

“The Preached Word”

“Don’t preach to me,” one spouse might say to the other. Or, when someone has been on their soapbox, railing away – someone might respond, “Boy, he sure is preachy.”

Preaching often has a negative connotation associated with it. Even the dictionary definition seems to pile on – “to preach” – to give advice or urge a course of action, especially in a meddlesome or tedious manner.” As you may expect, I’m not enthralled with the reputation that preaching has – after all, it’s my vocation.

After all, the carpenter doesn’t excuse himself for building something. The mechanic doesn’t say, “I’m sorry for tuning this engine” – or an accountant apologizing for balancing the books. But preaching, that’s another story.

The prophet Jeremiah was called to preach – and his call was a tough one – preaching to a people who didn’t want to hear what he had to say.

So Jeremiah tries to wiggle out of it – saying he’s too young – no one will listen to me. But preaching is not about the preacher (even though many preachers seem to like to draw attention to themselves). Preaching is about the Word proclaimed.

Christian preaching is the living and active Word of God that kills and makes alive. As God Himself says – His Word never returns to Him empty – His Word creates, and upholds, and sustains. And that is a good thing.

Last week Jesus was preaching in His hometown synagogue and the people almost threw Him off a cliff. Today, in our Gospel reading, Jesus is preaching in Capernaum – and the congregation is astonished with the authority of Jesus’ words.

You see, Jesus isn’t simply another preacher delivering a sermon – He is the Sermon – He is the Word of God made flesh. He is God’s sermon to the world – sent to preach good news --- the good news that God reigns over all things – that in Jesus is the end of demonic terror, the end of disease and death, the end of the condemnation of the Law that weighs heavily on all mankind.

Jesus is the Gospel! The good news that you are pardoned – that your death sentence has been lifted – that your sin is covered by His blood – that you are free from the condemnation of the Law.

All of this is conveyed to you by the humble, lowly preached Word. Do not despise these words sounding forth from a simple mouth. Don't close your ears to the Word of God – because it is His divine power and authority.

That power is shown in the synagogue at Capernaum – in a man plagued with the spirit of an unclean demon who has brought chaos and disorder to his life. With a word from Jesus' lips the demon is muzzled, silenced, and cast away. Even the demons must obey the Word of God-in-the-flesh-Jesus.

Then Jesus is off to pay a house call on Simon Peter's mother-in-law. She is sick with fever – and Jesus comes and rebukes the fever – muzzling it like the demon.

Both are the result of sin which seeks to sever one from God – lives that Jesus has come to restore. Like the demons – and anything else that would seek to bind God's good creation – the fever must hear and obey the Word of God – for God does what He says.

She is set free – free from the fever – and free to serve – even on the Sabbath day. That is why Jesus has come – to be our Sabbath rest. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest,” He promises.

And then, as the sun was setting on the Sabbath – all the sick and demonized are brought to Jesus – who lays His hands on them and heals them. All night He tends to the sick and demonized – for He is the Light who comes into the world and drives away the darkness.

When morning comes, we see that Jesus has snuck out of town and has gone out into the wilderness. The people come, begging Him to stay – but He must continue His journey to the cross – leaving Sabbath rest in His wake. “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose,” He says.

Jesus was sent to preach. The healings, the casting out of demons – all the displays of His divine authority – they all serve to validate His preaching.

It's all about the preaching and hearing of the Word. That's how God's kingdom comes to us – that is how He rules over our sin, death and the devil. When God gives us His Holy Spirit by the Gospel – when the Word of God is preached in its truth and purity, and we, as the baptized children of God believe it and live holy lives according to it – He is muzzling our chaos and giving us His rest.

It is the living voice of this Jesus who preached in the synagogues of Judea who now preaches to this gathering of God's people today. His Word of forgiveness, His recreating Word of Baptism, His nourishing Word of the Supper – all is His preaching the good news into your ears – ears that are often reluctant – ears dulled by the noise of this world – ears that are distracted by demonic side-shows.

Jesus is God's sermon to you today – by which He rules over your sin with His redeeming blood – conquering your death by His bloody death and giving you life with His victorious resurrection. Dearly beloved, Christ Jesus has set you free from all sin that muzzles you. You are forgiven.

“Don't preach to me”? Faith doesn't talk like that. Rather, faith says – “Preach to us, Lord! And don't stop preaching until we see you face to face. Until then, preach your good news to us – so that we may have rest.” Amen.

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