

Mark 6:1-13 - "Blessed to Be a Blessing"

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What a grand celebration we had last Sunday, as we thanked God for the blessings He has poured out upon Redeemer Lutheran Church over the past 75 years. God has blessed us by His Word and Sacraments, through which He has given and continues to sustain our saving faith in Jesus Christ. God has blessed us through our Lutheran Confession's clear summary of what God's Word teaches. God has blessed us with this facility in which to receive and share His blessings.

All these blessings of God and more are not only for our good but also for the good of others, which is emphasized in our readings for today. But what is especially noticeable in all three readings is how much resistance we face in this world when it comes to sharing God's blessing with others, especially His Word of salvation. Whether it was Ezekiel, Paul, the NT Apostles, or Jesus Himself in His own hometown of Nazareth, when they shared God's Word of salvation with others they were all rejected for the most part by "*impudent, stubborn,*" people, who hurled "*insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities*" upon them. In Nazareth, only a "*few sick people,*" perhaps humbled by their illness, were "*healed.*"

What does this say to you and me today, as we consider God's blessings and His call to His Church to share them with others, especially the greatest blessings of the Gospel and Sacraments? First of all, don't be surprised when the majority of people you share God's Words of Law and Gospel reject you and God's Word. Such stubbornness and hostility comes not only from the sinful nature in all of us, which wants to remain independent from God, but also from some of the false teachings they've heard in the world and in other parts of the church, which makes sense to their natural way of thinking.

Take for example the most prominent false teaching in the world and church in Jesus' day, which continues today; the teaching that we have a part to play in our salvation. Whether it's taught (as in the cults) that our salvation is completely dependent on our good works, or (as in most parts of the church) that our salvation is depends on Jesus' work on the cross plus our good works, they are all teachings of demons.

The reason these works-righteous teachings are so popular is because, as I said earlier, they make sense to the sinful nature we were born with. And the reason they are so dangerous is because evil is at work in all of them, including the false teaching which makes our faith, or decision to believe in Jesus as our Savior, a good work on man's part. They all lead us to look to ourselves instead of Jesus for our salvation.

From these false, works-righteous teachings comes two of the main reasons people steer clear of the church today. Either they think they're doing enough good things on their own to get them into heaven when they die, so they don't need the church. Or they have despaired of ever being good enough to get into heaven, and think that the church is full of self-righteous hypocrites who think they are good enough. So they too steer clear of the church.

And when we tell them what God said to St. Paul in our Epistle reading, that "*[God's] grace is sufficient for you,*" and that our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior is a free gift from God, not a result of the works of man, "*so that no one may boast*" (Romans 3&4; Ephesians 2:1-10), the sinful nature in all people steers them clear of us especially, since God works through this truth to put to death their sinful nature which is controlling their lives.

So, what hope is there for the Church? The hope that God gives us through the Good News of Jesus death in our place and His victorious resurrection from the dead. The Church is built on this Good News that Jesus, who is true God and true Man, is Christ our Savior, "*and the gates of hell shall not prevail against*" this Good News (Matthew 16:16-18).

How many, in the end, will be included in the Church? God doesn't tell us, so that's not our concern. Instead, He calls each of us, according to the vocations He gives us, to share His blessings with others, especially His Word, both the Law and the Gospel.

God's Law makes it clear that we are all law breakers, and therefore, deserving of God's eternal judgement in Hell. But God is not the bad guy in all this. Remember, He does all in His power to save all people, because He loves us despite our sins. But He, even as almighty God, will not force anyone to love Him. That's not how love works, and "*God is Love*" (1 John 4:8). Therefore, the Son of God became a man in Jesus Christ so that He could punish our sins through His death on a cross. Then Jesus rose from the dead to assure us that our sins, death, and the devil have been defeated. Then our Lord comes to us through His Word and the waters of Holy Baptism, proclaimed and distributed by His called people, to give us the new life of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Then the Lord continues to come to us, through His Word and the Lord's Supper, again distributed by His called people, to feed and strengthen our saving faith in Jesus Christ. He does all in His power, and all that is necessary, to give and sustain eternal life in us. Once He graciously gives us these undeserved gifts, can we reject them? Yes. Even though we have nothing to do with God's work of saving us, we can reject the gift of faith and our new life in Christ, just like we can reject the gift of our physical lives.

Who's the bad guy when it comes to rejecting God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ? The person who rejects. Jesus told His apostles that "*if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.*" Yet even this action is not a final judgement against them. It's a warning that if they do not repent of their actions against God's Word, their rejection of either His Law or Gospel in favor of what they think is right, they will be cut off from God forever, which will be hell. The good news is that as long as they are breathing the temporary breath of life in this world, God will continue to do all in His power to breath His eternal breath of life into them through His Word.

What's the good news for us, who by the grace of God repent of our sins and trust in God's forgiveness? Besides the assurance of our salvation, God desires to work through us to breath His eternal Word and Spirit into others, assuring us that some will believe and be saved. So don't let your past sins, failures, handicaps, or thorns in the flesh make you feel inadequate. Remember again our Lord's words to St. Paul (at one time a persecutor of the church, who's thorn in the flesh make him feel ineffective), "*My grace is sufficient for you.*"

The Good News of God's gracious work of salvation through Jesus Christ is "*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*" (Romans 1:16), even in sinners like Paul, you, and me. When God is with us and the message of the Gospel, as He promises, we have everything we need to make disciples of all nations.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

[Children's Sermon]

How do we get to heaven? Through Jesus Christ. He is the way to heaven.

What if you tell someone that Jesus has opened the door of heaven to all people through His death and resurrection, and they say someone told them that they can get to heaven by doing more good things than bad. Is that true? No.

Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*" (John 14:6). The only way into heaven is through Jesus and His work for us through His death and resurrection, not by our works "*so that no one may boast*" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Is it wrong to tell someone that they are wrong if God says in the Bible that they are wrong? No. God wants us to tell them the truth, out of love for them. If you saw this symbol (skull & crossbones) on a food wrapper what would it tell you? Poison, don't eat. What if someone told you that they thought this symbol meant that the food in this wrapper was good to eat, so they started to unwrap it to eat it. What would you do? You would tell them the truth and hope that they will listen to you.

The same is true when it comes to the truth about Jesus. God wants you to tell people that Jesus is our Savior from all our sins, death and the devil, and to pray that they will listen to God's Word.