiah in the womb of his mother.
- This is the first matter every person must keep in mind: the Lord creates you to exist – you do not come into existence due to the will of two people.

Further the Lord says that he sanctified Jeremiah even before he was born.

- The fact is that the gifts to execute his calling were bestowed upon Jeremiah during the process of his creation.

The arrival of the Lord Jesus into our world has a specific effect on those who accept Him as their Saviour: Faith in Him makes us capable of life! It is the effect of His arrival, resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit into us!

- The Lord makes you a pillar of strength (in the words of our text). You can carry a heavy weight and you will not break.
- You will be able to resist any attack, because the Lord makes your faith so that you cannot be broken down by a battering ram or thrown over.
- You are a bronze wall. A solid metal impervious against that type of onslaught.
- Every time the words of the Lord are like a refrain to our ears. The Almond branch blooms to our salvation!

Here are two matters standing out very strongly:

- The first is that the Lord literary enables us to do what He later in our lives asks from us.
- The second is that He continually stays with us and that he always supports us with His saving grace.
- Eventually the grace of God becomes a reality in the salvation when we are acquitted by the grace of Jesus Christ when facing God's throne of judgement.

- The perfect fulfillment certainly only arrives when Jesus Christ appears in the clouds.

When the Lord appears in godly white on the horizon and each of us bear our fruits in the light of His grace.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: 118:2

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen.**

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