

Sermon Notes for 10/16/16 (Pentecost 22)
Preached at Jehovah Lutheran – St. Paul, MN
Text: 2 Timothy 3:14-17, 2 Corinthians 10:16-17
Theme: WORD AND TABLE BRING US LIFE

The Point: The Lord's Word and His Table bring eternal hope and joy to those who are dying without hope or joy in their lives.

Introduction: The key phrase that we want to focus on today comes from the Epistle from 2 Timothy: "equipped for every good work." That is where that verse ends that begins, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Holy Scripture is given for this very purpose: to equip us for every good work. And in a similar sense, the Lord's Table is given with the very same goal, to equip us for every good work. That is where today's theme originates: WORD AND TABLE BRING US LIFE!

Last week we heard especially about the power of God's Word as it works in this world, working to draw people to faith in Jesus Christ. That Word announces that God is not angry with you. It assures you that God has exhausted His wrath against His own dear Son. At Calvary God's Word interacted with God's world in this strange way. His living Word suffered death so that a dying world might live forever. "It is finished!" In those words is summarized the entire purpose and plan of the Lord from all eternity. The eternal Son of God went through death so that we might live, no longer for ourselves (for that way is death itself), but for Him who died for us and was raised again. That word is calculated to bring us life.

So Paul encourages Timothy in today's Epistle: "Proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching." Pastors and other teachers of the Word need to take care that the message, that is the Gospel of God's forgiveness provided for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, that this message is the heart and core of their ministry, whatever the time or situation in which they serve. The Word of the Gospel has power.

The Lord's Table conveys the same power of God. Both Word and Table are focused on the act of God that is THE ACT of God, namely His act of extending His forgiveness to undeserving sinners. That is what drives Him onward: the desire to forgive so that He may hold us forever in His loving embrace. The Gospel that is spoken centers on the cross of Jesus. And in the Lord's Table we have the Gospel made visible and tangible.

Paul's words from 2 Corinthians speak to this very matter: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." As we have shared in the very body and blood of the crucified and risen Lord, we then move out into the world as Christ's arms and feet and eyes and ears. We are one body, the body of Christ, and that body is desperately needed in this world.

The other day I was listening to a wise man (who also happens to be a college president) speak to the question of whether we should be optimistic or pessimistic about the future of our land. He quoted an appellate judge who, when asked that question, replied, "Despair is a sin." Our future, whether considered individually or collectively, is in the hands of a merciful and gracious God. Despair is indeed a sin – and this meal reminds us of that reality. We eat the body and drink the blood of a God who has lived amidst the despair of our world and even died an undeserved death at the hands of people who considered themselves "righteous."

But even that dying could not keep Him or His people down. He now lives. And by baptism we live in Him. So we are not just eating and drinking symbolically on the corpse of a dead Savior. We are fed on the body and blood of a risen and ruling Lord, who holds our past, present and future in His nail-scarred hands. He promises to be present for you here today, especially in the meal that He spreads.

Sometimes people get down on the church because they see it besieged on every side by human opposition and spiritual forces of evil. One man tells this story: “Growing up on the Atlantic Coast, I spent long hours working on intricate sand castles; whole cities would appear beneath my hands. One year, for several days in a row, I was accosted by bullies who smashed my creations. Finally I tried an experiment: I placed cinder blocks, rocks, and chunks of concrete in the base of my castles. Then I built the sand kingdoms on top of the rocks. When the local toughs appeared (and I disappeared), their bare feet suddenly met their match. Many people see the church in grave peril from a variety of dangers: secularism, politics, heresies, or plain old sin. They forget that the church is built upon a Rock (Mt. 16:16), over which the gates of hell itself shall not prevail.” (Gregory P. Elder)

That sounds a bit like Jesus’ word to Saul on the Damascus Road, doesn’t it? “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” When it seems that human strength will prevail, God turns things on their heads. When it seemed that Jacob might win that wrestling match, the angel of the Lord simply touched his hip and put it out of joint. Even then, Jacob held on for a word of blessing, which he received in the gift of a new name, *Israel*. God’s Word and the Lord’s Table bring us life. It may not seem like much of a stronghold as the world sees things, but God’s promises stand fast in every time of trial. He promises to bless us wherever He appears, and He has promised to be present in the proclamation of His Word and the celebration of the Table meal. He has given us a new name, “follower of Jesus,” and that name tells everything that needs to be known about you and me.

If the unjust judge of Jesus’ parable finally provided justice for the widow who pestered him with her request and would not be quiet, how much more will the Lord of creation, who created you and who loves you with an everlasting love, listen to your appeals and answer your deepest need?! You can count on Him and go to Him with all your desires and hopes and wishes.

Conclusion: The Lord’s Word and His Table bring eternal hope and joy to those who are living and dying without hope or joy in their lives. If you have struggled with the question of what meaning your life has, if you have come to the point of giving up on people who continue to let you down, if you are about at the end of your rope in whatever way that has meaning for you, then pay attention to the Lord’s Word. He has died for you so that you could truly live and serve others in His name. Give attention to what He has done in leaving you this final Testament of Christ’s very body and blood in and with the bread and wine, so that you may be forgiven and may rise up with new hope and new joy for today and for eternity. In the precious name of Jesus our Lord, AMEN!