

Sermon Mission Sunday 2nd July 2017.

Luke 24:44-55.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon this morning is written in the book of Luke 24:44-53, which was our Gospel reading before

44 He told them, “These are the very words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, namely, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

45 Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, “This is what Scripture has said: ‘The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day; 47 and on the basis of His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’

48 You will testify to these things.

49 “I am sending you what My Father has promised. Wait here in the city until you are armed with power from above!”

50 He led them out to where Bethany lay ahead of them. Then He raised His hands and blessed them.

51 While He was blessing them, He left them, and was taken up to heaven.

52 They knelt in worship of Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. 53 They stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,
Peace be with you.

The first mission of the New Testament Church had been given. The risen Lord appeared to the eleven disciples and gave them the divine charge to preach repentance and forgiveness in the Name of Jesus Christ to all nations. Following a three-year catechesis, the disciples were being equipped to carry out the Lord's mission. The Lord opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, that they would be better able to preach the Word, for their minds had been closed, rendering them unable to understand that everything written about Christ in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled, and that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.

They had the mission, but it wasn't the right time for them to go out into the world and preach the Gospel; the Lord told them they had to wait until the right time— **armed with power from above!**” until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost. They had to wait ten days, after the day on which our risen Lord ascended into heaven, where He is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come and judge the living and the dead.

Then, at Pentecost, came the Holy Spirit, their souls inspired. The Holy Spirit descended upon them and gave them the gift of preaching the Gospel in different languages, beginning with St. Peter's sermon that day. He preached to the masses gathered at Jerusalem. His message was simple: he preached Christ crucified, whom the people were responsible through their sins for killing.

So what was the point of such radical preaching? In Acts, St. Luke writes that the people were cut to the heart and asked what they were to do. Peter's answer was simple: **“Repent, and let every one of you be baptised, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** [Acts 2:38.] Through Peter's preaching 3,000 people became believers that day. The mission of the Church had begun to spread, as the first Christians were dedicated to the apostles' preaching, to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and to the Prayers of the Church. Their lives were lived around the Word and Sacraments. They gave to anyone who was in need, and the Lord daily added to their number those who were being saved. The mission was simple: the divine charge, the apostles' preaching, and the people's response.

The mission of the Church was simple 2,000 years ago. It remains simple today. The Lord has given each of us the command to tell the Good News by way of our Baptism. Sent by God's blessing, confessing our true faith, we tell others what our Lord has done. Those who hear our message, moved by the Holy Spirit, repent of their

sins and confess their faith in Jesus Christ. The mission is so simple that even you and I can carry it out. In fact, the Lord has called each and every one of us, you and me alike, to bring the Word of God to those who do not yet know the Lord. This is part of our vocation as Christians, marked with the sign of the cross at our Baptism.

As Christians we cannot help but share the hope that we have with others, that they too would have this same certainty of their salvation, that they too would inherit the gift of eternal life. There's no need to implement big, fancy programs that only serve to impede the mission and get in the way of the Gospel by their sheer complexity. The Church doesn't need to have outside consultants come in and tell the Church how to "do" missions, consultants who are more interested in the bottom line of their ledgers than in the bottom line of the Gospel.

The bottom line of the Gospel is that Jesus died on the cross to take away the sins of the world, that the forgiveness He won on the cross He gives to all who believe in Him, the gift He desires to give to everybody, to you, to me, and to all people. The mission of the Church is simple: to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus to all nations, beginning here at our own congregations, and then to others elsewhere. God desires that all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

There's another truth we either don't realize or don't want to hear. While there are many missionary endeavours, blessed by the Holy Spirit, that have brought many souls into the kingdom of God, the mission of the Church has come up against numerous roadblocks through the ages, both abroad and here at home.

Ever since the Church began, she has undergone persecution all around the world. People have been put in jail and to death simply for confessing Christ crucified. We have heard from society for the last couple of years that we should be tolerant of the Islamic religion. But know this: Islam is an evil religion, for the Muslims do not worship the one true God and deny that Jesus Christ is God the Son, that He is both God and Lord. Know this as well: in Islamic nations it is illegal to convert a Muslim to Christianity, a "crime" punishable by death! Muslim nations put Christians to death simply for proclaiming the Gospel. There are numerous other places all around the world there missionaries are forced to work in secret, lest they face arrest and execution.

While there are godless governments and God-hating factions who simply loathe the Gospel and will do anything to quash it, we are being forced to accept same gender marriages, legalised abortion, we face numerous obstacles in this country. In recent years Christians have been under attack here in Australia, where our religious freedoms are supposed to be protected. Prayer in public schools has been banned. Children are suspended from school for wearing T-shirts that have Christian messages in the fear of upsetting some other religion, and teachers fired for merely wearing cross pendants. Political appointees at the federal level are castigated, vilified, and demonized for professing to be Christians who value human life.

Many of our fellow citizens have fallen into a trap set by the devil promoting equality in religion. If you listen to them they will spread the lie that all paths lead to heaven, that one need not be a Christian. To this the Lord says, **"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through Me"** [John 14:6.] The one true God, the Triune God, will not share His glory with false gods.

In one of my many visits to nursing homes I once here'd a nurses' aide wheeling a resident into a Christian church service, I heard the tail end of their conversation, as the aide said she believed there will be more than one religion in heaven. I would love to give her the benefit of the doubt and think that she meant that people from different Christian denominations will be in heaven, for we easily and willingly grant that there are true Christians to be found in all corners of Christianity. But if she meant that there would be non-Christians in heaven, then there is great concern, another obstacle set in the way of the Church's mission, to proclaim that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone according to Scripture alone.

But we have our own reasons excuses, actually to not carry out the mission of the Church. The message of the Gospel is simple; yet we set out to complicate the message's getting out by not telling the Good News about Jesus or not being willing to upset people when we have opportunities to do so. We claim to not know what to say. The prophet Jeremiah said the same thing, and God made him one of the Major Prophets in the Old Testament. Besides, the Holy Spirit is with us, giving us the words to speak. We say we are not good enough for such an important task, but look at the men the Lord called to be apostles: Simon was a zealot, James and John had fiery tempers, Matthew was a tax collector, Peter denied the Lord three times, and Paul previously persecuted Christians.

We are no better than they were. Yet they were willing to spread the Gospel at the expense of their very lives. We, on the other hand, do not want to live our faith. We do not want to tell others about what the Lord has done

for us. We want to keep our faith to ourselves, to place it under a basket. We want to keep our faith private, "just me and Jesus." But the more we keep the faith to ourselves, the more it shrivels up and dies within us, as James tells us, **"Faith without works is dead."** And a dead faith is a non-existent faith.

However, the Gospel still runs strong, despite our best efforts to stall it. You see, the power of the Gospel does not lie in our efforts or lack of them. No, the power is in the Christ who died, the Christ who rose from the dead, the Christ who ascended into heaven, and the Christ who will come again, all one and the same Christ. Jesus' death and resurrection give the Gospel its power and validity.

Again what is the Gospel? We often hear of the "Gospel in a nutshell," found in St. John's Gospel, and we hear the very words of our Lord: **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life."** [John 3:16.] This brings up the "Lutheran" question, "What does this mean?" It means that your heavenly Father loves you very much, so much that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in your place on the cross, giving His body and shedding His blood for you, for the forgiveness of all your sins, and through faith, worked in you by the Holy Spirit, you have the totally certain promise of eternity in heaven with your dear Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The message is that simple! It is a message we all can tell others. This is what Jesus has done for me; this is what He has done for you. This is the simple but great message we get to bring to all people. The Gospel is far greater than a man-made program and much better than expensive consultants, for the Gospel is free. God's grace is free, the grace He gives to us through His Word and Sacraments.

Jesus says, "Go." Jesus says, "Make disciples of all nations." In our text for today Jesus says, **on the basis of His name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.' "at home."** (v. 47). Making disciples is done through the proclamation of God's Word, that all people would repent of their sins, trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord, and receive His forgiveness, which comes to us through our Lord's Word of absolution. Jesus also says, **"Baptize them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."** Our Lord counts the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as essential to the Church's mission, for through Baptism one is ushered into God's kingdom of grace as the Holy Spirit enters the heart to create within the newly baptized saving faith in Jesus Christ. The mission continues throughout the Christian life and the life of the Church.

Jesus says, **"Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you."** To this end the Mother Church teaches her children, and this teaching comes purely from the Word of God. Through lifelong catechesis we are fed on the Word, and we grow in the faith. Following a formal period of instruction, the catechumens presents themselves before the congregation to profess the faith into which he is baptized, that he may receive the Sacrament of the Altar, the true body and blood of Christ, which are in, with, and under the bread and wine. Continual participation in the Lord's Supper is the goal of missions here on earth, that we and all the faithful would continue to receive the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith, that the true body and blood of our Lord would strengthen and preserve us in the true faith, to live everlasting. Strengthened by this holy meal, we are moved to share the joy, to tell the good news about Jesus.

Never let anyone say to you that the Church needs to implement programs or hire consultants so that we can better "do" mission work, and that the Word and Sacraments are *"outdated."* To the contrary, the mission of the Church depends on the Means of Grace as these are the means God has given the Church to make disciples of all nations, the same means by which He gives us His gifts of grace: forgiveness, life, and salvation. We cannot do better than to do what God has given us to do and to use what He has freely given us. We can be confident of this, for God gives us His Word. Thanks be to God! In the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

"When you are baptized, partake of Holy Communion, receive the absolution, or listen to a sermon, heaven is open, and we hear the voice of the Heavenly Father; all these works descend upon us from the open heaven above us. God converses with us, provides for us; and Christ hovers over us--but invisibly. And even though there were clouds above us as impervious as iron or steel, obstructing our view of heaven, this would not matter. Still we hear God speaking to us from heaven; we call and cry to Him, and He answers us. Heaven is open, as St. Stephen saw it open [Acts 7:55.]; and we hear God when He addresses us in Baptism, in Holy Communion, in confession, and in His Word as it proceeds from the mouth of the men who proclaim His message to the people." --Martin Luther (1/19/1538 [LW 22:202])--

Prayer of the Church Mission Sunday 2nd July 2017

P Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have revealed to us Your salvation in Your Son, Jesus Christ, crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. We pray that You would preserve our faith as that of little children, guarding us against perverting Your saving Gospel with the notions and wisdom of man, - that we might have the glad confidence of forgiveness and eternal life, accompanied by Your Holy Spirit to not be timid, allowing us to boldly proclaim Your Gospel to our friends and neighbours, solely for the sake of Christ Jesus our Lord..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You gave Your Son to speak salvation and peace to the nations. We commend to You our nation and the nations of the world. Grant to leaders wisdom, justice and integrity, that they might serve in their offices for the good of those You have entrusted to their care; and grant to citizens a cheerful heart to honour authority and serve those around them. Preserve us by Your grace until the day when the battle bow is finally cut off and strife is ended forever..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for the many undeserved freedoms that You have poured out upon us, both the freedom from sin and the liberties we enjoy within our country. We pray that we might not abuse those freedoms as license to satisfy the sin that dwells within us, but rather that we might rejoice to act in service to You and to our neighbour..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Your Son has already borne all of our sins and infirmities to the cross. We commend to You all who are especially weary and heavy laden by sickness and affliction [*including* J. Grant to them healing and deliverance according to Your will, and sustain their faith in the meantime so that they might find rest for their souls in You..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that our mission continues to bring Your saving Gospel to the world. Help us to continue steadfast in this calling, and bring Your Word to others. Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Christ our King still comes to us righteous and having salvation, yet humbly in, with and under bread and wine. We pray that all who receive Your Son's body and blood today might do so with prepared and penitent hearts, rejoicing in being set free by the blood of Your covenant..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P We thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for all the saints who have gone before us, and whom You have delivered from this body of death through Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray that You would preserve us in the faith until we join them in eternal rest and peace with You..... Lord, in Your mercy,

C hear our prayer.

P Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

4th Hymn: 829.