

Scripture Reading:

Micah 4: "1 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, And shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the Word of Jehovah from Jerusalem. 3 He shall judge between many peoples, And rebuke strong nations afar off; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. 4 But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, And no one shall make them afraid; For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts has spoken. 5 For all people walk each in the name of his god, but we will walk in the name of Jehovah our God Forever and ever. 6 "In that day," says Jehovah, "I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; 7 I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation; So Jehovah will reign over them in Mount Zion From now on, even forever."

"Making Outcasts a Strong Nation"

This morning brings the third message in our series on covenant renewal worship:

- **We have come to the portion of the service we refer to as the consecration of God's people.**

Before we consider what it means for God's people to be consecrated, I want to remind us quickly about the flow of the worship service. This is something you will hear me say at times from the pulpit, especially if we have visitors, but it is good for us to consider just what happens each week, how all the elements of worship fit together and how they are informed by much of what we find in the Old Testament.

Put simply, we are called into God's presence and then confess our sins and know God's forgiveness: As Pastor Wilson reminds us, we should not enter God's house with dirty shoes. We are then changed, or consecrated by the Word of God as we sing His praises, read and hear His Word, and then present our gifts and prayers. After this God feeds and nourishes us as we commune at His Table and then we are ready to be sent forth, or commissioned to do the work He has called upon us to do.

- **I would encourage you to keep this flow in mind the next time you read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers or Deuteronomy!**

In the midst of the many details about all those sacrifices & ceremonies we see three major offerings when God's people gather together:

- **A sin offering which points to the death of Jesus, the great sacrifice that saves His people from their sins, where the focus is on the death of the animal.**
- **The burnt offerings, or ascension offerings where the animal is carefully rearranged by the sword of the priests & then ascends by fire as a sweet smelling savor before God.**
- **And finally, the peace offerings where the worshiper could partake of the offering they brought.**

This is why we read at Leviticus 9:22 "Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, & peace offerings.

This is what the Apostle Paul clearly had in mind when after spending 11 chapters telling us about our great salvation, he then opens chapter twelve with these challenging words:

Romans 12: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

- **We are no longer to sacrifice those animals, but rather we now present ourselves as the focus of God’s purposes in worship.**

The Apostle’s words tell us exactly what it means to be consecrated or changed here in the central portion of our worship:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

To be consecrated means more than just being holy or set apart:

- **It means being changed and prepared for service:**
- **Just as those animals were radically changed and prepared to be the sweet smelling smoke in the ascension offering to God.**

There the priest used a physical sword to rearrange their bodies in preparing those animals and then consumed them in the holy fire.

- **Today, the Holy Spirit, Who is often symbolized by fire, uses His more powerful sword on us: The Word of God!**

As the writer of Hebrews declares, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

So, the text that I selected from the Prophet Micah is intended to help us understand just how serious what God does with us at this point in worship really is: Reflecting on our morning text:

-- How many are expecting the nations of the earth to start hammering those swords into plows any time soon?

-- How many of you think wars will cease?

Those are tough things to believe and yet this is the promise God has given: There will be real, tangible, and practical affects as the Kingdom of Jesus fills the whole earth under the influence of God’s Spirit. So how is that going to happen? God is going to use all those outcasts, the sinners that He calls in and cleans up to do this work!

- **And part of what we need to understand is how difficult that task really is!**
- **God says that He will “make the lame a remnant, And the outcast a strong nation!**

For God to transform us from lame outcasts and rebels to faithful Saints is in some ways even tougher to imagine than those swords being pounded into plows.

However, if most of the people in two nations are converted and changed, one should be able to imagine a cessation of war between them.

Keep in mind what changes those animals in the O.T.: the knife & the fire...

- **Today when we come as living sacrifices God will consecrate us through His Word & the Spirit!**

With all of that in mind let's consider what is done during this time of consecration in the covenant renewal worship service.

The first thing we do after hearing the Gospel proclaimed, is to join with the hosts of heaven in singing the praises of our great God. In Revelation chapter five we are told that we sing a new song to the lamb: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe & language & people & nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

Next, we read a portion of Scripture in unison or responsively as we begin the process of being instructed by God's Word... But this is not just an academic class room like what we might find at a University or even a good Seminary. Here in the midst of God's renewal of His covenant, the Holy Spirit is going to use His Sword, the Word of God, to properly prepare us to be a sweet smelling savor before our Holy God and to serve in His Kingdom.

- **I guess this is the point this week where we must again ask if we REALLY believe that this is what is happening to us?**

IF we do, it will change how we sing, how we read or listen, how we pray and how we give!

- **We see all of these things during this time of consecration and we must always learn to be more and more serious about what is taking place!**

Some churches follow a lexicon of Biblical readings so all of the Bible is read over a three year period during the worship services. We have chosen to focus on key passages that are instructive to the Saints and critical in our battle with the world today: For example we read the Law of God and the account of Creation on a regular basis.

- **Then we sing a song of response & the minister reads the morning text and preaches the sermon.**

This is perhaps the easiest place for some to slip into thinking they are just spectators...

Nothing could be further from the truth IF we really do believe that the Holy Spirit is with us using the Word of God to reorder and change us! This is the practical portion of the service not because I include the appropriate applications in my sermon but because we believe that the Spirit uses all of the message to transform us, to consecrate us!

This is truly where we are filled with the Spirit, or slain in the Spirit or moved by the Spirit: Experiences many charismatic churches often try to achieve in other ways today.

It is also why the Word IS central: Not because everything points to the sermon, not because I got my three points, have a nice speaking voice or learned in seminary how to "move" people to make a decision.

- **Rather, this is where the Spirit does His most extensive work to prepare us, to consecrate us for God's service in this world.**

This is again an important place for the instruction of our children: Not only in terms of what they will hear and understand, but in their learning to be attentive and participating. It can be as simple as training children to keep their attention focused on the pastor during this time of instruction.

You will be amazed at how much even our young children will learn and we also try to keep them engaged with illustrations and/or questions they can understand...

- **And I often argue that this is important because it also teaches the adults some of those critical lessons as well!**

After the sermon we continue our worship with a song of response and then read a passage of Scripture together focused on the importance of tithing and giving. This is not something we focus on because God needs the money! Many churches downplay the offering not wanting to appear too materialistic and that removes a very practical and important part of our consecration.

- The giving of our tithe reminds us that ALL our increase comes from God's hand!

We are not giving because God or even the church has needs... Rather, we give so we understand how God blesses us with material things so that we can use them for the advance of His Kingdom!

There are two ditches to avoid here:

- No offering to avoid materialism
- High pressure offering for needs.

The same principles apply when we come to our time of prayer: We are not praying so that God will get the latest update on what is happening here at Church of the King or come to know our needs...

- We are praying because we are commanded to come before His throne boldly and learn to realize that the prayers of the Saints are a delight to God!

In the New Testament both giving and prayer are seen as extensions of the Old Testament sacrifices that pointed to the finished work of Jesus: Those sweet-smelling savors that go up before God like the smoke from those ascension offerings...

Phillipians 4:16 “ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. 18 Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.”

Revelation 8:3 “Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.”

- Those are powerful pictures!

Images that should remind us of the importance of our prayers and our giving! With both giving and praying, we again set the example for our children to follow:

- Do they see us as cheerful givers who are training them to do the same?
- Do they see us as faithful prayer warriors who are teaching them to be the same?
- Reminding them that we are all praying even in the Great Prayer!

So what does all of this mean? What are we teaching and passing along to the generations to come? I have made the case that this is the practical part of the service...

But how is it practical, what happens to us, what do we learn & how do we become properly equipped? Our readings from the Scriptures and listening to the sermon brings knowledge & wisdom, we are changed or transformed as the Spirit using His Sword: The Word of God!

Here we learn the right ideas & lessons about how we are to live as those who trust & obey, those who love Jesus & keep His commandments.

- It is difficult to keep them,
if we don't know what they are!

Tithes & offerings focus on our wealth, great or small, the practical stuff of life that is often ignored in 'spiritual' circles!

With the giving of our tithes & offerings in our time of consecration, we learn that God loves to bless His people and gives us the wealth and ability to serve in His Kingdom.

[not the wealth we think we need or want, but what is needed!]

And finally our time of prayer reminds us where our true source of power lies as the God who made heaven and earth receives and hears our prayers and our lives as a sweet smelling aroma!

Right worship gives us a right focus for all of life and reminds us of the great plans that our Great Covenant God has for His people...

As the Prophet Micah proclaimed: "'4 Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths.'"

Communion Meditation: Jerimiah 31:13-14

"Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, And the young men and the old, together; For I will turn their mourning to joy, Will comfort them,

And make them rejoice rather than sorrow.

I will satiate the soul of the priests with abundance, And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says Jehovah."