

7th Sunday of Easter
May 12, 2011

We Believe, Therefore We Speak

Pastor Michael Ewart
2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Have you ever come to church, glanced at the sermon theme and cringed a bit? Be honest. Aren't there certain topics that you just don't like to hear about? In fact, what if we brainstormed and came up with a top-five list of sermon topics you would rather **not** hear? Now I'm just guessing, but probably at the top of the list would be the topic of money or finances. Rather not hear the preacher talk on that subject. Good news... today's sermon is not about money. I'm not sure what would come next on the list, but I'm just guessing that the sermon topic: "Witnessing your faith" or "Sharing the gospel" might also be on that list. And that is what we'll talk about today.

Now understand me correctly. We all love to hear stories of missionaries sharing the gospel around the world. We love to hear success stories of new missions taking off. We love to hear when one of our own efforts to share the gospel draws lots of people. But what we don't like to hear as much is when the preacher makes it personal, and make *me* accountable and responsible for sharing the gospel. That's when we start to squirm in our seats and we start to remember the missed opportunities and our lack of boldness and zeal. It's when the feeling of guilt washes over us because we haven't done as well as we should in this area. We see the sermon topic and we groan inside knowing we'll be going home today feeling a bit more guilty than usual because we know we've fallen short.

Have I hit the mark here? Does this ring true for most of you? I'm guessing there aren't too many people sitting here today thinking, "Oh good! A sermon about personal evangelism! This is an area where I'm excelling, but there sure a few other people today that will need to hear this message!"

My purpose today is not to lay a guilt trip on anyone. My purpose today is simply this: to give glory to God. God is great. He's awesome. His love is beyond our imaginings. And I want him to receive credit where credit is due. I want him to receive the praise and honor and recognition that he deserves! Isn't this the bottom line? It was for Jesus, wasn't it? Remember the Gospel lesson for today. The word glory or glorify occurs 6 times in those 11 verses. Jesus through his perfect life of obedience, and his fulfillment of the Father's salvation mission brought glory to the Father. The Father glorified the Son. And now Jesus prays for his followers that they may glorify the Father. If we are in Christ and Christ is in us, and Christ had the singular goal of bringing glory to the Father, then won't we who are in Christ also have that singular goal of bringing glory to God?

Now the scope of this topic is too great for one message. We bring glory to God in many different ways: in our thoughts, words, actions. In our various callings in life. Even in our eating and drinking we can give glory to God. That's too much to talk about. So we're going to narrow it down and today just talk about one particular way that we can give glory to God. And it is simply this: **Speak. And say what? God loves us. He forgives us in Christ. We are his for eternity.** [Repeat.] When we share with others Christ's salvation mission, we are bringing glory to God.

What will it take to open our mouths and share the good news? What will it take to get each and every member of Good Shepherd inviting friends, relatives and acquaintances to this church? Not guilt trips. Here's what it will take. Listen. FAITH. Where there is a strong faith in Christ, you will find a person who speaks about Christ.

This isn't my idea. Listen to what Paul said:

It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."

Paul here is quoting a psalm. Most say this is Psalm 116:10 which says, "**I believed; therefore I said...**" And David goes on. But the truth is this thought is in many Psalms. It comes forward clearly in Psalm 145. Listen to these selected verses:

Psalm 145:1-11 "I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. [This is a person of faith!] One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might." Did you hear it in there? They believe, therefore they speak. When you know and believe God's majesty and his wonderful works and his great deeds of love and undeserved kindness... his graciousness and righteousness... you have to speak! You have to tell!

Paul continues: "**With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.**"

I think it's worth taking a brief side trip here to point out that the apostle Paul directly connects his faith with that of King David who had lived 1,000 years before him. Paul's faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior was identical to David's faith. David lived before Christ was ever born, but he trusted in the Messiah, the promised one, who was to come... that he would be his Lord and Savior. David trusted in the one true God and his rescue. He relied on God's forgiveness and new God restored their broken relationship. Paul had the exact same faith. He just knew a few more details about the way God accomplished this rescue through Christ Jesus.

Here's the point I want to make. We here in America are enamored with what is new and innovative and modern. More than any culture that's ever been in earth, we embrace change and new things, presuming they are better than the old. But here's the thing. When it comes to the Christian faith, we are resting on an immovable, unchanging rock. We'll talk about that more in a sermon coming up in a few weeks. But for now, understand this: As Adam and Eve believed, so David believed, so the apostle Paul believed, so Martin Luther believed, and so you also believe. Time has not changed the one true faith. Neither does geography or culture. As you believe, so believe Christians in Russia, and in Japan and in Peru and in the Sudan and in Pakistan. This faith in God's rescue through Christ crosses time and space and unites believers in the one Holy Christian Church. Isn't that amazing?

That's why, by the way, we have a liturgical worship service and follow a set calendar. Those who went to the Ascension Service Thursday evening celebrated in a worship service that has been conducted in Christian churches for at *least* 1,800 years! And although we don't have

the records to prove it, I'm quite sure an annual celebration of Christ's ascension could be traced all the way back to the year after his ascension. The creeds with which we confess our faith are more than 1500 years old. The blessing which will be pronounced over the congregation at the very end of the service today has been spoken over God's people for the last 3,500 years! The hymn we sang right before sermon was written about 300 years ago. Although there's an argument to made for using the new and modern in worship, isn't it awesome to consider our worship and liturgy ties us to the faith that spans all the way back to the creation of the world?

And yet our faith has a modern expression as well. The hymn we will sing right after I finish the message today was written by a man who is actually still alive and well today!

Anyway, I digress. What were we talking about?

“With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.”

What is it that we believe in? How do you summarize all of the Christian faith into one sentence? John 3:16 is one way to do it. But this verse is to. **We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus...** and we will stand in God's presence holy and pure.

A couple weeks ago in the sermon we talked about how you have to have the goal in mind before you set on a path. What is our goal? We said: heaven. Being eternally in God's presence. That's what Paul says here! We believe, therefore we speak. What do we believe? That the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us... and we'll stand in God's presence. That's our hope, faith and goal. And we know he'll raise us because Jesus finished the rescue mission given by his Father. He glorified the Father in completing the mission, and the Father glorified his Son. And in Christ Jesus God's Son, we now glorify the Father and he will glorify us in his eternal presence.

This is what we believe! Because we believe that Jesus Christ gives us an eternity in bliss... because we believe that with Jesus we have hit the eternal jackpot... because we believe... therefore we speak.

And what happens when you speak? God is glorified. Remember we agreed at the beginning of the message that our life is all about giving glory to God. Well listen what happens when you believe and therefore speak:

All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

When you speak God's grace, that is, is undeserved love for us in Christ Jesus... love that forgives us and draws us close to God and promises eternal life... this grace when you speak reaches more and more people. As it does, thanksgiving to God multiplies and overflows. And God gets more glory. More people believe. Then they speak. And even more are reached with the grace of God and thanksgiving overflows and God is even more glorified.

I just summarized God's expansion plan for the Christian church... and for Good Shepherd. God's will is not that the pastor alone reaches out to the lost. God's will is not that the evangelism committee take on the responsibility of reaching out to the lost. God's will is that you... each and every one of you... because you believe, therefore you speak.

Let me make this vivid how this could be. Use your imaginations with me. For the sake of round numbers, let's say we have 100 regularly attending members. The real number is over 200, but I'm going to say 100 so you really get the impact of this. Over the course of the year, ALL 100 bring in 5 new people. Wait. 5 might be a lot. How about 3. No... let's say two. During a WHOLE year, could you find just two people who might come to know and believe the grace of God in Jesus Christ? Two who would believe and be saved? Wouldn't that be awesome? If even just two people. Maybe one of your many neighbors came to believe. Or one of your many coworkers. It's not a big number, but what joy if just two would believe!

If that happened, by the beginning of June next year, we would have not 100 people worshipping here, but 300. That's the original 100 plus 200 more. Can you imagine?! In just one year. You only need to bring in two new people and we would have that growth rate. But here's where it really gets exciting. Now we start June next year with 300 people and during the next year they'll each bring in two more people. Two years from now we would have 900 members. If we kept doing this, in less than 10 years, the entire Omaha metropolitan area would be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, with thanksgiving overflowing to God and his name being glorified like we can hardly imagine.

Do you see what I'm saying? When every member speaks their faith to others, the results are astonishing. I believe, therefore I speak.

Now before you say this is just unrealistic. No way it could work. I've seen it work. I've watched it happen. In the early years when I was a missionary in Russia, I saw our children's Sunday School ministry grow from 12 kids to 40 kids to 200 kids in 3 – 4 years. I saw adult Bible Basics classes grow from 4 to 14 to 50 to over 100 adults per week coming. I had the joy of having a member come to me and suggest that we start Bible classes at the local club where the deaf would gather. He contacted the director of that club and we started classes a month later. 30 deaf people came to know the grace of God and thanksgiving overflowed.

Friends, when each and every member believes in Christ, and therefore speaks, God is glorified, and the glory he receives can multiply beyond your wildest dreams. But the key is this: Every person here believes and therefore speaks.

And so, let's finish today with a homework assignment. Your assignment is two fold. 1) Grow in faith. 2) Speak. To make (1) happen... for faith to grow... you need to be in the Word of God, for it is the Word that the Holy Spirit uses to strengthen faith. So if you accept this assignment, so your faith to grow, will you (a) commit to daily Bible reading and prayer. (b) Decide right now you will be regular in your church attendance this Summer, even when you're on vacation. Worshipping with fellow believers builds your faith. There's more we could say, but I'm keeping it simple.

And the second part of your assignment: speak. You've got the message that turns a person's future from the most horrible imaginable to the greatest imaginable. You believe. So speak! Again, two things to do this summer: (1) Invest in the lives of your unbelieving friends and neighbors. That means spend time with them. Show love to them. Get to know them better. Invest your time and your love in these people. And (2) invite them. Invite them into an environment where they'll hear about Christ. Church. You're home. Meeting at the coffee shop with your pastor. Or in your living room. Invest and invite. Invest and invite. That's the "Speak" part. We believe, therefore we speak. May God bless the spread of his grace and good news of Jesus with exponential growth here in Omaha, in the U.S. and around the world! Amen.