

Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60

It's an amazing thing that down in Louisiana rainwater is about the last thing they want there, but across the way in Texas they're begging for it. They haven't had a drought this bad in over fifty years. In Louisiana they opened the gates to the Morganza Spillway sending the floodwaters rushing down the Mississippi away from the cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In Texas even floodwaters would be a welcome sight; the grass there is so dry it crunches when you walk on it.

It's just as amazing to witness such extremes as these in the Book of Acts. Today we see Louisiana in our text in Acts 7. But a few Sundays ago we saw Texas in Acts chapter two. Let me explain. In Acts 2 Peter was proclaiming Christ Jesus to all the people gathered in Jerusalem. And the people gathered were like the State of Texas. God's Law cut them to the heart. They had crucified the Lord Jesus and they were desperate for relief. "What shall we do?" they cried. And Peter opened his mouth and poured out a flood of words upon them--words of forgiveness in Christ, words pointing them to the waters of Baptism, words which those people eagerly received; they welcomed them like dry ground welcoming a flood of water rushing toward it.

But now today in Acts 7 we see the State of Louisiana. Stephen opened his mouth and poured forth upon the people the same flood of water which Peter had spoken before. But these people were not like Texas welcoming such words. They were like Louisiana. They hated Stephen's words. They did not want them. They opened the spillway to send his words away from them. They covered their ears with their hands so that the flood of words being spoken by the mouth of Stephen would not come to them. And they cut off the floodwaters at their source. They rushed at Stephen, cast him out of the city, and threw stones at him until he was dead.

Today in our country people are wondering why a place like Texas can be so much in need of water, while a place like Louisiana only wants to get rid of it. Yet, a more important question by far is why people can act so much like Louisiana--wanting nothing to do with the Word of Christ Jesus, while there are so many who are like Texas--desperate to hear the good news of the Savior.

What about you? Are you more like Texas, or more like Louisiana? Do you hunger and thirst for the Word of God? Do you regularly desire His Sacrament of the Lord's Supper? Do you cherish your Baptism? And is His Word of Forgiveness in Christ like soothing water to your parched and sinful heart? I hope and pray that this is you, and that you do not resemble the State of Louisiana--wanting only for the Worship Service to end, even covering your ears to God's words given here--not physically, but by dwelling on other things, or by staying away from His preaching as often as possible.

This is how the people Stephen preached to behaved. They claimed to be God's people, yet they wanted nothing to do with the preaching of Jesus. But that did not stop Stephen. He fearlessly proclaimed Christ knowing that he was hated by his hearers, knowing that his life was in peril. And as Stephen lay dying, stones being hurled at him by his own congregation of hearers, he did not call down curses upon them; he became Christ to these people asking God to forgive them.

It would be tempting at this time for each one of us to picture in our mind those other people who resemble Louisiana...friends of ours, neighbors, even some within our family. Rather than do that, however, it would be better for each one of us to consider, with remorse, how the State of Louisiana lives within our own heart. How we--you and I--dam up our ears to the word God speaks to us. How we even, at times, become angry when God's Law touches a nerve within us. How we turn away

from receiving the Lord's Supper, turn away from the preaching of Christ because we think we have enough of our Savior already.

I see Texas here in this congregation. I see people thirsty for the Word of Christ. But I also see, within me and also within all of you, Louisiana lurking, beckoning us to turn away from God's Word and Sacraments. Let us repent for being Louisiana. Let us repent for desiring everything in life except the Word of Christ. Let us repent for thinking we're Christian enough--that we don't need much more of Jesus in our heart and life.

And pray for your pastor that he keeps the floodwaters coming to you whether you act like Texas or like Louisiana. Because no matter who is sitting here in the pew--Texas or Louisiana--the Word of God is for all of you. Repenting of your sins, it is for your ears to hear this good news that God forgives you. The very Man your sinfulness sent to the cross, from the cross prayed for you, just as Stephen prayed. But God's ears are not like those who stoned Stephen. God does not cover His ears to the cry of His Son. God does not open the spillway to send Jesus' prayer away from Him. God listens. He hears His Son pray for you. "Father, forgive them," He prays. And He does. Even if you have been living like Louisiana; even if you have been keeping Jesus away from your ears and life, God forgives you. Even if you do not think that God could ever forgive such a one as you, the truth is that Jesus died for you; you are forgiven.

Now how do we, you and I, stay like Texas, and not become like Louisiana? For to live like Louisiana is to keep Him who is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life away from us. To live like Louisiana is, in the end, to perish, for no one comes to the Father in heaven except through Jesus. To be like Texas; to live with the constant desire for Christ--which is simply put to live with faith--our wishing it cannot make it happen. It is the work of God alone. By His mercy through the power of His Word He keeps us thirsting for our Savior. He keeps us coming to the place where His Word is heard. He keeps us coming to His Communion Table. The less we are in God's Word, the less we desire Christ. The more we are in the Word, the more we see our sins and how great they are, and the more we desire His forgiveness, His Word in Christ.

To live like Texas is no big secret. Live in the Word. It is those who do not live in God's Word and so do not see the awfulness of their disobedience toward God who become like Louisiana; who care little or nothing for Jesus. But when God's Law cuts you to the heart again and again, and you live, therefore, with a constant desire for Christ, then you are like Texas. And then you will keep coming here--here where the floodwaters always rush toward you, here where Christ is given freely and in full measure, here where you, no matter who you are, always have a welcoming Savior, a Savior who forgives. Amen.