

Dear fellow baptized, grace, mercy, and peace be your in Christ Jesus. The title for today’s sermon is “Preach the Word! Hear the Word!” and comes from the Epistle lesson, 2 Timothy. Let us pray... Amen.

Years ago, I saw a cartoon. It was one of those three frame ones often found in the newspaper. The first panel showed a rough-looking guy who was walking through the streets of Sodom and Gomorrah. He carried a sign that read, “Repent! The end is near.” The second panel showed the man being asked, “Why do you carry that sign? You’ve been carrying it for twenty years, and it hasn’t made any difference.” The third, and final, panel showed the sign-carrier’s reply. He said, “For the first nineteen years, I carried the sign in hopes that I would change them; now I carry it in hopes they won’t change me.”

I kind of chuckled the first time I read it thinking about a guy walking through a hostile town while holding a sign calling for repentance, yet we also heard of this same thing happening when Jonah went to Ninevah. Yet, on reflecting further on it, this is what we as Christians are called to do to a lost and condemned world. Now maybe not while holding a sign, but in word and deed to proclaim and share God’s Word. This is what the church, and all its members are call, commissioned, and sent to do.

This is also LWML Canada Sunday, and after the service some of the ladies are going to come up and let you know a little more about how God has and continues to use them in sharing His Word and promise with a perishing world. The LWMLC is one important piece of God’s Mission to reach out and lead unbelievers to repentance and baptism, but they are not alone. They are part of God’s mission as He tries to work through all baptized believers to lead more to hear His Word on a regular basis.

But what exactly are we called to do. Jesus fortunately gave some parameters to His disciples at the end of the Gospel of Matthew in regards to what they were to do. Jesus told them, and thereby us also, **“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.”**(Matthew 28:19-20)

You are not alone because Christ is with you so, Go! Baptize! Teach my Word to all nations about so they know their Saviour. Go, proclaim My Word and give them the gift of new life, as they are reborn of water and the Word. Then, as one feeds an infant, continue to regularly feed these new born children of God with His Word to continue to build and strengthen their faith and trust in Christ. Paul talks about this in today’s Epistle reading as he encourages Timothy to **“...continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”**(2 Tim 3:14-15) Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed. Know from where it came, who, specifically who were the ones who shared it to you, and know the gift attached to this proclamation; Salvation through faith in Christ.

You have seen this happen. You saw it this very morning as God took a lost and condemned child, drown him in the waters of baptism, killed him, and then God brought him back to life, God breathed new life in him new life in Christ. The good news is this was not symbolic, because if that child’s death and rebirth in Holy baptism was only symbolic, then the salvation he was given would also only be symbolic. But in Holy Baptism, Beckham, just as happened to you and I in our baptism, we died to sin,

we were killed, and were brought back to new life in Christ. He, along with all of us, was delivered from the condemnation of sin, from the power of the devil, and freed from the eternal death and separation from God, what he and each of us rightly and justly deserve.

But this gift is not only a one time thing, it is not just something which happened to us many years ago at the font, but it is what God continues to do to us every time we come into His house, hear His Word, and receive His Sacrament.

And this is what we are to proclaim, not ourselves: Christ! At the end of the Gospel of Luke Jesus reminds the disciples, “**Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,**”⁴⁷ **and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.**”⁴⁸ **You are witnesses of these things.**”⁴⁹ **And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you.”** Jesus final words in the Gospel of Luke point us straight to repentance and the forgiveness of sins received only through faith in Christ. Jesus sent His disciples out into all the world to preach and proclaim this message.

And the message is clear; Preach Christ and Him crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins. It is at the cross where our sins were forgiven and our relationship with God restored. It is the blood of Jesus poured out on the cross, from His head, hands, feet, side, and back that covers and forgives all our sins. It may seem too easy or narrow a focus, but this is the message of salvation. It points most clearly to who God is and what He has done and what He continues to do.

For this reason the church has preached this message for the last 2000 years is because it is salvation, it crucifies the hearer, creates believers, it breathes new life into us and makes them wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

But can we really trust what God’s Word in Scripture says.

Here Paul is beautifully clear; “**All Scripture is breathed out by God...**”, all Scripture is inspired by God Himself. It may have been a human hand which did the physical penmanship on the page, but it was the Holy Spirit who worked through that person. As such we have been given a wonderful gift, we know Who God is, who know what Christ has done for us. The reason we trust the words as recorded in the Bible is because it is God's Word. As such we are commanded with grave threats to not add or subtract anything. The final verse of the Book of Revelation are frighteningly clear: “**I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book,**”¹⁹ **and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.**”²⁰ **He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.”**

Amen.”(Revelation 22:18-20a) Jesus is coming back. Jesus return is not some metaphor, allegory, or symbolism of something else. He is returning. Paul says the same thing in today’s reading; “**I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom...**”(4:1)

Jesus is coming back. He is coming back soon. When He does return, then will be the Resurrection when all those asleep in the ground will be resurrected back to new life. Then also will be the Final Judgment. Everyone before the throne of God: those with faith will be given eternal life; those without

faith will be judged for each and everyone one of their sins, they will be found guilty, and they will be sentenced with what they deserve for their sins to eternal damnation, eternal suffering, eternal separation from God in the fires of hell. There is no third option for those nice, kind, generous, and loving people who don't believe. It is either heaven or hell. For those who do not believe, no matter how nice, kind, and generous they are, their works will not save them! Their works will only condemn them!

Now people are sometimes fooled by sweet words spoken by a forked tongue. Because of itching ears, some are convinced into thinking that they have a choice in where they spend eternity. God's breathed out Word is horrifyingly clear. You cannot choose heaven. You cannot choose Christ. You cannot choose to be saved. You cannot choose to be forgiven. You cannot choose to be a child of God!

In spiritual matters, God's word is absolutely clear: your only choice is Hell, damnation, condemnation, and eternal torment! It is entirely impossible to choose God!

This is exactly why Paul stresses to Timothy, Preach the Word so the people can hear it. Preach it to teach them, to reprove them, to correct them, preach them the Word faithfully, accurately, to point them clearly to and directly at Christ.

The Gospel truth is you cannot choose God because He already chose you. You cannot choose Christ because He already made you His own through water and the Word. You cannot choose to be saved because Jesus already took your sins, He already suffered for all of them, He already paid the full price for your salvation with His very own life and blood whether you want to believe it or not. You cannot choose to be forgiven because in Christ and through Baptism you are already forgiven. You cannot choose this phenomenal gift because in Christ it is already yours. You cannot choose to be saved, you already are, but if you really want to exercise a choice, you can refuse the gift and eternally condemn yourself.

Now I should clarify. In this life there are choices you can make; you can make to strengthen your faith and that of your household and choices to kill it. Yes, when you get up on Sunday morning you need to make the choice to attend church or sleep in, you can make the choice to read and study God inspired Word for us as recorded in the Bible or remain ignorant of what God breathed out and is useful training in righteousness; yes you can choose to feed your eternal soul with God's Word and Sacrament, or yes, you can choose to starve your soul, and yes, you can even choose to poison it and try to kill it. But in no way can you choose God because He chose you while still hanging on the cross, two millennia before you ever born. He chose you and called you by His Word and through Holy Baptism where He breathed the new life of faith in Christ into you.

You are not saved because you choose God. You are saved because God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to stand in your place and in Him and through Him God chose you. This is a fantastic gift because if our salvation was contingent, or based on our choice, or based on what we have done, based on how strong our choosing or resolve is, we would all be condemned. There would be no assurance because, was your choice really good enough, did you really do enough. What happens when mental faculties fail? What happens if the brain no longer functions? What happens for those with Alzheimer's? What happens when you commit that 'unforgivable sin' and are not sure you could even be forgiven, let alone saved? // Well, you can say, at the font, in Holy Baptism, God chose you, He

forgave you, He placed His Name on you and marked you as His very own child, forgave you all your sins.

The reason people are condemned is because they choose to refuse the salvation freely offered in Christ alone and search for their own salvation. Again, God’s Word is clear; “**there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved.**”(Acts 4:12) Salvation is only through Christ. To refuse God’s free gift of faith and salvation in Christ alone leaves a person in only one place, hell and condemnation. Having a choice can sound like a good thing, but when the only choice is to deny Christ and to deny the salvation He earned for you, that choice is eternally fatal.

In looking at the other readings for today, it was noted that they deal with contrast. In the reading from Genesis, we heard that Jacob wrestled with a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. But it wasn’t Jacob who found God, it was God who found Jacob and wrestled with Jacob. It was no contest as with a touch God was about to put Jacob’s hip socket out with a touch. Still Jacob clung to Him and begged a blessing, kind of like a two-year old child clinging to your leg to keep you from walking. Still, there God blessed Jacob. In the Gospel reading from Luke we see a contrast. Jesus tells a parable about a stubborn widow who kept after an unrighteous judge to grant her justice. Interestingly, the word here for ‘justice’ is translated elsewhere in Scripture as ‘justification’ or ‘righteousness’. The only difference is she had a foot to stand on before the unrighteous judge; because of sin we have nothing before God. But in Christ, God comes to you and me and He gives us that eternal life on account of Christ.

And so as we walk around in this life, carrying metaphorically that sign of ‘repentance’ through this world, we have a wonderful gift. God has already chosen you. God has already given you that new life. Christ has done everything to grant you forgiveness, to give you faith, and to lead you to eternal life. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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