

Galatians 4:4-7

First Sunday after Christmas (Series B)

Lessons for the Day: Isaiah 61:10–62:3; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Operation: Redemption

December 31, 2017

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.” (Galatians 4:4–7, ESV)

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

On June 6, 1944, the day we know as D-Day, Allied forces undertook an invasion across the English Channel, codenamed Operation Overlord, which would result in the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi Germany’s control. Operation Overlord required months of extensive planning. Prior to D-Day, the Allies conducted a large-scale deception campaign designed to mislead the Germans about the intended invasion target. The planning paid off, and the battle of Normandy was considered the beginning of the end of war in Europe.

In contrast, Operation Market Garden failed to achieve its objectives. Designed to take control of bridges and supply lines, it fell short of its goal, when the Allies failed to capture the crucial Arnhem bridge.

We have become far too familiar with the idea of military operations involving a rather well-defined objective. In Operation Desert Storm, the object was to get the Iraqi military out of Saudi Arabia—and to deal a blow to terrorist activities allowed by Saddam Hussein. Operation Neptune Spear was the plan to capture or kill Osama bin Laden. All these efforts, and countless others through the ages, have met with varying degrees of success, but have never resulted in any significant and lasting change on our world.

While the precise date is unknown, we do know that approximately 2,000 years ago, God mounted an operation that had been in the planning stages since the creation of the world. The goal of this campaign was nothing less than the destruction of the devil and the redemption of the whole of sinful mankind. All that we have celebrated, and continue to celebrate in these Christmas days are a testimony to the success and power of God’s plans and purpose, which unfold for us in Operation Redemption, as God comes to save and redeem His people and to bring us the blessings of life as His beloved children.

With greater care and preparation than that of the best military strategists in history, our God has worked for the redemption of His people. It is a plan that has its beginnings in His love for us that goes back even before the creation of the world. It is a plan that becomes necessary after creation, and after Adam and Eve are tempted by the devil to follow their own will and desires rather than to listen to God’s plan for them. But even when Adam and Eve disobey Him, God makes a promise: the day is coming when I will destroy the plans and purposes of the devil. I will destroy the power of sin to condemn and to kill. I will bring life and victory for all who trust in me.

If ever there was a military campaign that was necessary, this is it. There is no unanimous consensus on the rightness of military action following the events of 9/11—or regarding any other military action in history. Yet most people would feel that force was justified in the face of an evil that so callously destroyed 3,000 lives. We understand the need for military action when 6 million Jews were being killed through the Holocaust. We perceive the need for military action when there are those who are suffering because of the cruelty of others. On that basis, there is no greater need than the campaign God has planned. The sheer number of those affected by sin and the devil is staggering: left unchecked, sin will destroy every man, woman and child who ever lived, who is alive today, or who ever will live in this world. There is not one person—not you, not me, not the greatest of saints in this world—who is able to escape the horrible consequences of sin. What the Scripture says so simply: *“The soul who sins shall die”* (Ezekiel 18:20, ESV) is a terrible reality for us, for we are sinners. We sin. That means we will die—not just physically, but we will also suffer the terrors

of death in the ongoing, unending torment of hell.

Thankfully, this sad reality of our lives is totally unacceptable to the God who created the world and who made man in His image. He determined to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. He would save us from sin, death and hell. And so He planned and prepared Operation Redemption. The goal: to destroy the works of devil, and to free lost and erring sinners, and to give them life as His beloved children.

Perhaps you, like others, have wondered why God waited so long to send His Son as our redeemer. In our text, St. Paul sums up God's great plan in just a few words: ***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*** With all the planning that went into D-Day's invasion of Normandy, the most important factor was timing. The time had to be right. The weather had to be right. Everything had to be coordinated, or it would all fall apart. The same was true for God's eternal plan. Paul reminds us that it all happened when the time was right, when everything was ready and could not fail.

Again and again, God reveals His plan to us in the Scriptures. All of the prophecies that point to the work of the Messiah are glimpses into Operation Redemption. Every detail; every possible counter-attack from the devil was considered. This past week, we observed the feast of the Holy Innocents, and remember how the devil used Herod to try to destroy the infant Jesus. But God is always one step ahead of the devil. An angel warns Joseph to take the child to Egypt, where he will be safe. God leaves nothing to chance. No detail, no matter how small or insignificant is overlooked. God has also thought about every response that can come from the enemy, and is prepared for them. Every contingency is considered.

The events that we celebrate right now assure us that God's plan has come to fruition. Christ was born to save us. He came to fight for us—and to win us for God. We are told: ***“Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”*** (Hebrews 2:14–15, ESV) The battle was not without casualty. In order to carry out this plan, the sinless Son of God would have to give His holy life in our place. He would suffer the punishment we deserve and die for us. But that was still not the end. When we confess in the Nicene Creed, “On the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures”, we recall the final part of that plan. That phrase doesn't mean that, at least the Scriptures say that Jesus rose from the dead. It reminds us that the Scriptures promised and prophesied this part of God's plan, too.

In accordance with His all perfect, holy and knowledgeable will, God has worked for your rescue. Operation Redemption was God's plan for your salvation. His purpose is that we might receive the full rights and blessings of children in His family. As He rescues us from our slavery to sin and the devil, He makes it possible for us to live to His glory. He brings joy and blessing in all of the day to day things of this world, as we live in the freedom He gives us, and as we live to honour Him with our hearts and lives. He promises: ***“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*** (Jeremiah 29:11, ESV) We can be sure that He, who has worked and planned our redemption so diligently will also show that same concern in the simpler things of our lives. There is no detail, no event, no situation in our lives that has escaped His plans. When all is said and done we still have what He has promised us: the full blessings and benefits of being His children, who call Him ***“Abba! Father!”***

Even the best laid plans of this world often fail, for human wisdom cannot begin to consider every possible alternative, complication or counter-strike. But God, whose wisdom, timing and actions are perfect, is able to execute His plans perfectly. As Corrie Ten Boom once said: God has no problems—only plans. In His time, that plan was carried out for us. Christ came and was born to save us. That baby would grow to be the One who would be nailed to a cross for us, but would cry from the cross: ***“It is finished”*** (John 19:30, ESV), and thereby assure us that the victory is ours. Three days later, an angel would announce to the women at the tomb that Operation Redemption was a total success—***“He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.”*** (Matthew 28:6, ESV) Like Simeon and Anna, we have seen the salvation our God has accomplished. What a joy that brings us this day and always! Amen.

