

2017 LWML Sunday Sermon 10/1/17
 2 Timothy 4:1-4
 "Be Ready to Confess Jesus"

SERMON TEXT IS OUR EPISTLE READING FROM THE 4TH CHAPTER OF 2 TIMOTHY

2017 is really an amazing year. It is the 500th anniversary of Luther's posting of the 95 Theses. This year also marks the 75th anniversary of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League, our LWML, which has done so much to encourage and support the sharing of Christ's gospel within our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and among partners and friends throughout the world.

In the 500 years since the Reformation began and the 75 years since the LWML formally organized itself, confessing the faith has not gotten any easier. In fact, it may be even more difficult for us to speak and to live as Christians today. And who knows what the future might hold for us, our children, and our grandchildren? Yet God is faithful and has promised that His church will survive all the challenges that the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh can throw at us.

Building on God's promises, we know that this is our time to be *distinctly* Lutheran. AS CONFESSING LUTHERAN IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD AND IN AN INCREASINGLY HOSTILE CULTURE, WE NEED TO BE READY TO CONFESS JESUS TO A WORLD THAT DESPARATELY NEEDS TO HEAR IT.

I. Confessing Christ is Central to Our Identity as Christians

To be proclaimers of the message of salvation is central to our identity as Christ's people. Look at the words of Paul:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom:

preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-2).

Do you ever wonder why God brings the people that He does into your life? He does so because the good news of the Gospel is given to each of us to share with those whom God places in our lives. When Saint Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he did so as one writing to a fellow pastor, but proclaiming the salvation won by Jesus is not just “the pastor’s job.” Every single one of us is all called to be ready to confess Christ as God opens the doors for us to do so. You are called to be ready to confess!

The need for sharing Christ is as pronounced today as it has ever been. While it is true that somewhere around 90 percent of Americans claim that they believe in “God,” their understanding of God is not the true God of the Bible. Add to that the fact that upwards of 60 percent of Evangelical Christians (a category that would include LCMS members) think there may be other ways to salvation outside of faith in Jesus, and the need to be ready to confess the message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone is as pressing today as ever.

Add to that Paul’s realistic assessment of where people were at his time:

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Timothy 4:3-4).

That sounds like a commentary on 2017!

II. Luther Was Ready to Confess

The setting in which God called Martin Luther to confess Christ

was easily as confused as our own day. Worship of saints had intruded on worship of Christ; works were preached as necessary for salvation; purgatory, images, relics, and other lies of the devil had obscured the Gospel of salvation in Christ alone.

It was in that context that Luther was confronted by the question of righteousness: What does it mean to be right in God's eyes? And the Scriptures were clear to him: keep God's law perfectly. However, he knew that he did not keep God's law perfectly; he knew that he did not keep God's law sufficiently.

Through his study of the Scriptures, Luther came to understand that the righteousness of God is not about us being good enough. The righteousness of God is about Christ, who is perfect. Christ, the God-man, who has completed salvation for Luther, for you, and for me, perfectly, once and for all.

We are righteous before God because there is a great exchange that occurs. The filthy rags of our sinfulness and rebellion towards God, Jesus took upon Himself, carried it to the cross, and crucified it once and for all. The perfect righteousness that is His, He now clothes us in and through the waters of Holy Baptism. Where before there was sinner, God now sees his perfectly redeemed child through Christ.

III. God Calls Us to Be Ready to Confess This Gospel

Luther confessed the Gospel in 1517 and did so to the end of his life in 1546. Which poses a question for us: How do we, like Luther, prepare ourselves to be ready to confess? Today in particular, we want to recall the work of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League.

There is never a perfect time to start an organization like the

LWML, but could we have chosen a time more challenging than 1942? The world had been at war for three years and the United States had joined the effort in 1941. Rations were short, many men were preparing to fight overseas. Women were entering the workforce to fill the vacancies left by the new soldiers. The circumstances were challenging, to say the least!

Yet, on July 7-8, 1942, over 100 women met in Chicago and established the LWML. Its purpose was to encourage a greater consciousness among women for “missionary education, missionary inspiration, and missionary service.” It also decided to gather funds for mission projects above and beyond the Synod’s budget. From this humble beginning— and through the use of the now familiar “Mite Boxes”—the League has blessed the mission efforts of congregations, districts, and synod in amazingly powerful ways!

The Church faces challenges in 2017. The truth of Scripture has always been attacked by the lies of the devil. But the Lord has been faithful and has raised up faithful pastors like Timothy who have preached the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. And the Lord has gathered faithful men, women, and children who have carried out the work of the Lord with zeal and devotion, meeting the challenges and opportunities to reach out to those who need to hear the Gospel. Simply put, our faithful God keeps His promises and we pray this Sunday and always that He will always enable us to be ready to confess.