

This Sunday's texts:

[Job 38:4-18](#)

[Romans 10:5-17](#)

[Matthew 14:22-33](#)

Sent
Pastor Jim Cords
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The holy gospel for this morning comes to us from the gospel of Matthew, the 14th chapter:

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd. ²³After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said and cried out in fear. ²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ²⁸"Lord, if it is you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." ²⁹"Come," He said. Then Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" ³¹Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. "You of little faith," He said, "why did you doubt?" ³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, root in our hearts the Good News of Your love and forgiveness and allow it to bear fruit in our souls and in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

It's good to be back! The world we live in has gotten smaller and smaller. The ability to go to the ends of the Earth is ever-present. So when we remember the words of Jesus at the end of the Gospel of Matthew where He says, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,"¹ we understand today in an even newer way that that is eminently possible. We can indeed go to the ends of the world to share God's love. In fact, one of the amazing things about this journey is that we saw the incredible evidence of how the love of God has borne fruit across this amazing world in which we live. But I want to be honest as I begin this sermon today.

I want to be honest with my own reaction to the Great Commission. It has sometimes throughout my Christian life impacted me maybe in the opposite way it should. I hear the command of Jesus, "Go and make disciples" and I see in my life the hesitancy. I see in my mouth silence when I should be speaking words. I see my hands in my pockets rather than reaching out to those who need to experience the love of God.

¹ Matthew 28:19

This command of Jesus is experienced by me as law that I failed to obey. While I want that to go away, the truth is whenever I evaluate myself against that Great Commission, that great sending, I see over and over again that I have fallen short. Now, it's my hope that I'm not only preaching to myself today, though if that's the necessary reality, then that's probably not a really bad thing. Especially if the heart of the Gospel, the heart of this sermon, the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans can, in fact, take root in my soul, so that self-deception of inadequacy can be wiped away through the grace and love and promise of Jesus that is mine and is indeed yours.

I say all that to say that this same letter from Paul to the Romans has in my own journey elicited those same feelings. I read these words, "But how can they call on Him ... unless they believe? ... how can they believe ... if they never heard? ... how can they hear ... unless someone tells them?"² And I think to myself, "Oh, I've done it again" failed to speak the truth of the Gospel that transforms, failed to share the Good News that brings life to God's creation. Is it because of my failure that others have not heard and therefore have not believed and therefore have not experienced the amazing transformative goodness of God's grace through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

But there's more there. This question "How will they believe in Whom they have not heard?" can be heard differently than what I've been suggesting up until this point. In fact, at our gathering in Oklahoma City, our Church's newest theologian did a bible study on these very words and was brilliant. I will, maybe, catch an ounce of that brilliance in the sermon this morning, so that you can be blessed by it.

It starts by asking simply this question. Do we receive this text with the logic of the Gospel or the logic of Law? We hear the word "commandments." We hear the phrase "Ten Commandments." We hear the word "Law" and immediately recognize that we fall short. What I want to suggest to you is that all of it is a gracious gift from God, that all of the Law, all of the Commandments rightly understood through the grace of Jesus Christ can be heard as an incredible invitation, instead of simply condemnation for falling short.

So how might we hear and see in this language, especially in Romans 10, the logic of the Gospel? Now I want to suggest that right from the beginning, in Paul's own writing itself, there is this suggestion that maybe we understand the distinction between Law and Gospel. This is not simply a Lutheran theologian's impression of the text itself, but the text itself begins, this morning, in verse 5, by saying, "For Moses describe the righteousness which is from the Law."³ If you recognize that at all, having read through the earlier parts of Romans, you recognize that Romans is the very book in which Paul writes "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."⁴

² Romans 10:14 (NLT)

³ Romans 10:5 (Holman Christian Standard Bible)

⁴ Romans 3:23-24

Romans is the very book that starts out by saying in the first chapter: those Gentiles, they're sinners; in the second chapter: you Jews, you too; in the third chapter: all have sinned and fallen short. Then over the last few weeks, I trust, because I trust Joe's ability to preach the Gospel with clarity and boldness and strength, you have heard afresh these words, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."⁵ So if that's true, I want to ask this question. Not what have I done, but what has God done?

What has God done? Let's have that as the foundational understanding before we move to that question of what we are sent to do with what has been done by the One who is sending us. In Romans, we hear so clearly, repeated over and over again, that what God has done is send His Son. What God has done, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, is make you righteous.

Several times in my tenure with you here at St Timothy's, I've come back to this point. I've recognized that we as Lutherans are really good at saying "I'm forgiven because of Jesus." Amen? But what we're not quite so good at is saying "I'm righteous because of Jesus." Can I get an amen to that? At least a few. The reality is the goodness of God in Jesus Christ has been given and declared by God to be yours. You, by the grace of God, are righteous. So we have to ask what's wrong with our theology, Pastor Jim, if you keep allowing yourself to fall into the pit of sin and inadequacy and despair, thinking that I'm just not enough.

It's true that I'm not enough in and of myself. But what we've been trying to declare throughout this entire year is you're not in and of yourself. You have Jesus. You have the Holy Spirit. You have the forgiveness and righteousness of God, given and declared by God to be yours. It's out of that truth that we recognize what God has done, what God will do, and what God is, in fact, doing in the world right now - rescuing us from sin and despair, giving us hope and a future and the promise of eternity in relationship with our loving Creator. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus our lord because through Christ Jesus the Law of the Spirit of Life set me free from the law of sin and death."⁶

Earlier this year in the Lenten season, we talked about living a "Lifestyle of Grace," allowing the truth of God's grace to be expressed in the living of our lives. In the Easter season, we discussed and looked at the reality that the power that raise Jesus from the dead, God declares is, in fact, the very power that is at work in our lives. As we've journeyed through this Pentecost season, we've recognized that each and every day we walk in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Our theologian that shared this great Bible study, talked about a home project. Now, he's a pretty small guy. Now granted, you know who's talking, but he's pretty

⁵ Romans 8:1

⁶ Romans 8:1-2

small. Is pretty small, Joe? He's a pretty small guy, isn't he? Yeah, okay. When you look at him, you don't think "manly man." Now granted small guys can be great at home repairs, but he started talking about the fact that he decided, together with his wife, with this new home they bought to do a DIY project. He acknowledged that he was terrified because he doesn't really know how to do it himself. He says, "For me, home improvement projects are like putting a picture on the wall and getting it relatively level and not building stairs" which I understand and I don't understand much, is a fairly complicated process for those who are not skilled carpenters and even sometimes for those who are. He talked about the terror of doing this because of the inadequacy of his own skills and abilities. As he came to the end of that story, he told us about his buddy. His buddy who came alongside him, his buddy who was a master at all of the tasks that they were doing, and that friend came alongside him each and every day, gave direction to his work, and allowed him to complete it with joy and with quality and accomplishments because he had an expert alongside him.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's what we're talking about when we talk about living our Christian lives in the presence of the Holy Spirit. That's what we're talking about at St Timothy's, when we say "Go with the Spirit." Recognize that the incredible power of God is available at work, going ahead of us, coming behind us, and indeed in the very words we share when we share the Gospel of God's love in our own unique ways, in our own unique relationships. We don't need to fear inadequacy because almighty God is with us.

So what is God doing in our world today? Transforming lives. What is God doing in our world today? Bringing hope to the hopeless. What is God doing in our world today? By His Holy Spirit, He's empowering the lives of His children to indeed communicate in word and deed the hope of God's transforming love and forgiveness for everyone. What is God doing in our world today? Here's the amazing thing. He's inviting the likes of us to participate in his work. He's inviting you and me to be partners in what God is doing in the world. He sends us and He goes with us because He actually wants His Spirit to be at work in our words, in our sharing, in our help, and in our caring to make tangible the truth of His love and promise for everyone. And He can do it through our smile, through our words, through our sharing of the truth about Jesus that is transformed our own life.

Listen again to Romans 10, "But the righteousness that is by faith says: 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the message containing faith that we proclaim.'"⁷

⁷ Romans 10:6-8

I remember relatively early in my career there was the development of worship services that some people referred to as “Seeker Services.” These were worship services that supposedly were designed for those people who were not Christians, but were “seeking.” They were kind of wondering about God. They were trying to figure out this God. I've often asked myself the question about those services how hard is it to make a service seeker sensitive when God is here, when God is near, when God's work in the world is, in fact, to make Himself known. There's not a lot of work for us to do because it's the very will of God to reveal Himself to His people, especially in and through the Church.

You don't have to get up to heaven for that incredible mountaintop experience. You don't have to dig down into the depths of suffering in order to make Christ known. He's right here right now. He's in every word we share, even if we bumble and stumble and misquote. God has indeed opened up the movement of His Spirit for our involvement, for our invitation. It is indeed what God is in the midst of doing throughout our world.

Now, Sue, I didn't know you were going to be here, but that's not how this text got here. I say that because Sue's husband Lee, Marilyn's brother, loved to quote this phrase. You can quote it from two places. You can quote from Romans or you can quote it from Isaiah. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.”⁸ Lee liked to say, “Aren't my feet beautiful?” I will concede that Lee's feet were more beautiful than mine. That's not saying much. What I want to suggest is that this word and the word matched here in Romans that says “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news”⁹ of the Gospel suggests that when you carry the very presence of God with you into relationships and conversation, the beauty of God shines forth there. It's on your face. It's in your words. It's in your hands, because you're bringing Good News, because you're bringing hope that is available nowhere else, because you're helping a world that thinks that God may be up there looking to catch them doing something wrong and you're letting them know that the God who created the universe, who created them, actually loves them and is ready to forgive everything they've ever done that's been wrong and to restore them into an incredible relationship of hope, of forgiveness, of joy, and of meaning.

It is the Good News of the Gospel. Throughout these last several weeks, what I discovered over and over again was a people eager to praise God because they had seen the goodness of His love, eager to give God all glory and praise, even in things that I thought were still quite a struggle. But for them, they saw the hope of the Gospel. For them, they saw the movement of God in their lives and in the lives of their children. They were praising God with amazing enthusiasm and joy. And I thought to myself, “Me

⁸ Isaiah 52:7 (ESV)

⁹ Romans 10:5

too." I thought to myself, we too have this amazing opportunity to see the hand of God at work in the midst of us and give all glory to God. One of the great Solas of our Lutheran tradition is all glory to God, as we recognize his goodness to us in Jesus Christ.

This commandment, this commissioning, this sending, that in the past, has allowed me to feel inadequate and feel guilty because I just feel like I haven't done enough. I've suddenly realized is an incredible invitation because God is already doing it in the world. He simply said, "Hey, you wanna to come? You wanna part of this? How would you like it if I demonstrated My love and My transforming power in other people's lives and I'll use you." That's the invitation we have. That's a part of the Good News of this calling. When we see it as the Gospel work of God that He's already been doing, that He will continue to do, and that He's ready to do right now, in and through us, we can celebrate the fact that we have beautiful feet, that when people hear the Good News of what we're proclaiming, they're going to be glad we've come. They're going to be happy to hear the wonderful Good News that God is good and that God loves them. He has no desire whatsoever to punish or condemn or put down, but rather to transform, to renew, to give hope, and a future.

What is God doing in the world today? Mark [Smith], He's working through you. May [Smith], He's working through you. He is at work in and through His people. Let's join the celebration. Let's be a part of the incredible Good News of the transforming work of God in the world. Why be afraid of it? He's got the power. He's got to know how. We don't need to really even know how to swing the hammer because He'll show us how and we'll bring a renovation to the community in which we live, to the culture in which we are a part, to the friendships especially with those who are hurting the most, and need to be renewed in the hope, in the future that God has indeed promised and is indeed at work giving and bringing to them.

God's plan is moving. It is relentless and He will be victorious. We have this amazing invitation to enjoy the party, to be a part of the proclamation, to use our words and our hope to extend the loving embrace of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

I want to close with this one idea that I'm starting to incorporate into my life. It's, in part, your fault, Joe. So, you know, just accept it. It's not totally your fault, but it is, in part, your fault. Because the previous young-pastor-type person that I worked with in Tucson had a tendency always to end his prayers very differently than I in my prayers. He would end his prayers and Joe has done this on numerous occasions. I love you, Jesus, amen. Now I don't know about you, but I, in my prayers, as I have been rightly taught, in Jesus' name. But as I looked into the faces and lives of these young pastors with whom I've had this incredible privilege to work, I realized my jealousy of their expression in prayer of love for our lord Jesus. So I've tried to combine it and now, more and more often, my prayers are ending with "I love you, Lord Jesus and I pray in Your name." Thanks be to God. Amen.