

The grace, mercy, and peace of God be yours in the name of ✠ Jesus. Amen. The title for today’s sermon is “*Calling all nations!*” and is based on the Old Testament reading, Isaiah chapter 66. Let us pray Amen.

Calling all nations! Calling every nation, every tribe, absolutely everybody! This is the call and the purpose of God's holy word, which He has entrusted to His church, to call all people to Himself. What an amazing call and privilege. You are called to proclaim the excellencies of God and to declare His glory. You, as a baptized child of God, have been given God’s most excellent Word to share with your family, friends, neighbours, everybody around you so through their hearing of God’s Word some would be saved from the eternal condemnation they, and you, rightly deserve for sinning. What an opportunity, through your words and actions people can be saved from the eternal torment in the fires of hell!

We are know there is a heaven and there is a hell. Scripture is very clear on both. Scripture is also very clear on the fact that it is only “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” *Thereby* ¹⁰ “we are *God’s* workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,” *which includes calling all nations and telling them about Christ*, “which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”(Eph 2:8-10)

This is exactly what we do! Right? Every opportunity you and I have, we declare the glory of God to those who need to hear it, even when it might be a little socially awkward, ... or do we? Do we really take the opportunities God places in our laps, those He prepared beforehand, or do we shy away, either ashamed Christ or uncomfortable with what others might think of us?

To quote Penn Jillette, an avowed atheist, he says “I don’t respect people who don’t proselytize. If you believe that there is a heaven or hell, or that people could be going to hell, or not get eternal life, and you think it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward ... how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?” He then gives the example of if you saw a truck barreling down on someone, and you knew they were going to get run over by it, but they didn’t believe in the truck, wouldn’t you do everything in your power, including tackling them, to save them? Yet getting hit and killed by a truck is nothing compared to an eternity in hell.

And yet, how often do we stand idly by watching others condemn themselves to hell and say and do nothing about the truck of hell barreling down on them?

Fortunately, we hear in today’s Old Testament reading how God knows our works and our thoughts. Or is it really fortunate. God knows all your works and your thoughts. Not just your good ones and God pleasing ones, but all of them. He knows when we do good and He knows when we fail horribly. To put God’s words in context here, He is talking to those who were not faithful to God, the ones who did not fear or trust Him, the ones who put on a good show but who refused to repent or turn away from their sinfulness.

So God clearly tells them the time is coming when He is going to gather all nations and they will see His glory. God is talking about Judgment Day, the day when Christ will come and

judge all people and everyone will see His full glory. For those who believe and trust in Christ alone for their salvation, they will be saved, but for the rest, they have already condemned themselves to hell for failing to trust in the “only name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”(Acts 4:12)

Yet, before Christ returns, including today, God continues to call all nations to repentance and faith through the proclamation of the Gospel by His church. This responsibility rests not just with the pastors or evangelism committees, but with every member of the church, including each of you. This though can be overwhelming and cause great anxiety and fear.

Here is where we fail miserably. It is here, in the uninhibited proclamation of God’s Word and grace to the world around us that, if we are honest about it, we fail horribly. At times we shine a little, but in the grand picture of things we don’t come close to adding up.

Yet this is exactly where we go wrong. It is not all about you and I, it never has been. It has always been, and continues to be all about Christ. When we look at what God expects us to do and then forget about Christ and His work of salvation and the continued work of the Holy Spirit, we put ourselves back under the law and condemnation. When we remove Christ from the equation and deny the Holy Spirit and His work to bring people to faith through God’s Word and Sacrament we are lost.

It is exactly because we could not save ourselves, let alone anyone else that God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh. God didn’t send Him to be an example to follow, Christ came to save you. Jesus came and died for our unfaithfulness. Jesus poured out His blood to cover our sin and shortcomings. He also promised to send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, and to work through His gifts to the Church.

God gives us a gift and a sign: He gives us His Word and Sacraments. God continues to work through His Means of Grace to call all nations, to proclaim the forgiveness of sins earned by Christ, and to strengthen faith and trust in our only Saviour. This Good News of salvation and forgiveness in Christ has been proclaimed to all nations since Christ’s resurrection and it continues to be proclaimed. This is the call which you received when you first heard God’s Word and it is the call which continues to go out.

The result is those who have heard are also declaring God’s glory. This proclamation is not a demand of the Law but a blessing from the Gospel. The result is, together we declare the victory of Christ over sin, death, and the devil we received in Baptism and the faith which continues to be strengthened through the hearing of God’s Word and receiving the Lord’s Supper. This is not a select group, but people from all nations through whom the Holy Spirit chooses to work through. This declaration of God’s grace stems from the fact that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”(John 1:14)

God continues to call all nations. For those in whom faith is planted, God says they will bring all your brothers as an offering to the Lord. As in the beginning of the Book of Isaiah, “³many peoples shall come, and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.”(Isaiah, 2:3) Because they hear, people look to God. Isaiah talks about going up to Zion

to the temple—where God promised to meet His people. But we know we no longer need to climb Mt. Zion because the temple is now embodied in the Messiah, who dwells in the midst of His church.

Instead of having to search for God, He clearly reveals where He always is: in His Word and Sacrament, and where they are faithfully proclaimed and administered. We don't have to search them out, instead God freely comes to us.

As a result the priesthood is no longer only by birthright, as it was with the Levites. Now in Christ, the mediating services of the tribe of Levi is no longer needed. All of God's people are consecrated to offer themselves as living sacrifices, as Paul describes in Romans 12, and are authorized to teach all nations the way of salvation. We have the privilege to share this gift of eternal life with the world. Jesus instructed the disciple to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”(Matt 28:19) Share My Word to call all nations and lead them to My Sacraments.

You have this freedom because “you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”(1 Peter 2:9)

So as Isaiah looks ahead to the day when Christ will return in glory he sees how the crown of the new creation is God's restored people in Christ. For the servants of the Lord, life goes on eternally in the presence of the Lord and all share in a part of His glory. Sabbath to Sabbath: after Christ's return all time will be holy because we will be with God.

Instead of living in fear of condemnation, rejoice in your salvation. You are a member of the church: you are part of God's royal priesthood and you have the freedom and privilege to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Through water and His Word, in Baptism, He delivered you out of the darkness of this sinful world, forgives you all your sins, and declares you as part of God's chosen people, part of His holy nation, the holy Christian church. God continues to strengthen your faith and trust in Him by the working of the Holy Spirit through His Word and Sacrament. In the Lord's Supper Christ physically and spiritually binds Himself to you and assures you your sins are forgiven with His very own body and blood. You don't have to search for Him because He clearly tells you where He is; “For where two or three are gathered in my name,” *and around My Word and Sacrament*, “there am I among them.”(Matt 18:20) The best part is it isn't your words or your actions which saves, it is God working through His words which leads people to faith and salvation.

God is calling all nations, including each and every one of you, your families, your friends, your neighbours. God desires everyone to be saved and that is why He sent His only Son Christ Jesus into our world to die for all people. Together we have the liberty and privilege to share the Good News of Christ with a dying world. Rejoice and declare God's glory to the nations. Amen.

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