

2013_10_27 Reformation | Sermon (Ascension Batavia)
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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Continue Preaching and Teaching the WORD

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

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Grace and peace to you from God our Father who raised up Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead and has seated Him above all principality and power, and every name that is named. He is the head of the Church. Amen.

But how did we get here? How did we get here, the year 2013, to be so divided? Over 40,000 denominations profess the title Christian. We have Protestants and Roman Catholics over there. We have Lutherans' and we have Baptists. We have the CLC and we have other Lutherans. How did this happen? With so many divisions in the visible church, where is the assurance that any of us will be saved?

This Reformation festival, the Holy Spirit exhorts us to

Continue Preaching and Teaching the WORD

We consider this in four parts, as we meditate on how...

1. The Word saves in Timothy's day
2. The Word saves in the centuries leading up to the Reformation
3. The Word saves in the days of the Reformation
4. The Word saves today

All Scripture is breathed by God's Spirit. This Reformation Day we turn to that truth which was breathed into and penned by the Apostle Paul,

2 Timothy 3:14–4:5 (NKJV)

14 *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 4:1 I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ,*

who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

This is the Word of God.

We pray: Bless us, dear God, that we hear and believe that Word which comes from Your mouth.

1. The Word saves in Timothy's day

So who taught you about Jesus? Was it a Sunday School teacher who, week after week, taught you those basic lessons of the Bible, always emphasizing the importance of praying and memorizing Bible passages? Was it a pastor who baptized and confirmed you, who taught with a passion that showed his enduring appreciation for Scripture. Was it a friend, a relative, a spouse – someone who opened a Bible with you to show you who Jesus is? Or was it a parent, a parent who brought you to church each Sunday, who shared devotion with you at supper time, who prayed with you at night? Who taught you about Jesus?

Perhaps it is “all of the above.” Its never just one person. For Timothy, now a young pastor, it began with a his mother and grandmother. Paul writes earlier ... 1:5 – *I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also..* From childhood Timothy's mother and grandmother instilled in Him these Bible truths of salvation. But it didn't stop there. It wasn't just one person. It was also Timothy's own pastor, Paul. It was the Apostle and mentor who wrote this epistle and charged Pastor Timothy to “teach no other doctrine.”

But it didn't stop there. In fact it didn't begin there either. It wasn't more than this person or that person. It was more than a mother or grandmother or a pastor.

14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and knowing that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ... knowing that All Scripture is God-breathed.

It wasn't just who, but what. It wasn't just from whom. It was from where. Timothy had become wise unto salvation because he had learned these things from God.

As Jesus said in our Gospel text: It is "the truth" that "shall set you free." "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Already in the first century, Timothy would be confronted with those questions – what assurance do I have that I am saved? Does it begin with my decision? Does it continue with my commitment? Is it made complete with my works? The truth is the truth – which reminds us, being saved from our sins doesn't have anything to do with what I have done or what I have left undone. The truth is the truth revealed in Romans 3 – *By the law is the knowledge of sin. None have made the right decision. By the deeds of the law no flesh will be declared righteous. None have been fully committed. For there is no difference, all have sinned. None have made salvation complete by works. The truth is the truth – and it is the truth which declares you a slave to sin. And it is the truth which declares you free. For a righteousness is revealed apart from the works of the law. The righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. All sinners are declared righteous, not from the Law, nor through works, but from the sacrifice of blood which was set forth in the death, and declared in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the truth which has set you free. For the TRUTH is the TRUTH. AND THY WORD IS TRUTH.*

Paul would soon be gone. He sits in prison, under Roman guard, and he writes, "the time of my departure is at hand." What was Timothy's hope for the future after Paul was gone? What would remain? What remains after your parents are gone? What remains after your pastor is gone? As Paul pens this, the last known letter, he knows there is no greater gift he could leave with Timothy than this exhortation: "Preach the Word! ... knowing that the Holy Scriptures alone have the power to make you wise unto salvation."

The Word saves in Timothy's day.

Sing: TLH 264:1-2

2. The Word saves in the centuries leading up to the Reformation

It wasn't for lack of organization. Organization was the character of the centuries leading up to the Reformation. As the 1st and 2nd century drew to a close, Church was emerged out of a period of persecution to a period of expansion. Christianity had become legalized. The government was on their side. What could stop them?

The visible church became more and more intertwined in the expansion and organization of the Roman empire. It was organized in terms of priests, districts, bishops, and archbishops. Eventually they would turn to one leader, a chief bishop who would suppose the power to rule the whole empire. We know this office as "the papacy," we know this man as "the pope." Eventually, all roads led to Rome.

What they thought would help promote peace, good morals, and the growth of Christianity, Satan saw as unreliable. Satan saw the unreliability of a church run state or a state run church. Satan saw the weakness of it all. ... *because "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away. But the word of the Lord endures forever."* Now this is the word, the gospel was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:24–25)

It would prove unreliable because all flesh is grass. Today it is in the field and tomorrow it is withered. The teachings of the church had become dependent upon the decisions of the church. No longer was Scripture the sole power to make one wise unto salvation. The decisions of councils were being heralded as the decisions of God. The authority of the pope was elevated to the authority of Christ.

And those same itching ears that troubled the early church, trouble us today. We too are tempted to think the right leader, president, pastor, will keep us safe, will save us. But, as Peter writes – *"You have been born, not of corruptible seed."* Not of a pastor or a church ruling. *"You have been born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God which endures forever. This is the Word, gospel which was preached to you."* (1 Peter 1:23–25)

It was the seed of the Word which would save even in those trouble days leading up to the reformation. The Word continued to breathe, and the everlasting gospel continued to echo. God would save a remnant, even as He does so today. He would preserve those who continued in the things which they had learned, who knew that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, who trusted in the salvation which comes by God's grace, apart from our works. And from this echo God would raise up preachers and teachers who would continue to speak His Word faithfully – those who continued preaching and teaching the Word which saves.

Sing: TLH 264:3-4

3. The Word saves in the days of the Reformation

“Since your Imperial Majesty and Lordships demand a simple answer I will do so without horns or teeth as follows: Unless I am convicted by the testimony of Scripture or by evident reason - for I trust neither in popes nor in councils alone, since it is obvious that they have often erred and contradicted themselves - I am convicted by the Scripture which I have mentioned and my conscience is captive by the Word of God. Therefore I cannot and will not recant, since it is difficult, unprofitable and dangerous indeed to do anything against one's conscience. God help me. Amen.” (M. Luther before the Diet of Worms, 1521, California Institute for Ancient Studies).

The roots of Lutheranism are not rooted in Martin Luther. In 1521, as Luther spoke these words he stood on trial, accused of heresy, and facing the possibility of death. And he would root his convictions, not in popes or councils, but in the seed which gives birth to true faith – the Word. The roots of the Lutheran reformation, the Lutheran confession, and the CLC is not Martin Luther. We are born of the gospel. We stand upon that same foundation. “Unless I am persuaded by means of the testimony of Scripture and by clear grounds, I am held captive to the Word of God.”

The Greek word in our text, 4:2, is *keyrusso*. A word which means: “to make an official announcement, to make public declaration, to proclaim aloud, to announce publicly.” In other words: Preach the Word so everyone can hear it!

And that is just what they did. They preached; they announced; they declared in clear terms, what they believed and what Scripture taught. Once again, the everlasting gospel echoed in the halls of Christianity. Once again, Romans 3 was heard – for we conclude that a sinner is declared righteous by faith, from the works of the works of the law.”

So those words echo in carefully written confessions which we confess today. They were compiled in the Book of Concord. We announce; declare; proclaim aloud a clear declaration of that what we believe rest not in Martin Luther or in any such human source. Rather as our Formula of Concord says: “We declare adherence ... not because this confession was prepared by our theologians, but because it is taken from the Word of God and solidly and well grounded therein” (FoC Rule and Norm .5). And as Luther himself states: “the Word of God is and should remain the sole rule and norm of all doctrine, and that no human being's writings dare be put on par with it, but that everything must be subjected to it” (FoC, SD Rule and Norm .9).

Continue in the things which you have learned, knowing your salvation is not rooted in popes or councils, it is not rooted in your pastor, it is not rooted in your own works – from you have learned the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (3:14-15). That is the word we strive to preach and teach – the Word which saves.

Sing: TLH 264:5-6

4. The Word saves today

Timothy is asked to think all the way back to childhood. Paul gets more specific than this. He could have used a generic word meaning “young child.” But he didn’t. Paul chose the Greek word “brephos” – that is “from infancy.” Beginning already in baptism, God is teaching the believer about Jesus. From brephos – from infancy you have known this Word that saves. As we consider our final point, let’s set aside all the the differences and false teachings that have divided the visible church; as we consider how the Word saves today, I’d like us to become like little children.

My Sunday School teacher was Mrs. Ubel. I was probably in about 2nd or 3rd grade. I remember, Mrs. Ubel was not afraid to speak out about God’s Word. And when I was wrong, she was not afraid to correct me. I remember this when learning the lesson of Cain and Abel. You’ll recall that after Cain kills Abel, he is cast off by God to wander the earth. In order to preserve Cain from those who would seek vengeance, it says God placed a special mark on him. For some reason, I was convinced God put this mark on Cain’s forehead. And I argued: “no Mrs. Ubel, the mark was on his forehead, I’m sure of it.” But when Mrs. Ubel was right, she was right. She studied her Sunday School lesson. She knew the Bible didn’t say anything about where the mark was placed. And she was right. She spoke up – “no David, the Bible doesn’t say where the mark was, it just says God placed a mark on him.” The Word of God was so important to Mrs. Ubel that she relied on that Word for everything in her instruction. For teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction. She showed me that she was not the source of truth.

Continue in the things which you have learned, knowing from whom you’ve learned them. Looking back, I see that, like Timothy, I was learning God’s Word even as a young child. It was not just the detail concerning Cain – but the importance of knowing that what I was learning were not the ideas of Mrs. Ubel. I was learning these things from God.

I later discovered where my mistake about Cain came from. I think it came from the book of Revelation. In Revelation chapter 13, God is specific about a mark, saying that a mark would be placed right on the forehead. It is the mark of the AntiChrist. What a telling remembrance. God uses this symbol to picture those whose minds have been turned by the AntiChrist. They have been turned from the truth to fables; and worship man’s own accomplishments rather than God’s. To the smallest of details, the AntiChrist is trying to undermine the authority of God’s Word, to convince you that you have learned these things from man rather than God. It is the mark of the false teacher. It is the mark of the AntiChrist.

So you have your answer. How did we get here? How did we get to the year 2013 where Christianity is divided among over 40,000 denominations?

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

It is a time for us to return to Sunday School. Continue in the things which you have learned. It is a time for us, even as adults, to become as infants. It is time to return to the event of our baptism. For it was in that water, that God gave you everything you would ever need for salvation. He gave you His everlasting gospel, and placed a new mark on you – the mark of the cross. In that water, Jesus was echoing – “the truth shall set you free.” For whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved.

We need more Mrs. Ubels. We need the smallest details. For a free salvation that has come by Christ’s death and resurrection cannot dwell with the smallest contribution on our part.

What hope is there for the future of Christianity? I would argue there is all the hope that can be hoped. For the future rests not in us. It is “the truth” which “will set us free.” It is the truth which will save us; And this truth is the everlasting gospel of Revelation 14 which echoes again. From the days of Timothy, to the days leading up to and into the reformation, to today – this gospel will continue to echo an everlasting salvation; where ever Christ is preached and taught, there is the Word which saves. The TRUTH is the TRUTH. THY WORD IS TRUTH. Amen.