

“Hearing, Faith, and Salvation”

Romans 10:9-17

Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity 2022; September 4, 2022

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

Rev. Dr. Charles Westby, Pastor

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I draw your attention to the epistle reading this morning, from Romans 10, verses 9-17. In these verses the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, talks to us about faith, salvation, and the importance of hearing the word of Christ. The Apostle says this: “[I]f you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Then he says this: “Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). In verse 14 of this passage, Paul calls this word of Christ preaching or proclamation. It is like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: “Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed” (1 Corinthians 15:11). The preaching consisted of this: that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; that He was buried; and that He was raised from death on the third day according to the scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

So, I have been thinking about how important this is: “Faith comes by hearing, hearing the word of Christ.” And this, “So we preach, and so you believed.”

As we continue to talk about this, we need to make an observation. For the Apostle to speak of hearing the word of Christ, he is talking about a speaking of the Gospel in human speech. The word of Christ in human speech is the medium by which God brings forth faith in us, the Holy Spirit working in it and through it. And since the faith that saves is faith in Jesus who died an atoning death for us and was raised for us from the dead, the content of the speaking is Jesus who died and rose again, the result of which is our forgiveness and justification before God. The point is that this message and teaching takes place in human speech, either in speaking or in writing.

This is wonderful for many reasons. One reason we will come back to at the end. Another one is just simply this reality that God speaks to us in our own language.

So, let’s work on this faith comes by hearing, or so we preach, and so you believed. Let’s say that someone wants to teach their son or daughter how to fish. By the way, I think in teaching a child how to fish, a person assumes that the child was not born knowing how to fish. Likewise, people are not born having faith in Jesus; faith that God raised Jesus from the dead; faith that Jesus died to make atonement for them, so God could speak forgiveness, in grace, and peace, and joy.

Anyway, in a parent teaching a child how to fish, the speaking starts right away. It happens when a person says to their son or daughter: “Hey, let’s go fishing.” Then the parent may say: “The first thing we need to do is go down to the sporting goods store and get a fishing rod.” Then when they are in the sporting goods store, dad or mom talks about the different kinds of fishing rods and reels. They could say: “Some rods are thicker than others. It depends on what kind of fish we are trying to catch, bigger ones or littler ones. Around here, we fish for trout. They are not real big, you know, 12 to 20 inches, generally. So, this skinnier rod will do just fine. If one was fishing for halibut in the straights of southeast Alaska, not so much. The skinner rod would snap like a twig, if we were to hook a big halibut.”

Then mom or dad talks about hooks and lures. Maybe mom or dad ties their own flies. Then, of course, there would be fly-fishing in the river to talk about. Mom or Dad would talk about how that is a different kind of thing than fishing with a reel off a boat in a lake.

And bait must be talked about. Dad or mom talks about the different kinds of bait that are attractive to fish for different reasons.

And then you get to the lake, finally. Mom or dad needs to teach son or daughter how to get the hook on the line, along with the lure; and then how to bait the hook; and then how to cast; how the reel works; and then what it is like for the fish to strike the bait and the hook, and what to do with the rod at that point; and then how to reel the fish in.

There is a lot of speaking that goes on in all of these things when one teaches one's son or daughter how to fish.

Now, a person could say, "Yes, for sure. But there is also showing." That is also true. When it comes to an activity like fishing, that is quite within the realm of natural human reason to understand, and which also involves a physical human activity that is quite repeatable and involves methods and techniques, there is also showing in the teaching of it.

So not only does one describe how to tie the lure to the line and bait the hook, but one can show how this is done. And not only can one describe how to cast, but there is also the showing how to cast.

But what about believing that God raised Jesus from the dead? What about believing that because Jesus died and rose again our sins are forgiven? This is the heart of the Gospel that creates saving faith. Unlike fishing, however, this faith does not come about by showing it, but only by speaking it. I can't say, "God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, after He died for our sins, and was buried," and then show it to you. I can't say, because of what Jesus has done, God forgives your sins, and then show it to you. Sure, we can do skits to act out the resurrection, to try to make an impact as another teaching tool. But the reality is that even skits are only an approximation, an illustration. They are not the same as the actual thing. When it comes to the actual thing, our faith relies on the speaking of it to us and to one another, and the Holy Spirit creating faith through the speaking.

In fact, all of the great acts of God that form the content of our Christian faith are like that. Take creation, as another example. I could not demonstrate for you creation out of nothing simply by the power of God's word, when I say: "God created all things at the beginning out of nothing simply by the power of His saying so: 'Let it be,' and it is." There is no demonstration I can do to show it to you along with telling you about it.

Likewise, we believe that Jesus gives us His true body and blood in the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion. Christ mercifully gives us this sacrament as a tangible way of sustaining our faith in Him to support the preaching and teaching of the Gospel. But I cannot demonstrate to you, show you, that Christ's body and blood are in the bread and wine. You believe this because Christ speaks it to you.

So, faith comes by hearing, by what Jesus has done for us, what God has done for us and does every day, being spoken to us; being taught. How utterly important it is, therefore, what our children are taught.

But all of this about faith coming by hearing is another aspect of the grace and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. Here is another reason why faith coming by speaking is so important to us. Let's ask some questions. Where is Jesus? How can you even know that He died and lived again? Where is the heart and mind of God where forgiveness lies in Jesus? I mean where do you find it, God's heart and mind?

Here is God's grace and mercy. We do not have try to ascend to heaven to find Jesus there. We do not have descend into the realm of the dead, to try to bring Jesus up from the dead. God has raised Him from the dead by His power (Romans 10:6-7). And it is as Paul says in the verse

before the epistle reading today: “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the word of faith that we proclaim” (Romans 10:8); that Jesus died for our sins; that God raised Him from the dead. The word is near you. You have it in the speaking of it to you, and the speaking of it to one another. You have it in your mouth, that is, in your mind, and in your heart, which no one can take away. Christ is near you in the word of Christ, and in the faith in Him this word creates; it is in your mouth and in your heart.

Praise God that He has put the word of Christ in our hearts and in our mouth, and that we can preach and teach and sing and proclaim it to one another; that we can speak it and share it with others. Praise God also that by this word of Christ God gives us faith, and through this faith regards us as righteous and gives us salvation, which is eternal life with Him in Jesus Christ, which is our own resurrection from the dead in Jesus.

Let us, therefore, thank God for and use the wonderful gift of His spoken and written word that tells us about Jesus, our Lord, and creates faith in Him, for He is our life and never-failing hope. Amen.