

*The First Sunday in Advent*

December 2, 2012

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Genesis 19:15-17, 23-29

*With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.” When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them. As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”... By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land. But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD. He looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.*

Have you ever heard people say that we are living in a new Sodom and Gomorrah? I’ve even heard comments that things are worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. Has there been a time when you looked at this world around you and felt this way? I have some headlines from this last week that I didn’t even have to look for because they appeared on the home page of my email account. Here is a sample. *Couple arrested for beating and burning little boy. Fatal shooting over music. Raped hotel maid looks to settle. Widower of woman denied abortion to sue. Million dollar smash-n-grab caught on video.* There are perhaps even some other headlines that would have made some people in Sodom and Gomorrah blush. As we look at what happened in those cities, and as we look at the world in which we are living today, we would do well to offer up this prayer: **Lord, in Mercy, Deliver us! (1) from evil (2) from destruction.**

As we review the account of Sodom and Gomorrah, as we view our world, we begin to understand why our Lord Jesus taught us to pray: **But deliver us from evil.** Recall how the Lord had come to Abraham to warn him that the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah was so great and their sins so grievous that he was about to destroy these cities. Why tell Abraham? Because God in His grace chose Abraham and made special promises to Abraham, and Abraham had a nephew he cared about living in those cities. We see Abraham’s concern because he prays to God asking that God spare the cities if there are 50 righteous, 50 believers there. When the Lord grants this request Abraham prays boldly again and again asking for the Lord not to sweep away the righteous with the wicked but to spare the city for 45 righteous, then for 40, 30, 20, and finally for the sake of 10 believers. The Lord answered: **“For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”**

But, as we soon find out, there are not even ten. Still, the Lord in His mercy goes above and beyond what He had promised to Abraham. He sends two angels in the form

of men to Sodom. They come to rescue Lot and his family. Do you remember the ugly & disturbing details of their short visit in this city? They meet Lot at the city gate and Lot insists they do not spend the night at the city square but instead come stay with him. Lot knew how evil things were in the city. Lot was right because that night all the men, both young and old, from every part of Sodom come knocking at the door and ask Lot to bring out the two men so that they could have, how should I say it, relations with them. When Lot refuses and even offers a just as sinful solution in place of their homosexual desires, the men move forward to break down the door. Then the angels pull Lot back inside and strike the men with blindness so they could not find the door. Then they reveal to Lot the reason they have come. They tell him to warn any family he has that they need to flee because the cities are going to be destroyed. Yet, when Lot tells his sons-in-law they ignore him because they think he is joking.

So ***“with the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.” When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD was merciful to them.”*** You sense the urgency in these words. It is time to leave and leave now! They need to hurry and get out of there. There is no time for hesitation and so the angels actually grab Lot and his family by their hands and lead them safely out of the city. The Lord and the Lord alone is responsible for this great rescue! Indeed, the Lord was merciful to them. He certainly delivered them from evil.

You would think that Lot and his family would have rejoiced over being delivered from such wicked and evil cities. This is what makes Lot for me one of the most difficult people in the Bible to figure out. Peter writes about Lot being a ***“righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of the lawless men”*** living in Sodom and Gomorrah. Yet, his actions throughout are puzzling. He seemed to be comfortable with his life in Sodom. He showed actions throughout that were anything but pure. He hesitated to leave even when the Lord’s angels told them to hurry. When the Lord tells them to flee to the mountains Lot instead asks if they can head into the city of Zoar. Lot did not seem all that eager to be delivered from evil. And then there is Lot’s wife. Her story is well known, and her body embalmed in salt stood as a grim reminder of the terrible price all will pay who cannot tear their hearts loose from the joys and toys this earthly life offers. Centuries later Jesus warned his disciples about earthly-mindedness and added: ***“Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17).***

Isn’t there a tremendous warning for us in this account? Lot and his family were greatly influenced by the evils around them. We too need to heed Scriptures many warnings about being influenced by the world around us and how bad company corrupts good character. Think of all the sinful ideals and the worldview our children are facing today. Think of the challenges just when it comes to God’s Sixth Commandment alone. Living together apart from marriage, having multiple partners, open homosexuality and lesbianism are all things seen as being a good and normal way of life. In politics now and on T.V. shows we are bombarded with these things from all angles. For example, two shows I’ve heard about that promote such sinful lifestyles are even called *Modern Family* and *The New Normal*. We are definitely living in an age where the new normal is to trample all over God’s Word and Will that only one man and one woman enjoy such blessings together in marriage.

Yes, our prayer for our children and ourselves needs to be a frequent and urgent one: *Lord, in mercy, deliver us from evil!* And dear friends I am not just talking about from the evil which is out there – in this world. I am also talking about the evil which is right here – in the hearts of every one of us. For it is also out of our hearts which, as Jesus says, come: ***“evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”*** (Matthew 15) Our hearts are far too often tied up with the pleasures of this world instead of on treasures in heaven. Like Lot we hesitate with letting go of sinful things. We too often turn our heads back to the things of this world instead of fixing our eyes on Christ and His Word. Yes, we need the Lord to deliver us in His mercy. We desperately need God’s Word to be an even brighter lamp to our feet and light for our path.

This morning we are reminded of the dreadful consequences of living for the world and losing Christ. We see where wickedness and evil and sinful living ends up – in destruction. God’s judgment is coming. We have a graphic picture of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses writes: ***“Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.”*** God sent fire (burning sulfur) from heaven and turned these cities upside down. When the first two atomic bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, there were survivors. Not here in Sodom or Gomorrah. Imagine what Abraham saw the next morning as he looked out and saw the dense smoke rising from the land looking like smoke from a furnace.

Sodom and Gomorrah give us a picture of what the final Judgment will be like for all unbelievers. No one will escape God’s Judgment. All who ignore God’s Word will stand before Him and all who reject God’s Will stand to face eternal destruction. In fact, Jesus told His disciples as He sent them out with His Word: ***“tell them, ‘The kingdom of God is near you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”*** (Luke 10). Peter writes: God ***“condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly.”*** (2 Peter 2) Since we understand Judgment Day is coming and the eternal fires of hell will be far worse than the smoking furnace which was left of these wicked cities, how can our prayer not be: *Lord, in mercy, deliver us from destruction?*

It is interesting to note the name of God used to bring about the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Did you catch it? It came from the LORD out of the heavens. It came from the God of free and faithful love, the God who keeps all of His promises, for that is what this name emphasizes. The emphasis here is on the mercy God showed toward Lot. He rescued Lot from evil. He saved Lot from destruction. Dear friends, isn’t this exactly what the Lord has also done for us? He did so by keeping His promises to Abraham. The Advent season is all about getting ready once again to see how God kept His most important promise. He sent not angels but His own Son to rescue us. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*** (John 3).

Jesus didn't come to destroy this evil world but instead came into the darkness of it to save us from it. He came to suffer at the hands of wicked and evil men. He came to be tortured and killed. He came to die on a cross. But Jesus did it to provide the holiness we need and to take away the sins we can't have – not if we want to live with God. When Jesus died and rose again on the third day God announced we have been rescued from eternal destruction. In Christ the Lord has had mercy on us. He has delivered us not just from evil but also from eternal destruction.

So what does this mean for us now as we still live in this sinful world? What does this mean for us as we now wait for God's final Day of Judgment which is the Day of deliverance for God's people? It means we keep praying. It means we keep listening to His Word. It means we ask God to help us so that instead of the world influencing us with it's sinful ideals we may help them by spreading the Gospel, by speaking the truth to all in love, by asking them to join us in this prayer: ***“Lord, in Mercy, Deliver us!”***  
Amen.