

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Quinquagesima Sunday, February 19, 2023

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 8, 12:1, 363, 348, 38:1-3.

Lessons: Exodus 34:29-35, 2 Corinthians 2:17-3:18, Luke 18:31-34.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

You have probably tried to explain something to someone and they just didn't get it. On the other hand, you may have been listening or watching as someone tried to explain or show you something and you began to wonder 'how do they really do that'?

Paul has been talking about the Law of God and especially how some Jews didn't "get it" and rejected it. Of course, that is human nature, to reject the Law of God.

In this chapter his purpose is to explain and defend the ministry of those who proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ from the accusations of false teachers, who accused them of being deceitful workers, or tried to prejudice the minds of the people against them. So he tells them again how important the Gospel was. He writes to them both as a fellow Christian and as a minister, a servant of the gospel.

As you heard in our Epistle lesson, he talks about a "veil". A veil is something that in this case refers to that which prevents something from being understood. So today we ask

HOW CAN AND DO WE PRESENT OUR MESSAGE?

- 1. The Gospel can be veiled – Satan blinds people.**
- 2. But we do all we can to present it clearly, not veiled, not deceitfully.**
- 3. We strive to be honest, above board and concentrate on the truth, the Good News.**
- 4. And what is the result? God made his light shine in our hearts, so we can share the light of the knowledge of God.**

Moses had to wear a veil in our Old Testament lesson because his face had shone with the brightness of the glory of God, and the people could not bear to see that. In the same way today, people do not want to see the Law of God, which Moses delivered to the people. By nature every one of us rebels against what God says, especially in his Law. We learn God's moral law from the Ten Commandments which applies to all people of all time but we don't like it because of our old man, our sinful flesh. And so we try to cover our eyes from the Law of God, kind of like the little child who doesn't want to look at something he or she doesn't like.

But Paul is not talking about God's Law in these verses. He is talking about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is that Gospel which saves us from the demands and condemnation of the Law of God. Scripture tells us that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" But it also assures us that all "*are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*" Romans 3:23-24 (NIV)

Satan, who is here called "*The god of this age, has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*" Here Paul uses the picture of a veil that Satan, the devil, uses, to prevent people from seeing and believing the gospel. We need to hear it and read it so that it can work on our hearts. It is kind of like in the same way that if you don't eat any food, especially food that is good for you, it won't help you.

Paul emphasizes that it is God's mercy – his goodness and grace – that encourages him. It is God who has given him his calling to teach and proclaim Jesus Christ as Savior. And so he says "*Therefore, since through*

God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” It is God’s undeserved love that encourages him to share and give away that Gospel. If anyone had reason to be discouraged or lose heart – in an earthly sense about the work he was supposed to do – it would be the Apostle Paul. Listen to how Satan and the world attacked him.

Later in this second letter to the Corinthians, he writes that ***“Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.”*** 2 Corinthians 11:25-27 (NIV) Wouldn’t that discourage you and cause you to lose heart in doing what you were supposed to do?

He also wrote to the Corinthians: ***“As God's fellow workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, ‘In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves [that is, we present ourselves,] in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything. We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you.”*** 2 Corinthians 6:1-11 (NIV) Wow! And through all that he writes ***“we do not lose heart.”***

Every servant of Christ – and doesn’t that include every one of you? – has encouragement because it is God’s work that you are doing.

When he talks about how to present the Gospel he says we do all we can to present it clearly, not veiled, not deceitfully. We want to be honest, above board, and concentrate on the truth, the Good News.

He doesn’t have to resort to any kind of deception or trickery to present the Word of God. You can find preachers – even I have seen them on television – who invite you to send them some “seed money”. They claim that this will help you so that you can become rich here on earth. That is only one kind of shameful way that the Gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is perverted. Another way, especially common today, is how preachers and their churches pervert the Word of God. They explain that the Bible is simply human opinion, or that it was written for a different age and society in which people weren’t as open and free with their ideas and lusts – although they wouldn’t use the word “lusts”. They claim that things God says in his inspired Word ‘just don’t apply anymore’. And this is because they have been blinded by Satan.

It is very clear as we read the ten New Testament Epistles or letters which Paul wrote by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, that he was totally above board, honest, and open about what he was doing and not in any way secretive. He assures us: ***“we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.”*** He never hid the fact that it was the work of God that he was to do. He emphasized again and again that whatever he accomplished was actually what God accomplished through him. He wasn’t boasting of or about himself, but he was boasting about and preaching about ***“Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”***

This was Paul’s goal and mission and calling, and the goal and mission and calling of every true minister, every true servant of Christ, in fact, the goal and mission and calling of every Christian. We must renounce ***“secret and shameful ways.”*** We must ***“not use deception, [or] distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves [we present ourselves] to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”*** He says ‘no deception, no distortion.’ He says ‘Here is the truth of God’s Word.’ He wanted to present the Gospel in its truth and purity.

If people can’t see the gospel, they will perish eternally. Why? ***“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”***

Paul proclaims, teaches, preaches the glorious things God did in redeeming mankind from hell through the work of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, many attacked him and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Even today many can not plainly see the hand of God in what Jesus Christ did. Satan has blinded them.

As we again approach the season of Lent, starting Thursday, February 23, 2023, with a special worship service, which we intend to broadcast via Zoom, we will see in the sufferings of Jesus Christ how much he willingly endured for us.

The glorious result of Paul honestly proclaiming ‘this is what God has done for you’ is that **“God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”**

The very God who created light in the beginning also makes the light of the Gospel to shine in our hearts. This gives us **“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”** which we can see and do see **“in the face of Christ.”**

And what is the result of God shining his light into our hearts? We strive to live lives that glorify God in all we do. We live as his children every day, conscious of what kind of witness we are giving to the world. We can then share that light with others, so that others can see the light of Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. And it all comes back to the Word of God. Without the Word of God in our lives we fall back again into the blindness, the darkness of the power of Satan.

And the very next verse after our text is a confession as well as a rejoicing. He did not, he does not lose heart because it is the power of God which used him. **“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”** 2 Corinthians 4:7 (NIV) God didn’t make us golden bowls or silver pitchers to carry his Word into the world. He uses us with all our imperfections to do his work. We are clay pots, not golden pitchers and silver cups to deliver the Gospel to mankind. The power to accomplish anything in our lives, especially the teaching of the Gospel, comes from God.

May we, too, poor clay pots that we are, never lose heart but be about our heavenly Father’s business! Amen.