

Second Sunday in Advent – February 14, 2016
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Romans 10:8-13

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10) For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11) As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12) For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13) for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Friends in Christ:

I am sure that you've heard the cliché, "Familiarity breeds contempt." When something is readily available it becomes quite easy to take it for granted and maybe even to ignore it's real value. Take for instance water. We have a ready supply of water in this country but in many countries the water is not safe to drink in even the best of motels. When I traveled in such a county we had to find ways to boil our water or buy pure water. I would have never thought that water would have been the thing I missed most about home since it is always so near at hand.

In our text Paul speaks about something else that is close at hand and near to us – the life giving wells of water we commonly call the Word or the Scriptures. Even though that Word is close at hand we do not always treasure it above all else – we take it for granted, maybe we neglect it, maybe we even despise it or rebel against it.

During this Lenten Season we have more opportunities than most other times of the year for us to make use of the Word – Last week we began our midweek Lenten services which provide an extra opportunity to hear the Word in addition to the normal Monday and Sunday services. The season of Lent shows us what Jesus did for our salvation. It gives us a chance to marvel at his teachings, his triumph over Satan's temptations, his concern over the wayward citizens of Jerusalem, at his willingness to go to the cross, and at his separation from the Father as he suffered eternal death in our place.

With so many opportunities could it be that we will become complacent in our attitude toward the Word at a time when we have the chance to become even more fond of it through increased use of it? May the Holy Spirit use our text for today to enable us to resist that temptation as it reminds us of the value of that is so near us.

Theme: The Word is Near You. It is

1. A Word that leads to salvation
2. A Word that calls for a response
3. A Word that is intended for all

The word of faith surely is near to us – in addition to the opportunities I have already mentioned – think how easy it is for you to have access to the Word – think of the wide variety of translations available today, think of the variety of formats that the word is available in today: written, spoken, even digital, and visual. And the Holy Spirit can use any of those formats to create and strengthen faith in Christ Jesus. Paul reminded (2 Timothy 3:15) **from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.**

By pointing us to Christ and his saving work the Scriptures lead us to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and to believe in our hearts that Jesus is raised from the dead. The confession that Jesus is Lord was an acknowledgement that Jesus is true God. And this isn't an idea that we can come by on our own – The Scriptures declare, **No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.** (1 Cor.12:3)

The Word leads us to see and acknowledge our sin and our need for a Savior. It shows the grace of a loving God who humbled himself to suffer eternal death for our sins as he gives us credit for his own righteousness. It convinces us that his sacrifice cleanses us from all of our sins and opens heaven to us. It assures us that our Savior rose from the dead and lives again and that now we too can live for him in this life and with him in the life to come. That's why Paul reminds us that Faith comes from hearing the Gospel. It is there and only there that the grace of God is revealed to us. It is the Gospel and only the Gospel that brings us to faith in Jesus – the only Savior of the World.

The Lutheran church reminds us that our salvation is by faith alone, by grace alone and Scripture alone. Our text has shown us the connection – only the Scriptures reveal the saving grace which creates our faith in Jesus who is the only way to the Father – the way the truth and the life.

The Word which is near us leads to salvation as it leads us to believe that Jesus rose from the dead to assure us that he has provided salvation for us. But the word is not only in our hearts. No in the Christian the Word is an all-consuming thing. If it is in your heart it will direct your thoughts and actions. It will give you a set of values that separates you as a believer from the world. It will govern all that we think, say and do. The Word will control our speech and speaking. It will also be in our mouths leading us to confess our faith.

These are among the responses of faith which the Word calls forth in our lives. We speak of them as fruits of faith.

When you plant a seed in your vegetable garden– if the seed sprouts and grows a blossom will form and after the blossom there will be fruit. The Scriptures often portray the Word as a seed which when it takes root in the heart blossoms forth in faith which then produces actions which we call the fruits or response of faith.

One of those responses is our spoken confession of Christ. Each Sunday we publicly confess our faith using one of the Christian Creeds, normally the Apostles' Creed, or the Nicene Creed. As we make these confessions, we need to guard against the mechanical recitation of the meaningless words. That's one of the reasons why we occasionally will use a different form of the creeds – especially in some of our special services. But it's not only with our lips that we confess our Savior. It's also with our lives. The Godly life of a believer can also be a powerful confession of faith. It has been said that the only Bible which some unbelievers will read is the life of the Christians with whom they come into contact.

Such Christian lives are fueled and energized by the Word – but how easy it becomes for us to fail to apply the Word. That's why Jesus reminds us, “Blessed are they who hear the Word of God and obey it. Jesus describes such individuals in his parable of the sower and the seed as those who **“hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown.”**

Among the crops will be the love, the respect, the honor, the obedience, the service we render to the Lord and the love, the respect, the honor, and the service we render to our fellowman.

The more we use the Word the better equipped we will be to know and understand what is pleasing and acceptable in our Lord's sight as we seek to express our thanks for his wonderful gift of salvation. And, interestingly enough the more we use and study the word the easier it is for us to place our trust in the unending

promises of that Word and to have the boldness to confess our faith in words and actions before others. The Word that is near us is a word that is intended for all as our text reminds us:

As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12) For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13) for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Twice in this section of our text Paul quotes the OT Scriptures. He has already done it once before in our short text for a total of three OT quotes in just six short verses. For Paul the Scriptures were a source of truth and a foundation for his faith, doctrine and life. Just as the Lord was able to say, "It is written" to fend off the temptations and attacks of Satan so we dare not rely on popular opinion but only on God's word of truth as we seek to confess and live our faith before others.

When the Word is near and dear to us – then we will be prepared to share it with others. Indeed God's Word is for all since it proclaims Jesus as the Savior of all. The point that Paul makes based on the inspired Scriptures is one which needs to be stressed today. Popular opinion likes to stress religious diversity – suggesting that there are many possible paths to salvation. The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that there is only one living Lord and only one Savior. They also make it clear that this Savior is Lord of all and Savior of all. There is only one way of salvation – it's not that some are saved by the law and others by faith. Salvation only comes through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul reminds the Christians of his day. Paul's words dispel the popular notion that the Buddhist, the Muslim, the Jew and the Christian each have their own path to salvation – when it comes to salvation there is no difference among men because all are saved in the same way by grace alone, faith alone and Scripture alone. The same Lord blesses all who call on him. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." And conversely it is also true that anyone who does not call on the name of the Lord will not be saved. God's rich grace in Christ is for everyone – that's why Paul will continue in the words that follow our text to make the point that all need to hear the Word.

And that is why it is important for us today to share the Word of truth with as many people in as many places as possible. May the Lord use our confession of his name to accomplish his saving purpose in their lives. I began this sermon by talking about how it's all too easy to take something for granted. During the course of this sermon we've been reminded not to take the Word for granted. There's one more thing that we need to be careful not to take for granted. It's all too easy for us to assume that everyone we know is a Christian – but that may or may not be the case so let's share the Word with everyone. If they are a Christian, they will be glad that we've encouraged them in their faith. If they aren't a Christian, we'll be sowing the precious seeds of the Gospel which the Lord can enable to blossom and grow and produce fruit. Either way we have nothing to lose.

This Lenten season the Word is especially near to you. May God bless you as you take advantage of the many opportunities to grow in your faith and understanding and as you confess your faith with your words and your life to others. Amen.