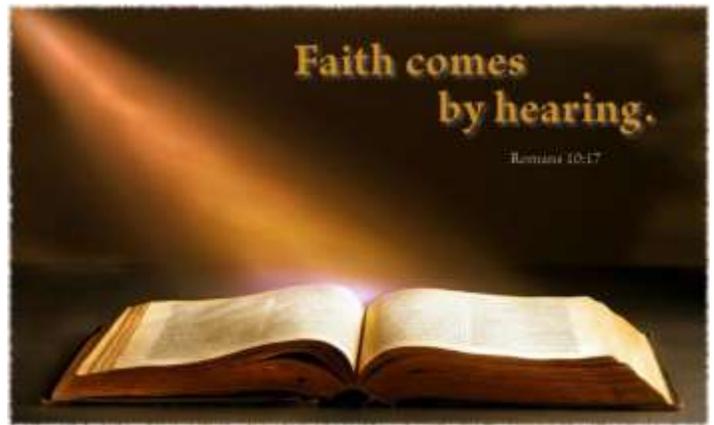


Epiphany 4-February 3rd, 2019
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish



Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,
⁵"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."
⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know
how to speak, for I am only a boy." ⁷But the LORD said to me,
"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.
⁸Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD."
⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me,
"Now I have put my words in your mouth.
¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant."

Romans 10:14-17

¹⁴But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

"Only By Hearing"

-Sermon by Vicar Randall J. Questad

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

"So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ." Can this be the only way to believing in God? Is this the only way to having faith? Does Paul who wrote the book of Romans give another way? Is there somewhere else in this book that tells of another way to receive faith? Or maybe there is another book of the bible that we can turn to that says you can use your sense of sight or smell or touch or taste to believe in God? The answer is "NO". Faith comes only by hearing.

*You can certainly raise the argument that God exists in all of nature. And you may feel that you can believe in God by seeing a majestic sunset, or by smelling the pleasant aroma of a flower garden in the spring, or by touching a newborn baby, or by tasting fresh fruits from the trees of God's creation. In fact the book of Romans begins by saying that no one has the excuse of not **knowing** God because of his presence is all around us in Creation.*

But knowing about God is not the same as having faith in God.

I remember Pastor John Watne, a pastor who preached at Willow Creek told about his experiences in Africa as a missionary where even the tribes he met who had never heard of God had a sense that there must have been a divine being who created all things. He also said that these people had a bad feeling within themselves when they were doing something wrong. But it wasn't until they heard God's words delivered to them from a preacher that they had faith.

When God is silent, you can convince yourself to believe in whatever you want. When God is silent, Satan quickly comes to speak into your ear and tells you to question and doubt what God has told you. When God is not speaking to you, the world is eager to tell you things that God would never say to you.

The idea of sending preachers to deliver the words of God to people is not just something that happened in the New Testament or happens today. In the first lesson for today, we heard how the prophet Jeremiah was called to be a preacher even before he was born. God knew while he was still being formed in his mother's womb that he was appointed to be a preacher.

After Jeremiah was born, he tried to run from what God had called him to do. He told God that he could not be a preacher as he was only a boy. But God told Jeremiah, "Do not say that you are only a boy," and told him that he had nothing to fear, because he would provide Jeremiah with the words to say and that he would not be alone. God would be with him. Then, God touched Jeremiah's mouth and told him that he had just put his words in his mouth to speak to others.

This is all that preaching is. Taking the words that God has given you to say and then proclaiming these words for others to hear.

Paul lays out the progression of the call of a preacher and how faith is heard in the scripture from Romans today. He says, But how can you call on the name of Jesus if you don't know who to believe in? And how can you believe in someone that you have never heard from? And how can you hear anything, if no one has come to preach to you? And how does the preacher arrive, unless they have been sent to you? Believing, having faith, trusting in the name of Jesus Christ is only possible by first hearing his name in your ear.

I had many interesting visits with patients at Avera two summers ago when I did my chaplaincy training. It amazed how many times people welcomed me into their rooms after I told them that I was their chaplain for the day, but then they were very eager to tell me about a bad experience that they had at their church and why they no longer attended. And then they went on to say that they could believe in God and could pray to God all on their own.

But this is where the problem begins. It is in this silence that you can convince yourself of whatever you wish to believe. It is in this silence that Satan slithers in when God is absent and encourages you to believe everything else, except what God said.

In our bible study on the book of Genesis we learn how this first happened. God was speaking in the first chapter of Genesis as he created all things. In the second chapter of Genesis, God spoke to Adam and Eve and gave them two words. One word of gospel which said that they could freely eat of all the trees of the garden. The other word, was a word of command saying, that they must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for if they do, they will die.

*Then in the third chapter, in the next moment of silence, the serpent came to Eve and whispered in her ear, "Did God say, You must eat of the **any** tree of the garden?" Then Satan replaced what God said with his words and said, "You will not die".*

But this sin is not the end of this story. God did not abandon Adam and Eve. It is not the end of your story and he has not abandoned you. Because God shut up the serpent when he said, "A seed from Eve will crush your head." The seed that came from Eve is Jesus Christ. And Jesus put an end to Satan when Jesus died on the cross.

The serpent made another attempt lead even Jesus Christ away from God when he tempted him in the wilderness. Satan attempted to lead Jesus away from God with his words, but Jesus rebuked Satan and trusted only the words that God spoke to him.

The words that had just been spoken to Jesus were "This is MY son, with whom I am well pleased." These words were spoken by God as Jesus was baptized. This is why we gather together often to hear God say to you that you are mine and hear Jesus speak to each of you today, "Your sins are forgiven." This is great news to hear! Amen.