

We bow our hearts in prayer: O Lord, grant to Your faithful people pardon and peace that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve You with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ Your Son, our Lord, who lives with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed,

As we continue through St. Paul's letter to the Christian's living in Rome,  
we have heard him contending that Jews and Gentiles are both to be saved by faith alone.

He is contending this because some were contending that they were righteous  
by observing the Law that God had given to Israel through Moses at Sinai in the OT.

But St. Paul, quoting numerous OT texts, points out that it has never been this way.

In the verse just before our text, he quotes the prophet Joel talking about how one is truly saved,  
**"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** Joel 2:32

So then both Jews and Gentiles are to be saved not by works of the Law,  
but by **calling on the name of the Lord** in faith, confessing Him as their Savior.

... We read as follows in Jesus' name:

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, *"How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"* But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, *"Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"* So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for

*"Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."*

But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

*"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."*

Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

*"I have been found by those who did not seek Me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me."*

But of Israel he says, *"All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people."* (ESV)

*This is Your Word, heavenly Father; **sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth.** Amen.* (John 17:17)

In this text, we hear the importance of God's Word for the life of the Church.

We hear how it is important because without the Word of God, no one can believe.

We humans in our sinful corrupted natures do not spontaneously start believing  
in the Triune God and Jesus (true God and true man) who died & rose for our justification.

We also hear the importance of those whom the Lord sends to speak His Word to us.

We could not hear His Word if God did not send men out to preach and proclaim it to us.

Today, pastors are not uncommon. Generally you have at least one in most churches.

(Sometimes you even have 3.)

You can watch them on TV. You can livestream countless numbers of them on a given Sunday.

If you don't like this one, you have the freedom to go somewhere else a few blocks away.

And to be sure, there's usually something about any given pastor that someone won't like. Someone once said, "Pastors make everyone happy. Some when he comes. Some when he stays. And some when he leaves."

The men who occupy the pastoral office are not perfect, flawless men. They are lazy. They are workaholics. They are too overbearing, too *laze faire*. Too energetic, too lethargic. Too loud, too quiet. Too emotional, too stiff. Too proud, too humble. Too wordy, too brief. Too nosy, too standoffish.

It is true, to some pastors the Lord has granted special graces so that they are well received in general by many people. But to most of the rest of us, we have a lot of personal foibles that raise numerous barriers. Those personal foibles distract from the purpose of the pastor: to speak for Christ.

But consider the image Isaiah gives of life back in the days of Judah's exile into Babylon. (People didn't wear leather wing-tips or high heels back then, just sandals.) Imagine that you are in captivity in a foreign land and have been so for many years. Then one day a messenger comes running across the desert, going from town to town, proclaiming a report from the king that you are now free, able to return to your country.

This is the scene of which Isaiah writes, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!*" Now, to the objective observer, those dusty, grimy, sweaty, stinky feet are truly gross. But to the captive who receives the good news, they are the sweetest feet he knows.

Pastors are nothing special. They are common ordinary men. They sin just like everyone else. To the objective observer, you could probably choose someone better, more personable, engaging, or dynamic to listen to for 17 minutes each week. Except...

Except that you are not listening to the pastor himself. Not if he is truly the Lord's servant. Jesus once said, **My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.**<sup>John10:27</sup> For someone to believe in Jesus, he must hear Jesus. Not hear "of" Jesus, but hear Jesus. St. Paul makes this point too in his letter to the Romans and I think it is a point that worth clarifying in the translation of our text this morning. When we read, **And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?** The text more literally says, And how shall they believe who they did not hear. Not "of whom they have not heard," but "who they did not hear."

And then he goes on to ask, **And how are they to hear without someone preaching? How are you to hear Jesus (not hear of Jesus, but how are you to hear Jesus Himself) without someone preaching?**

You see, the special thing about pastors is not their personality or character. It is their message. And it isn't even their message. It is Jesus' message. That message is one of freedom. Freedom from the captivity to sin, death, and the devil. The declaration of forgiveness, life, and salvation. And when you hear it from a duly called and ordained servant of the Lord,

it is the official proclamation of your Father in heaven.

Jesus told His called and chosen disciples, "**He who hears you, hears Me.**" Luke 10:16

Judgement day is then upon you and you hear God's verdict officially pronounced upon you,  
"**Be of good cheer. Your sins are forgiven.**"

But how often do we treat that message as if it is so common that it is not important?

How often do we ignore that proclamation of forgiveness by neglecting the Divine Service?

We take it for granted that the church will be here next week. "I will go then," you say.

We underestimate the corruption of our sin and think, "I don't need to be forgiven this week."

(Actually, I doubt that many of us have truly thought that,

but when we carelessly pass up the opportunity to hear Jesus speak to us,

this is in essence what we are saying.)

We get tired of the pastor's peculiar mannerisms and ignore the sermon,

distracting ourselves with our plans for the next week

or fixating on some visual element of the church building, or going to our "nothing box."

We neglect the Lord's coming to be with us with His body and blood

and treat the Lord's Supper as if it were some holy snack that we can take or leave.

We assume that others will support the church and the ministers and take care of it

and it will continue as it always has for the last 20 years.

We satisfy ourselves thinking that we are keeping the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment by showing up

regularly or every now and then... but we are the only ones we satisfy with this thinking.

...

But we are not the first to have such thoughts. Israel and Judah acted this way, too.

They behaved this way back in Isaiah's day and he writes,

"**Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?**" Isaiah 53:1

During Isaiah's time, the kingdom of Israel was taken into exile, never to return.

And he prophesied that Judah too would go into captivity, and when it happened,

the temple, the beautiful temple that Solomon had built and Judah neglected, was torn down.

It happened in Jesus own day, when Jesus Himself preached to Israel.

And they destroyed that Temple too.

And Jesus warned His apostles: "**The one who hears you hears Me,**

**and the one who rejects you rejects Me, and the one who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me.**"

Israel found themselves in a world of pain and suffering for their neglect.

By their actions and in-actions, they *despised preaching and God's Word.*

Instead of *holding it sacred*, they thought it common.

And therefore, they did not *gladly hear and learn it*. They crucified God's Word.

"**All day long I have held out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people,**" God says.

This is you and me. We have been disobedient and contrary. We have crucified God's Word.

...

But listen, His voice is still going out. He is still calling you back to Him in repentance.

Therefore confess your sins against His Word, against His Son, and hear His holy judgment.

Dear fellow redeemed, those hands that He holds out all day long are held out for you.

It was for your taking Jesus' forgiveness for granted, your underestimation of your own sin,

your despising of preaching, your assumption that others are to support the church,

your neglect of the Lord's Supper, your self-satisfaction in your own works of righteousness, that Jesus held out his hands to be extended on the cross for death. God has punished His only-begotten Son, the only one able to take your sins upon Himself, and by Jesus' blood has blotted out all your transgressions. You are clean, having been washed in Holy Baptism and declared righteous.

And this is an important distinction, this declaration of righteousness. For God knows that you still have your sinful nature clinging to you until death. So it is important that you hear His declaration... that you are holy in His sight. Otherwise you wouldn't believe it. You couldn't believe it, for **faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.**

Isaiah rhetorically asked, "**Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?**" Thanks be to God that you do.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,  
as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forevermore. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*