

Pastor Joe Polzin  
Revelation 14:6-7  
“The Eternal Gospel”  
Year A – Reformation Sunday  
October 29, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Are you a person who likes to keep up with the news? Are you always up-to-date with the biggest headlines? I can't say that I'm very good at keeping up with the latest. It's difficult to do! Reporting and journalism, especially in today's day and age, is a very competitive business. And people want the very latest, the next twist, the hottest opinion, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

But even the hottest stories can quickly fade. They quickly become “yesterday's news.” Remember the hurricanes, for example? It's not as if the people *there* have forgotten, or aren't still dealing with it. But as big and important as that story was, national interest fades. The next thing comes around. Our attention is re-directed, and everyone desires *new* news.

Today, this Reformation Sunday, we are celebrating some news, some *good news* that is completely different than what you'll find on your favorite news channel or website. This news never grows old. It never grows stale. It's never outdated. It never becomes “yesterday's news.” This *good news* is the enduring, life-giving, salvation-bestowing Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's what we celebrate today, this the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. That God keeps sending forth the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be proclaimed to all the world, *since* the world's beginning, and all the way until its very end.

The Apostle John writes about this Gospel in our reading from Revelation today. Look at that First Reading with me, from Revelation chapter 14. Now, in the first five verses of the chapter, John describes God's Church on earth, that's us, Christians who follow the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who are marked by the waters of Baptism, and who are singing praises to their Lord. And while all this is going on, he sees an angel flying over the earth, proclaiming the Gospel of the Lamb. Let's take a closer look at that Gospel, look at verse 6 with me.

First, the Gospel message is just that: the Gospel. Gospel is the Greek word for “good news,” and in this case, the good news of Jesus. Our other readings today state clearly what that Gospel is: that, though “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” as Romans says, we are “justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24). And, as Jesus says in John, those who have been set free by the Son, are “free indeed” (John 8:36).

Second, the message of the Gospel is a heavenly message, as John describes the angel flying “directly overhead.” The word there actually means “in the middle of heaven.” The angel is positioned in the most central, most noticeable spot in the sky, loudly speaking this heavenly Gospel to those on earth. He's speaking from heaven, from God, to earth, to us. He's hovering over all the earth and sharing the good news of Jesus.

Third, The Gospel message a universal message, as it's proclaimed to “every nation and tribe and language and people” (Rev. 14:6). It's a message for every single person who ever has or ever will live, no exceptions. *All* have sinned, but *all* have been forgiven by Christ.

And fourth, the Gospel is an “eternal Gospel,” as John writes. The good news of the Lamb slain for sinners has existed before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). It is a singular

and unchanging message of hope and salvation in Christ, which will be proclaimed to all the world, until the very end of the world. It's an *eternal* message of *eternal* life with Christ, who was dead but who now lives *eternally*.

And this is where I'd like us to focus in our remaining time, on the eternal nature of this message, of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because this isn't news that has ever or will ever fade away into "yesterday's news." This is the powerful message of God that endures. Which comforts us, especially when we see, and this is true of every age, the great enemies of God and His Gospel seek to extinguish it.

Already in John's day, the early Christian church was facing persecution because of their faith. The Jewish leaders opposed them. The Romans killed them and made them martyrs. False teachers attempting to teach other options to the one, true Gospel rose up. John describes, in the previous chapter of Revelation, two beasts, as symbols for this evil opposition, deceiving and murdering believers. Christians must have been asking themselves, "Can the Church continue? Can the Gospel endure?"

But the Gospel kept flying. "The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church" (Tertullian), and the eternal Gospel spread throughout the Roman Empire and across the world.

Fast-forward fifteen hundred years, in the time of the medieval church. The Muslim armies threatened to overrun Christian Europe. The Gospel had long been clouded with false teachings, Church leaders more interested in riches and power than the truth of Christ, and a spiritual ignorance after centuries of failing to teach the faith. The Gospel was being turned into a strange message, a mixture of grace and works, a confusion of Law and Gospel. There was no comfort in Christ, because no one knew how to speak it. Those who were aware enough to ask, must have been wondering, "Can the Church continue? Can the Gospel endure?"

But the Gospel kept flying. God raised up Luther and other reformers who pointed clearly and unmistakably to Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners. God revealed to Luther through the Word, not some new message, but the eternal Gospel for the sake of the world.

So, how about our day? The Church is still under siege. False teachings. Divisions within Christianity. Governments that begin to restrict or even forbid the true Gospel of Christ and those who would follow it. A culture that is well-entrenched in seeking out its own truth, its own feel-good messages, its own desires of the heart. A Church that is shrinking. As we look around, we may be tempted to ask, "Can the Church continue? Can the Gospel endure?"

The angel that John saw was the heavenly proclamation of the Gospel that is for all people, over all time. And that Gospel continues to be proclaimed today. In the time of the Reformation, as early as 1522, some among Luther's supporters actually began identifying that Gospel-bearing angel in Revelation 14:6 with Luther himself. So freeing was his preaching of the Gospel of Christ, that many who had suffered under the burden of trying to earn their salvation by what they do, were now eternally indebted to what Luther had proclaimed.

But Luther would be the first to point out, it wasn't *his* message. It's the eternal truth of God's Word. And so, while Luther may have symbolically and truly fulfilled the role of this angel in Revelation, so do *all* pastors and proclaimers who, throughout history, point people to Jesus Christ.

You see, the Gospel of Jesus is this. That he, with the Father and the Holy Spirit created a world to be inhabited and graciously co-governed by us, so that God might share His love and grace and fellowship with us. Yet, we sinned, and continue to sin, and darken this world with the disease of sin that infects and kills every generation.

But, instead of walking away, God did the opposite. He stepped into this world that He had created with His own two hands, and became one of us. God the Son was born a child, Jesus, and lived a life in humility, and yet also sinless-ness. He demonstrated by his life and teachings that He was blameless before the Father, and that he had been sent to reconcile us to Him. He suffered, was crucified, died, and was buried.

But not death, nor sin, nor sinful men could destroy him. He rose again victorious to show us that he has the power over all things. And he ascended into heaven to rule over all things, until the day when he will return, restoring to this world and to us the perfection that once existed before sin and death. And until that day when he returns, we proclaim the good news of his victory for all, the forgiveness he extends to all people, and the eternal life he's given to us for free.

Can the Church continue, even in a day and age when it seems like it's coming to an end? Can the Gospel endure, even in a world that seems to be crowding it out with competing messages? The answer, thanks be to God, is *yes*. Because the Gospel is eternal. Jesus is eternal. He will never fail. God's enemies may strive hard against His Word, but the victory's been won.

As the hymn, "A Mighty Fortress" says, "God's Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it; For God Himself fights by our side With weapons of the Spirit. Were they to take our house, Goods, honor, child, or spouse, Though life be wrenched away, They cannot win the day. The Kingdom's ours forever!"

In 2015, a Confessional Lutheran Leadership Conference was held in Wittenberg, Germany, that little city where Luther taught and preached. This conference included participants from Germany, Sweden, Norway, the US and Canada, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Tanzania, Cameroon, Cambodia, Malaysia, Japan, Australia, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, and many others!

Gathered together, they heard with joy the preaching of this Gospel. They sang the praises of the Lamb who was slain, and who, by his blood, has redeemed those from every nation and tribe and language and people. Together, they thanked God for what He had passed down through Luther's Reformation—the good news that they have been indeed set free by the Son.

And it's a little glimpse of that vision from Revelation, as John describes it. Because what we see today, is that Confessional Lutheranism, which is nothing more than Christians who stand squarely on the authority of God's Word and the Gospel of Christ alone, Confessional Lutheranism is exploding worldwide.

In the 1500s, Lutheranism took hold on the continent of Europe. Today, Europe is spiritually darkened, not dead, but darkened. And the US may or may not be heading that way. But if we take a moment to zoom out, and see what God is doing worldwide, what we see is an unprecedented growth of Confessional Lutheranism in the world today, primarily in Africa, Asia, and South America. And the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is the forefront leader in this regard.

As a church body, we're walking side-by-side with millions of our brothers and sisters from around the world who rejoice in the Gospel daily. And again, it's not about us, as if we're the only Christians out there. It's about that Church, in Revelation 14, who follow Christ alone. And it is a reminder to us that God is always preserving His Church. And He's always sending forth the Gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ, to be proclaimed to all the world, *since* the world's beginning, and all the way until its very end.

And so today, we celebrate more than simply the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. Today we celebrate the heavenly message of the universal and eternal Gospel of Christ, which

had been promised since before the foundations of the earth, and proclaimed faithfully for thousands of years. It's news that will never grow old, never fade away. Christ's victory for us over all his enemies will continue to be proclaimed, the Spirit will continue to change hearts, the Church will always endure, and the Gospel good news will continue to reform lives until the day he returns again. In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

(Sermon is adapted from Rev. Thomas Egger, *Concordia Pulpit Resources*, October 29, 2017.)