

God's Word is For Everyone

Acts 2:1-21

- A. *it is for those commissioned in Jesus to be public ministers;*
- B. *it is for those who have faith in Jesus.*

In so many ways this world is complicated. There was actually a time when with a moderate number of tools you could do quite a bit to fix your own car. Today, more often than not you need computer diagnostic equipment just to determine what is not right with your vehicle. It used to be when you wanted to get a hold of someone you simply stopped over for a visit or picked up the telephone. Today, in some ways it is easier to connect with others over the phone with cell phones but now today many are preferring to communicate over Facebook or Twitter. There may have been a time in the mystical past when you collected your W-2 from your employer and grabbed your shoebox full of receipts to prepare your own income taxes; today many are better off going to a specialist.

Today we have reason to celebrate the fruit, the results, of the hard work of some of our own specialists who have been active in their ministry this past school year. Of course I am talking about the graduation of our two eighth graders: Bethany Grunewald and Simeon Crass-- products of our Saint Paul's Lutheran School. The specialists are our teachers who have studied and prepared themselves for a career in education but a career in Christian education: giving a well rounded education based in a knowledge and a living faith in God.

Today is a wonderful day to acknowledge our teachers and our graduates because this is the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon God's chosen witnesses in a powerful way. In our reading for today from Acts 2 we have the apostles and the church leaders all in Jerusalem waiting for the promised gift that Jesus said would come. And come it certainly did!

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” (verses 1-4). It is important to note here who is the “all” that were gathered together. In context the end of chapter one concludes with the apostolic replacement

for Judas Iscariot. Matthias a man who had been with the apostles from the beginning of Jesus' ministry was now chosen by lot to once again make twelve apostles.

These were God's chosen people to be His special witnesses to Jerusalem, to the rest of the Judea and to the whole world. These were the men especially enabled by the Holy Spirit to preach and to teach and to win the whole world for Christ. They had become ‘specialists’ for the Lord. Their labors and their work was so powerful that two thousand years later we are gathered in the name of Christ to worship God.

Having a separate, specially called group of spiritual “specialists” was nothing new at this time. The whole history of the Jewish nation with the establishment of the Levitical priesthood had been a cornerstone of the faithful's experience with God. It was the priests who had the special task of dealing with Scripture and it was the priests who alone could perform the sacrifices necessary to allow people to maintain their relationship with God. The work of God in the Old Testament nation of Israel was something highly specialized for the few.

There would have been expectations by the early believers in Christianity that the apostles would in essence take over the position of the Levitical priests--that they and they alone would be the necessary intercessors between all believers and God. Yet, our section from Acts for today does not teach this but rather some much broader and much more powerful. What God was teaching the people was that everyone who hears and believes God's Word has access to God directly and has the benefits and the salvation of Christ!

Luke, the author of the book of Acts first stresses who heard the message of the Lord in their own language. Luke names no less than fifteen different peoples, from Rome to Arabia and from Egypt to Asia. Having examined commentaries it does not seem to be important to try and figure out a special ordering of the peoples but rather the stress in on how many different peoples heard the message of God in their own language. Luke makes this clear in verse five: **“There were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven.”** The emphasis is on the breadth of those hearing the message. The Word of God is not meant for a select few but is meant for everyone.

This is made even clearer when we take a look at Peter's sermon on this occasion. Peter's sermon is a quote from the Old Testament book of Joel. Isn't it interesting to note God's promise for everyone in the Old Testament: **“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants,**

both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” (verses 17-18).

What is really being stated here? It is the powerful and, for that time, unexpected teaching that the Word of God is not for a select few but for everyone--for the public called worker in God's kingdom such as a pastor, a teacher, a missionary, etc. but also for the father, mother, grandparent, for everyone in God's kingdom. This means something very powerful for us here this morning.

School is drawing to a close and for many students and adults alike a more relaxed pace and time of the year is very welcome. Having said this we want to be reminded today that it is God's will for everyone to hear God's word and to understand it.

What a wonderful miracle that the Holy Spirit performed that day allowing everyone present to hear the Word of God in their own language. God doesn't just want His Word heard but to be understood and taken to the heart. God's Word is sufficient for everything God wants us to do and become. In fact Paul reminds us: **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Do we ever stop growing? The answer is no. Do we ever stop learning? The answer is no. Just as we wouldn't think of not eating, or drinking or bathing, or doing any and all of the other essentials of living over the Summer we should also not consider ignoring the Word of God even though school is no longer in session.

The Word of God belongs to all of us; whether you are the pastor or a teacher or whomever you are. The Word of God belongs in our homes just as much as it belongs in our school and our church. The Word of God should not be something that we take a break from, nor is it something that we should leave to a “specialist.”

How are you doing? Is the Word of God welcome and active in your home or when you go home today will it be something left comfortably safe and secure at church as you reenter the “real” world? Is the Word of God read aloud in your home? Does your family gather around even at least occasionally so that the Bible can be discussed? Are your children or grandchildren catching the habit of personal Bible study simply by watching your life at home? The Bible is meant to be as active in our homes as it is at church. Why? It is everyone's Word, and it is the only way God matures us to be ever like Jesus.

We do well to not forget the last part of today's text and the end portion of Peter's sermon from the book of Joel. **“I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.”** (verse 19-20). Peter here is talking about the end of the world as we know it. In its context what Paul's sermon is all about is simply that the word of God is given by God to all people and they will hear it, they will believe it and understand it and they will also share it. This is what God's people, the church does--they do this when they gather together Sunday morning for worship and they do it when they are at home as individual families.

What will become of the people who have God's word? **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** (verse 21). The Bible asks: **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"** (Romans 10:14-15).

We can be grateful that the Word of God is preached in our church; we can be especially grateful that we have dedicated teachers giving children a well rounded education grounded in Jesus Christ. But we need to be grateful that the Word of God is available to us at home too. Is there any greater work a father, a mother, or a grandparent give than that of the faith which leads to life everlasting? Yes, the Word of God is a gift to us all.

While I am not a professional church historian I have come across two major fears of our best theologians over the past century and a half. The first fear was that our church would fall out of the practice of private confession and absolution. They feared this because they thought it would stop a healthy and essential part of the relationship between a pastor and his church members. They feared this because it would use the training of the pastor too little. The other great fear was the loss of home devotions and Bible reading and simply leaving such things for the church and the school. Here the great fear was putting too much on the pastors and teachers asking them to do all or nearly all of Christian teaching and mentoring. The first great fear has been realized as private confession and absolution is for most a relic of the past. Only a heroic effort on the part of synod and church could change this. By God's grace and who we are as Christians today we need not realize the second fear. Amen.