

“A Gospel for All Times and People”

Today we rejoice at the baptism of Cullen, and as with all baptisms, it is a reminder of the gift that God has given to us. As we celebrate his birth and rebirth, one might wonder – “What kind of a world will he grow up in?”

Even before the chaos of 2020, things have been precarious. Change happens so fast these days, and it is so dramatic. Cracks appear in the foundational things like the family, our constitutional republic, and even in the church. Simply put, things are not always so certain and sure.

Truth is whatever you want it to be. The family has been shaken and stirred, and pieced back together. Pronouncements from the pope send shock waves through Christianity. Again, one might wonder – “What kind of world will we grow up in?”

God speaks into this chaos – and St. John proclaims His Word into our ears this day. “Then I saw another angel flying directly overhead, with an eternal gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tribe and language of people.”

An “eternal” gospel. Good news that has no beginning or end – because it is the Gospel of Him who is eternal – the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

The “eternal” gospel is not at the whim of the times, or cultures, or ideologies. It is God’s good news in each and every generation – for each and every person – for all who dwell on earth, those of every nation and tribe and language of people. In other words, this “eternal gospel” is for Cullen – and for you, and me – and for all people.

What does this mean in our day to day lives? It means that God is at work through His Word – both His Word of Law and His Word of Gospel – “for you.” The progressive world may continually redefine words and come up with its own flexible truths – but “the word of the Lord endures forever.” (1 Peter 1:25)

As we heard in the Epistle, God preaches His Law so that all mouths may be stopped – so that the whole world may be held accountable to God – so that all people, including you and I, may know our sin. He preaches the demands of the Law so that you may see that you have not done what He desires – so that you stop trying to make excuses for your sins of thought, word and deed.

A natural reaction to learning that we have done something wrong is to make up for it – to fix what we have broken – to reconcile our relationship. How is that working for you? Have you fixed everything? Are you justified before God and your fellow man?

Only one who is deceived would dare to claim – “it is finished” – “I’ve done what is necessary” – “I have made all things right.” If you think you have no sin, or, can make up for your own sin – then why would you need a Savior?

God says there is no distinction, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” All are sinners, in need of salvation – and so He preaches His Law to you. You need to hear it – you need to have your life put under His microscope – you need to be cut to the heart, to be devastated by what you’ve done, and left undone.

God preaches His Law to you so that you might realize your need for deliverance – but that is not the life He wants you to live – living under the condemnation of the Law – toiling under the burden of guilt and shame. So, He sends His angels (His messengers) to preach the “eternal gospel” to you.

“If you abide in my word,” Jesus says, “you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Did you notice who Jesus is speaking to? He said this “to the Jews who had believed in Him.” He tells believers to abide in His Abiding Word. We need to hear that, because we are tempted to respond as they did.

Jesus promises them freedom – and their sinful pride immediately rejects His truth. They claim their own righteousness – “we are offspring of Abraham.” They deny their sin and its bondage – we have “never been enslaved to anyone.”

Unless God convicts you of your sin and slavery – you see no need for His Gospel, His Savior, Jesus.

The problem in the church at the time of the Reformation was that many who claimed to be children of God were no longer abiding in His Word. The teachings of men had dulled God's intended use of His Law, and darkened the light of His Gospel.

God's Law and Gospel were misused, mingled, redefined. The Law was tossed out like a life preserver by which man was to save Himself. The Gospel no longer focused solely on Christ, and His atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world – but rather, had become a Law dressed in Gospel clothing.

The people of that time lived under the Law – in slavery – relegated to a burdensome toil of trying to make things right with God. That is not the life which God created them, or you, to live.

It has been said that the church is always in need of being reformed, and that is true. Sinful man substitutes his truth for God's truth, and does not abide in His Word. And so, the “eternal gospel” – God's Law and Gospel – must be preached in every generation, to all people, to you.

He has given His Son, Jesus Christ, to take your sin as His own, to suffer and die in your place, and to be raised to life again so that you may have life. In Christ you are set free – free to live before God as one who is righteous in His sight.

“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith.”

That is the “eternal gospel” – that God has redeemed you by the blood of Jesus Christ. You are free from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus, your Savior, has reconciled you to the Father – and even now, you stand before Him as His beloved child – holy and righteous in His sight – all because of Jesus.

Dearly beloved, what kind of world will you grow up in? One in which you are justified by faith in Jesus – forgiven and free – today, and forevermore. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.