

March 9, 2025 - Lent 1 Pastor Ventura

God's Truth: Easy and Powerful Romans 10:8b–13

Dear friends in Christ,

This is the first Sunday in the season of Lent. And as the season has begun, so is our journey to the cross with our Lord Jesus. And just like Israel journey to the promised Land, it wasn't easy. It would require God's continued presence and the devotion of his holy and consecrated people. Heart and soul would have to be engaged. They needed to trust and rely upon the truth of God's Word and its power. Yet it would not be a difficult truth, it would not be hard for them to understand.

During his ministry and his temptation by Satan in the desert Jesus shows what it means to understand God's truth. His response to Satan's attacks shows us that God's truth is easy, and yet very powerful.

We begun our service this morning with one of our favorite hymns, Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." Do you have a favorite phrase in that hymn? I do. My favorite line in that hymn is "One little word can fell him." The power of the Word—that is, God's Word, Christ's Word—has unlimited power. It can fell the most powerful foe ever, Satan himself. What good news and comfort this is for us who believe and confess Jesus! It is God's truth, which is easy and yet so powerful. It is so great that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!

Now, wait a minute, powerful to save? When we say powerful to say, does that mean then that condemnation is a given, almost as natural as the natural laws that we need to be saved from it? The answer is yes. The Word says we are all born dead in our trespasses and sins. This is the first fact of life that we need to keep in mind. It is who we are, since the fall of humanity into sin, and it is what we see all around us.

In the Lutheran faith, we say that as the Word I powerful to say is also powerful to condemn. It is not like placing a curse on somebody, you speak a formula, and boom it is done. Rather, it is the declaration of our condition. It is what the law does. We therefore preach two messages, Law and Gospel. We must hear and proclaim both. A few verses before our text for today, Paul speaks about the Law and its ability to make righteous everyone who keeps the commandments: "For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them." (Roms. 10:5) The law is important, you could even be saved by it, if you could fulfill all of them, all of the commandments that is. If only! Unfortunately, neither Paul nor Moses nor we nor anyone else has or ever will perfectly keep God's Law. So, the Law always speaks to us accusations and condemnation. It points out our sin. It mocks us. It tells us we deserve hell, and no there is no leniency to the law braker. If you run a stop sign, you will get fined, it's the law. No bargaining

or convincing the judge you are a good person so the judge should let you off the hook. If that how it works with earthly laws, now imagine God.

Law and Gospel need to be heard, need to be not only accepted but also trusted. Paul laments all who reject God's Word, both his fellow Jews and the Gentiles. Later on, on verse 16, Paul quotes the prophet Isaiah who said: "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" (Roms. 10:16) The greatest tragedy throughout the history of the world is all of the people who have lost out on salvation and an eternity in heaven, instead trading the beauties of their salvation for fleeting pleasures, fake riches, and false gods. Especially tragic when they hear the Word that condemns and warns, yet they refuse to believe that warning. Bitterly tragic when they hear that Word and, rather than realize it condemns, think they can live by succeeding in keeping it.

In contrast, Paul points us to the "righteousness based on faith" in v 6. This righteousness is not based on our good works or our living by, our keeping, the Law, or an excuse: "well God made me that way" so I don't have to change my life." He says "But the righteousness based on 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 abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)'" (Roms. 10:6-7). We don't have to build a bridge to heaven, for Christ is our bridge. We don't have to raise our God from the dead like other religions, because our God is alive!

You've heard the saying "the pen is mightier than the sword." It means that the power of truth and the word to influence hearts and minds is stronger than the mightiest army. The pen of the Gospel is far mightier than any sword of the Law, including the works we do to earn salvation, or any sword or accusation of Satan, "one little word can fell him". That is very good news indeed!

"The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Roms. 10:8), Paul says. In fact, the Word is Christ! He is near us. He is in us. He is placed there by the Holy Spirit working through Word and water. We don't create faith in our hearts or decide to believe in Jesus on our own. That's what the Holy Spirit does in our spiritually lifeless corpses. And Jesus continues to come to us physically as he, the Word, comes into our heart via our ears, and his body and blood come into our mouth in Holy Communion.

Faith and confession are joined together in vv 9-10: "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." What is in our heart is what comes out of our mouth. It is impossible to believe and not confess. And it is impossible to confess without believing. Our confession is that "Jesus is Lord." That historically has been the

simplest, yet most powerful, confession of the Church. And it is our bold confession today: Jesus is our Lord. This is the confession that will continue through all history. It is founded on the absolutely unshakable truth “that God raised him from the dead.” The resurrection of Jesus changes everything. There you have it, it is yours, trust it. But are we trusting it enough? We have the greatest treasure, we have the greatest weapon, we have the greatest resource for life, truth and hope, but are we trusting the word, that’s the question.

In the 2016 Risen movie, the story is told of the soldier tasked with finding Jesus’ body after the religious leaders claimed his disciples had stolen it. Eventually, he did find Jesus’ body. But it was not the dead body he had seen on Good Friday. The body of Jesus was very much alive! That’s the truth the disciples saw with their own eyes. In fact, over five hundred followers of Jesus saw him alive after Easter!

Paul, a Jew of impeccable credentials, agonizes over the fact that most of his fellow Jews have rejected the possibility that Jesus could be the Messiah. God’s word explains it clearly, it is easy to understand and yet so powerful. How can the Jew don’t get it? I’m sure Paul shook his head many times at this. Instead, they deny Jesus. They deny that he rose. They deny that he is God. And they are the children of Abraham by birth. This should have been the fulfillment of their faith. Instead, they have been pruned out of the tree of Christ and his Church. And in their place, the Gentiles have been grafted in (Romans 11).

The fact is that the truth of the Gospel, though easy to understand, is also hard to believe. The truth of the Gospel is easy to understand, but for the natural man, it is hard to believe. It is unbelievable folly to unbelievers. That is because the grace of God, God’s undeserved kindness toward us, runs contrary to our hard-truth way of thinking. It is so contrary to our natures to believe that God would save us not by our own works and deeds, but rather by sending his Son into our human flesh to live a perfect life under the Law to be our substitute and, as our substitute, to die in our place. And it is so contrary to reason that as our substitute, Jesus could unite our bodies to his body as he rose from the grave to defeat death! But God’s Word has power to do that thing human reason cannot do—create faith in God’s easy truth. Therefore, it’s just as vital that receive this truth, that God’s truth is powerful to create faith.

Paul is thankful so many Gentiles have come to faith. He is, after all, the missionary to the Gentiles. But he also hopes and prays that one day the Jews will also come to faith. And he knows it is not an either/or situation. God desires both to be saved, “for there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him” (Roms. 10:12). The riches of the

Gospel—forgiveness, life, and salvation—are for everyone! “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Roms. 10:13).

Paul’s great desire, then, is for all to believe and be saved. He knows this is the task and mission of the whole Church. How can people believe who haven’t heard? he asks in v 14. How can they hear unless someone preaches? How can someone preach unless he is sent?

And we, my friends, are the senders. We, the Church, have the privilege of sending people with beautiful feet—missionaries, pastors, proclaimers of the Word of Christ. The Word that they bring makes them beautiful as they preach the Good News. The message of salvation for the world God has placed in our hands! Through it, the Holy Spirit creates faith so that people believe and confess Jesus is Lord. “Faith comes from hearing,” Paul says, v 17—hearing the Word of Christ!

Scripture alone! Grace alone! Faith alone! Christ alone! These truths shine from the words of our text. The Word that ought to condemn us, instead gives us life. One “little” word, Christ, has conquered our foe!

Down the road from this first Sunday in Lent, we will see Christ stand before Pilate and declare that everyone on the side of truth would listen to his voice. Everything Jesus taught would be truth. It would not be the word of the world or our own reasoning, or even science or philosophy or psychology or politics. Not at all. Just the sweet, simple, and easy-yet-powerful words of Jesus, like those spoken to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” He said to her, as he says to you, “Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:25–26).

Amen.