

A few weeks ago, we talked about how the Divine Service is a dialog with God. We come to Him in prayer, and then He answers us through His Word in the readings, to which we then respond to by confessing that we believe with the Creed, and we praise God with a hymn.

The problem is that sometimes it is a challenge to read and understand the Bible. We like to talk about how important it is to read the Bible and how clear the Bible is, but to be honest, often it is not as clear as we wish it were.

It is all too easy to take something from the Bible out of context and inadvertently twist it's meaning. So many false teachers start with the Bible but then misuse it by taking it out of context. But you don't have to be trying to twist God's Word, often we can misunderstand something because we do not understand the full context of the passage. Without a thorough knowledge of the Bible, we can be unsure of what a given part of the Bible is talking about.

When we talk about the Bible being clear, we mean that when it comes to matters of salvation, and with a proper Biblical context, it does reveal to us everything we need to know. However, there are parts that are less clear as well.

The real problem is: how are we to understand what the Bible is saying, and particularly, what is it saying to us here today? Let's be honest, who of us hasn't, at some time, felt frustrated in reading the Bible?

The truth is, reading the Bible is something that we need to learn and grow into. Sometimes reading the Bible takes real effort and guidance to fully understand it. There are parts that are abundantly clear, like John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” However, there are other parts, like the Book of Revelation, that are far more difficult to understand.

Not only that, but there is sometimes a gap between understanding what a text means and then applying it to ourselves. For instance, we can read about God rescuing the people of Israel from slavery in the Exodus, and it sounds like it is just ancient history. So, what does that have to do with us? How does the Bible apply to us? It is not enough for us to simply hear the words of Scripture and move on. Rather, we need to think about them and truly apply them to ourselves.

So, how are we to do this? Well, that is the purpose of the sermon. Obviously, the sermon is one of the centerpieces of our worship service. You can even tell that when you enter a church, due to the prominence of the pulpit. The fact that we have a pronounced piece of furniture just for the sermon speaks to its importance. The sermon is also the most visible part of the service. It is what we are most likely to talk about afterwards.

In fact, the sermon is so important that only in extreme cases do we not have one. No worship service is truly complete without a sermon. Virtually any other part of the service can be omitted, but if we don’t have God’s Word read and expounded on, then it isn’t really a worship service of any sort.

As I mentioned a while ago, the Divine Service has two main parts: the Service of the Word and the Service of the Sacrament. With the Sermon,

the Service of the Word reaches its climax. The Sermon is even important enough to have its own hymn attached to it.

Why the big deal about the sermon? Because, in the Sermon, God’s Word is applied to us. This is where the pastor takes it out of the realm of abstract and brings it into real life. The sermon is intended to bring the truth of Scripture into our lives.

This practice has a long history. In our Old Testament reading, we heard how Ezra had a group of people who “helped the people to understand the Law” and “They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.” Likewise, while we tend to focus on the miracles, the primary work of much of Jesus’ ministry was preaching. And as we heard in our Gospel reading, Jesus also sent out His disciples “to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.”

Because of its importance, the sermon is one of the parts of the service that should be done by a pastor. In fact, even when a seminary student preaches a sermon, it was previously read and approved by a pastor before he could preach it. The reason is to make sure that the exposition is in fact correct. It is all too easy to just give our opinions. But what we need is a right understanding of Scripture. This is why we only entrust this part of the service to men who are theologically trained and have been examined by the Church.

But the sermon isn’t about the pastor, rather it’s the message. It is pretty obvious that different pastors have different styles. Some pastors are simply better speakers than others. But what really matters is the content of the message.

One of the curious things about the sermon is that it is supposed to talk about things we don’t like. Yes, the high point of the service includes talking about how bad we are. A good sermon discusses our weaknesses.

Of course, nobody likes to think about their problems. Yet a good sermon talks about the problems that we face. It should confront us with the things we do wrong. It should remind us that we are weak and need help. We need to discuss our frustrations. A sermon is supposed to remind us that we are far from perfect. It is supposed to bring problems of ours to the fore.

Moreover, it is supposed to remind us that we are often the root of our problems. We need to be reminded of our failings, of the wrong things we do. To put it simply, we are to be reminded that we are sinful. In fact, it is our sinfulness that causes us to misunderstand and misapply the Bible.

This is one of the reasons that we sometimes make excuses to miss church. We don’t want to be reminded of our guilt. Likewise, we tend to chafe at those times when the Law in the sermon hits a little too close to home. We don’t like to hear that we are sinners – but we need to!

However, the goal of this is to point us to Jesus. It is to remind us of our need for Him, so we can appreciate Him all the more. In John 5:39 Jesus explains “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.” Therefore, a faithful sermon brings this truth out.

When we see our sin in all its ugliness, then the cross is more beautiful. We need to see that we are in fact sinful and impure, so that we will crave, love, and cling to God’s forgiveness in Christ. As Paul assures us

in our text: “For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’”

The point of every good sermon is to turn our hearts to what Jesus has done for us. Why? For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Having our sin and guilt pointed out to us is not to make us feel bad. Rather, it is so that we will gladly hear the message of Jesus’ forgiveness. After all, Jesus came, suffered, died and rose from the dead so that you and I may be forgiven and have the promise of God’s blessings, now and in eternity. As Paul puts it so well, “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.” Yes, the fact that God raised Jesus from the dead for your sake, gives you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

And this message is to come to us, amongst other ways, through the preaching of God’s Word. The role of preaching is so important that Paul expounds on it in our text. He starts with the rhetorical question: “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?” Paul is pointing out that we need faith to reap the benefits God offers; but where does faith come from? So, Paul asks: “And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?”

He then points out that we need to hear about what Jesus has done for us to have this faith when he then asks: “And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” This brings us back to the sermon.

The sermon is vital, because here we get the goods delivered in the clearest way. We hear not only what Jesus has done for us, but how that

Romans 10:5-17 “The Sermon”

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affects our lives. Because of Jesus, we should be able to face whatever life brings us. The sermon is one way we are reminded of this and prepared for life.