

The Third Sunday after Michaelmas (Trinity 21) – Pr. Faugstad sermon
2 Chronicles 32:1-23: “If God Himself Be for Me, I May a Host Defy.”
October 18/19, 2025 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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O LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth. Incline Your ear, O LORD, and hear; open Your eyes, O LORD, and see; and hear the words of those who oppose You, by which they mock You, the living God. O LORD our God, save us, please, from their hands, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You, O LORD, are God alone, and that You are the only Savior from sin, devil, and eternal death. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. (adapted from 2 Kings 19:15-16, 19)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is written in the thirty-second chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

After these things and [Hezekiah's] acts of faithfulness, Sennacherib king of Assyria came and invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself. And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and intended to fight against Jerusalem, he planned with his officers and his mighty men to stop the water of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the brook that flowed through the land, saying, “Why should the kings of Assyria come and find much water?” He set to work resolutely and built up all the wall that was broken down and raised towers upon it, and outside it he built another wall, and he strengthened the Millo in the city of David. He also made weapons and shields in abundance. And he set combat commanders over the people and gathered them together to him in the square at the gate of the city and [Hezekiah] spoke encouragingly to them, saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. / After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria, who was besieging Lachish with all his forces, sent his servants to Jerusalem to Hezekiah king of Judah and to all the people of Judah who were in Jerusalem, saying, “Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, ‘On what are you trusting, that you endure the siege in Jerusalem? Is not Hezekiah misleading you, that he may give you over to die by famine and by thirst, when he tells you, “The LORD our God will deliver us from the hand of the king of Assyria”? Has not this same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, “Before one altar you shall worship, and on it you shall burn your sacrifices”? Do you not know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands at all able to deliver their lands out of my hand? Who among all the gods of those nations that my fathers devoted to destruction was able to deliver his people from my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you from my hand? Now, therefore, do not let Hezekiah deceive you or mislead you in this fashion, and do not believe him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less

will your God deliver you out of my hand!” / And his servants said still more against the LORD God and against His servant Hezekiah. And he wrote letters to cast contempt on the LORD, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him, saying, “Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand.” And they shouted it with a loud voice in the language of Judah to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten and terrify them, in order that they might take the city. And they spoke of the God of Jerusalem as they spoke of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men’s hands. / Then Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, prayed because of this and cried to heaven. And the LORD sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty warriors and commanders and officers in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword. So the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib king of Assyria and from the hand of all his enemies, and He provided for them on every side. And many brought gifts to the LORD to Jerusalem and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations from that time onward. (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reigns “*from everlasting to everlasting*” (1Chr. 16:36) – not like “*the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men’s hands,*” dear fellow redeemed:

“If God Himself be for me, / I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me / My foes confounded fly.”
(*Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* #517, v. 1)

These are the words of the hymn we just sang, a hymn by the great 17th century Lutheran hymnwriter, Paul Gerhardt. The hymn begins with a conditional statement, “If God Himself be for me / (Then) I may a host defy.” First one thing has to happen – God must be for me – before I may defy a host, a great company, of spiritual enemies. But is it true that God is for me? Can I be sure of that?

There have been many times in life that we questioned if God is for us. Maybe we didn’t seem to fit in anywhere and felt all alone, and we wondered why God didn’t seem to notice or didn’t seem to care. We may have gotten in the middle of a fierce family disagreement, found ourselves in a financial crisis, or dealt with a serious health issue. Perhaps our job was causing great stress, or we lost someone we were very close to. “If God is for me,” we wondered, “why is He letting me experience so much pain and trouble?”

King Hezekiah may have dealt with similar doubts as he watched the great Assyrian army make its way toward Jerusalem. We heard last week how the northern kingdom of Israel was completely overcome by the Assyrians, and whatever Israelites survived were relocated to other places (2Ki. 18:9-12). Now King Sennacherib set his sights on Jerusalem.

After Sennacherib had conquered a number of fortified cities in Judah, Hezekiah tried the appeasement approach. In the parallel account to today’s reading in 2 Kings, Hezekiah told

Sennacherib, *"Whatever you impose on me I will bear"* (18:14). The Assyrian king demanded the payment of three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. To reach this amount, Hezekiah had to strip the gold from the temple doors and doorposts. He sent almost everything he had to the Assyrians. But it wasn't enough to appease King Sennacherib. The Assyrian army kept coming and camped outside the city.

The people of Jerusalem were not completely unprepared. The very location of the city made it difficult for enemies to overcome it. It was built on the top of Mount Zion, so any enemies had to go uphill to attack it. Besides that, Hezekiah built up the main wall of the city, added an extra wall outside it, and put up towers all along it. He diverted the water through an underground tunnel to the city, so their enemies could not cut off their water supply. He *"made weapons and shields in abundance."*

The odds still seemed very bad for Hezekiah and the people. The Assyrian army was 185,000 soldiers strong (19:35). The Assyrian king's top official mockingly offered Hezekiah 2,000 horses if he could find riders to sit on them (18:23). The same official speaking for Sennacherib also mocked the LORD: *"[F]or no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to deliver his people from my hand or from the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand!"* They put the same mockery in print in letters sent to Jerusalem: *"Like the gods of the nations of the lands who have not delivered their people from my hands, so the God of Hezekiah will not deliver His people from my hand."*

How would the LORD God respond to these insults? Would He respond at all? Was God for Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem or not? The answer to that question is not in what the LORD would do for them. What God will do in the future is entirely in His hands and done according to His wisdom. Whether or not God was for His people was answered by what He had already done for them.

He had brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He had given them the Promised Land of Canaan. Though they often rebelled against Him and served other gods, He patiently called them back. He sent faithful prophets to preach to them, and He replaced wicked kings with good ones. Besides all that, He continued to repeat the promise that He would send a Savior to redeem sinners. It was clear that the LORD loved His people and did not want them to be destroyed.

We need to answer the question, "Is God for me?" with this same perspective. We don't find the answer in what He will do for us, as though He needs to prove Himself to us, or how He will address my current problem or pain. We find the answer in what He has already done for us. Romans 8 makes the answer clear, starting at verse 31, *"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"* This is how we know that God is for us: He did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.

God is for you because the Son of God took on human flesh to save you. God is for you because Jesus perfectly kept the Law on your behalf. God is for you because He took every one of your sins to the cross where He paid for them with His blood. God is for you because He rose in triumph over death and the grave. God is for you because He keeps bringing you the

righteousness, forgiveness, and life that He won for you and gives them to you through His Word and Sacraments.

So when you are alone, when you are in the middle of a trial, when you are struggling, when you are under attack, when you feel like nothing will ever be right again, and you question if God is really for you—He is for you. He knows your trouble, and He promises that He will not leave you to fight through it on your own.

He may not address your trouble exactly the way you want or expect, but He will address it in the way that you need. He uses your suffering to build up your endurance in the faith, endurance to produce good character, and character to point you toward hope—the hope of eternal life in heaven, where all suffering, pain, and sorrow will be done away with (Rom. 5:3-4).

Knowing that God is for us makes us confident and bold. We are on the side of our Lord—the winning side. This gives value to all the work we do for Him and our neighbors. He is pleased with what we do. He loves us and has redeemed us from our sins to serve in His name. Unlike the unbelievers of the world, we don't just focus on ourselves and what we can get in this life. We focus on Him and the blessings He gives us through our service to our families, in our jobs, and in our communities.

As we carry out this work, we are also confident and bold in our prayers. Jesus says, “[W]hatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you” (Joh. 16:23). The model for this boldness is the Lord’s Prayer where we cheerfully demand from our heavenly Father what He has promised to give. We boldly pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and “Forgive us our trespasses.” “I am for you,” He says, “so make your request. I am listening; tell Me your concerns.”

Hezekiah showed this same confidence and boldness (at least outwardly) as the Assyrian army came marching over the hills toward Jerusalem. He encouraged the people in their work saying, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.”

From an outsider’s view, victory seemed impossible for Jerusalem just as it often seems impossible for us. We can feel like we are surrounded by fierce enemies, outnumbered, like sitting ducks. How can my family survive the attacks of the devil and the world? How can the Church survive? Do I have enough faith to be saved? It does us no good to look inside ourselves, to trust in our own efforts, our own arms of flesh. We trust in the LORD and His powerful Word. He hasn’t lost yet, and He isn’t about to.

Hezekiah prayed fervently to the LORD, and the LORD heard His prayers (2Ki. 19:6,20). Despite all appearances, despite any logical person’s expectations, Assyria did not destroy Jerusalem. Just when the army was preparing to attack, “the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (v. 35). His army destroyed, King Sennacherib “returned with shame of face to his own land.” Then our reading tells us that “when he came into the house of his god, some of his own sons struck him down there with the sword.” Not only were

Sennacherib's gods unable to overcome the people of Jerusalem; they were unable to save him from the scheming hands of his own sons.

The Assyrians messed with the wrong god when they mocked the God of Judah. This was the true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of David and Hezekiah. This is our God, too, the Triune God—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He cannot be defeated. No matter how much the devil and demons and the powerful kingdoms of the world throw at Him or His people, His holy Church endures. Jesus said that *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”* (Mat. 16:18).

We stand firm by the power of His Word, His Word that declares us right with Him, justified, children and heirs of His kingdom. Since He is for us, we are most certainly not alone. We are not outnumbered. We are not without hope.

If God Himself be for me, / I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me / My foes confounded fly.
If Christ, the Head, befriend me, / If God be my support,
The mischief they intend me / Shall quickly come to naught. (ELH #517, v. 1)

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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