

“We Believe and Therefore Speak”

Liturgical Date: Proper 5 (B)

Primary Text: 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Second Sunday after Pentecost, is the Epistle Lesson from 2 Corinthians 4 and 5. As God’s people we are called to share His message with others. The title of the sermon is, “We Believe and Therefore Speak.”

When I am teaching or preaching the Bible, I often do several things. I may ask the questions that we want to get an answer to. We may look at some of the alternate answers that are incorrect and why they are false. Many times I will explain what the Bible teaches using illustrations, examples, and cross-references. So there is often some drilling down to the theological aspects as to why something is so, according to God’s Word. But I also have the goal of communicating the main idea, the “bottom line”, if you will. What can what we are talking about be “boiled down” to?

Our text for today does just that concerning witnessing, sharing the Christian faith with others. When it comes to Evangelism, there can be multiple questions. The “why”, the “motivation”, the “how”, etc. The second part of verse 13 puts it very succinctly and very clearly. *“I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believed, and therefore speak.”* This is really what it all comes down to. We are sharing the faith that God has so graciously given us. We have something that we want others to not only know, but to have as well: salvation in Jesus Christ. We believe. And how will others also believe? By our speaking as God works through His Word. The best Lutheran Evangelism book that I have ever read, by Dr. David

Vallesky, was titled from this verse. These are two essential elements in witnessing: believing and speaking. Removing one of these things, either faith or the Word, and you can't have a Gospel witness.

Our text in a clear way lays out more in regards to this simple truth. In the sermon today I aim to proclaim these to you. We understand that we have an individual faith in God. No one can believe for us, nor can we believe for anyone else. Jesus has won salvation by paying for the sins of the world, but this must be applied to each individual person as the Holy Spirit delivers life and salvation. But we also know that we are not alone in this faith. As the text began, *"We having the same spirit of faith"*. There have been true believers throughout history. All of those with saving faith in Christ have this "same spirit of faith." We are not alone, but part of a community of believers. This includes the Old Testament Saints, the Apostles, St. Paul, and all of our brothers and sisters here today. Paul declares this is personally for him *"I believed, and therefore have I spoken."*

And he doesn't stop there as it continues, *"we also believe, and therefore speak."* Notice that words like this are used throughout the text, "we", "us", "you", "your", and "our". This tells us that evangelism is the work of the whole Church, the whole body of believers in Jesus. Evangelism is something that we can easily try to "pass the buck" on. "So and so is much more bold and eloquent than I am. I need to learn more to be an effective witness." And my favorite, "that's what the pastor is supposed to be doing." The Lord, speaking through the Apostle Paul, is very clear here that it is not only pastors, church workers, or some "elite" group of Christians who are supposed to share Christ with others. He says, "I", but then "we". We are to believe and therefore speak, each and every one of us.

And what are we to speak? What we believe, what we know. Sometimes Christians may be hesitant to share this because they think their testimony is not that interesting. You may have heard some dramatic ones before such as one whom was saved out of a lifestyle of crime or gross immorality. I have heard some pretty dramatic ones, for example a man that had a multi-state drug empire and another that was on the FBI's 10 most wanted list at one time. How could we top that? My testimony seems pretty boring! Well, the secret to an effective testimony is not that you have a bunch of cliff-hanging or shocking details of your past life of sin. What makes a good testimony is the one that is how God has worked in your life. And if you are a Christian, that has happened! We share what God has done for us. He has saved us from death and hell.

Very specifically in our text see verse 14, *"Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus"*, and verse 15, *"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."* While we may share some details of our life in witnessing, sharing the Gospel must center on, well, the Gospel! As verse 14 said, the same God which raised Jesus from the dead raises us from the dead. He wants to bring you from spiritual death to spiritual life. And how and why does He do this? Abundant grace. That is what we are doing when we are speaking the Gospel, we are sharing the good news that God's grace is abundant. No one is "too far gone" or has "sinned too much" to receive forgiveness through repentance.

And of course we know that this involves speaking the Law too. Our text for today is very Gospel-centered. But if you go back earlier in Chapter 4 you see that it brings in the Law as well. Verses 3-4 tell us that the Gospel is "veiled" to those who are perishing because the "god of this world"

(Satan) has blinded them. So we are to proclaim Jesus Christ, the light shining in the darkness. We share that we are sinners, and that includes us, that God will judge sin. The penalty for sin is death. And then the Gospel really becomes good news as despite all of this we tell people that Jesus died for them and wants to forgive them. Verse 16 points us to this, *“but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”* The sinful and corrupt outward flesh will perish, but those that are renewed by the Gospel live every day and for eternity. This is Baptismal language as we are to remember every day that we are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection. Really the theme that runs through all of our readings today is that the resurrected Jesus is the one who will bring all the broken to Him, for they know that when their earthly home is totally destroyed, they have an eternal building from God.

People get very caught up in the things that are seen (verse 18) where those blinded by sin do not see the things that are eternal. This is where we who believe must speak. You see people are very concerned about temporal things, and many of them are not hesitant to talk about them. I am sure that you, like me, have been surprised by people who will talk to you about things going on in their life even when they don’t know you that well. Sometimes it can be TMI! The point is many/most people are concerned about things like money, health, their love life, politics, sports, etc. Will I have enough to go on that vacation this year? Will the car make it until it is paid off? Will I have good enough health to enjoy my retirement? Who is going to win the election? Who is going to win the game? Some of these things may indeed be serious, and others seem serious at the time. But compared to eternity? Not even close. So this is why we must speak. We must awaken the conscience. We must nudge the person toward thinking

about the eternal, not just the temporal. And many people do think about spiritual things, at least at times, but are not as comfortable talking about them with others. They may tell you about their colonoscopy and then when you bring up Jesus say, “religion is too personal to talk about.” But there is something inside of everyone that wonders things like, “Is this it? What will happen to me after I die?” Again, we who believe must speak-as we know the answers.

So why don’t we? I think probably the biggest reason is fear. Almost nobody likes rejection. And we fear being rejected if we try to talk to someone about spiritual things and they shut us down. We also must know that the devil is behind this fear. Satan does everything in his power to stop the Gospel from going forward. He is a defeated foe, but wants to drag as many souls down to hell with him that he can before Jesus returns. The devil will whisper these doubts in your ear about your ability to share God’s Word with others, distract you with other things, and want you to think of the worst possible scenario if you run into an unreceptive person.

I want us to go to verse 17 at this point, “*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*” I love that verse. How does this tie into witnessing? Any opposition or rejection we face in this country for witnessing to someone is likely to be fairly mild. We might get our feelings hurt if someone is particularly rude, and most people aren’t. The teacher for our recent evangelism workshop reminded us of this. There is almost 0 chance we will be arrested, punched, kicked, or some other form of physical persecution. People will just say, “No thanks” or “I’m not interested.”

But oftentimes in history and in some places today there is a real cost for sharing the Gospel. St. Paul certainly knew that as the list is long of

opposition that came his way including: threats to his life, being driven out of cities by force, stoning, beatings, imprisonment, and finally martyrdom. Paul had faced opposition in Corinth as well. You can read about it in Acts Chapter 18. He, as he was on numerous occasions, was hauled before the civil authorities. Check out the photo on your bulletin cover. I snapped that picture three years ago while walking through the ruins of ancient Corinth. These were the ruins of essentially city hall/the courthouse where Paul was put on trial. And in that spot you can see today a stone with 2 Corinthians 4:17 engraved in both Greek and English. The governor, Gallio, did not find him guilty and he was able to continue his ministry in this key Greek city.

You see, whatever was coming Paul's way was "momentary light affliction." But hey, some of those things sounded pretty serious, right? And they were. While it's pretty safe to witness in this country, many of the people you talk to could be facing serious challenges in their lives. This verse is not saying those things are not serious hardships. What the verse is saying is that anything we do face in this life is "light affliction" in *comparison* to the eternal glory in Christ. In fact, God told Paul in a vision in Acts 18:9, "*Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent.*" And he did speak, because he believed and wanted others to believe as well.

I actually had a little "light affliction" when I was in Corinth. I thought my stick shift rental car was in reverse, it wasn't and I hit the back of another parked car. I was worried as I had to deal with all of this in a foreign country where I did not speak the language. But it worked out, and we were on our way not missing any of our other stops. It seemed like a crisis at the time, but in the larger context of things it really was not a big deal.

And most likely any challenges you face in witnessing probably will end up not being too big of a deal either. They certainly won't compare to the "eternal weight of glory." God has chosen *you* to deliver His message. The Good News, the best news. The Gospel. This is the call for all of God's people. It is sharing what Jesus has done to save all of us sinners. He has risen and extended us grace. It really comes down to a simple truth: We believe and therefore speak.

Amen.