

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Pentecost 20
Saturday, October 5, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, October 6, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

“The Picture of Your Salvation”

Hebrews 2:1-13

We have been journeying through Mark’s Gospel this Pentecost season. As we saw a couple weeks ago in Mark chapter 9, Jesus brought the young boy into the midst of all the disciples and said, “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me.” In our Gospel reading today, the disciples now have a chance to put into practice what the Lord has taught them.

So what do they do? People were bringing little children to Jesus so that He could touch them and bless them. And the disciples were trying to stop this. Even though Jesus has said, “You must have the faith of a little child” and “Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me.”

Our journey through the Gospel of Mark is such a clear example of how God has used very flawed children of Adam to build His church. The disciples and pastors throughout the generations have all had their flaws and weaknesses. Yet, God is able to cause His Word to prosper and not return empty.

We are constantly reminded that it is the Word that does the work. As Luther says in the Catechism, “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified, and kept me in the true faith.”

The author of Hebrews says, “We must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” This is why we continually ask the old

Lutheran question: What does this mean? As I mentioned last week, details about God are important.

Details about God's Word is important. The amazing thing about God's Word being written down by 40 different men over thousands of years is that there are no contradictions to be found in the different passages of Holy Scripture. There are 63,779 identifiable cross references between different verses in the Bible. If you include themes, words, events, and people, there are an estimated 340,000 cross references. It is the most hyper-linked book ever written.

However, it is a book with a simple message and the clear teachings of Holy Scripture have been distilled down and taught as the creeds of the church. They have stood the test of time and have been shown again and again to be faithful. God's Word is both simple and complex at the same time.

The complexity of deeply interpreting the entirety of the Bible would be like putting together a 1,000,000 piece jigsaw puzzle – hence, the creeds and Luther's Catechisms. Dumping out 1,000,000 pieces would seem like an insurmountable task. Where do you start? This piece of blue; is it sky or is it water? What is the first step? Good luck finding a table. Well, the first step is to look at the cover of the box to see what the one who created this puzzle intends for it to look like. That is the simplicity of the Gospel.

In Baptism, we are given all 1,000,000 pieces of the puzzle; and He shows us the cover of the box. Our faith is complete. He has given you the picture of your salvation. There is nothing more that we need. We have the picture of our salvation on the cover of the box. The Gospel is simple and clear. Jesus says: "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Peter says: "Baptism now saves you." A baptized child has everything they need for salvation.

However, we are compelled to "search the Scriptures." Jesus says of partaking of His body and blood, "Do this in remembrance of Me." This is where we start wrestling with the complexity of the puzzle, even though we already see

the full picture of our salvation. We just aren't quite sure how it all fits together yet. This is where having the faith of a little child is important. Without that simple faith, Scripture remains a closed book. Without the picture of our salvation before our eyes, the pieces of the puzzle would seem random and meaningless – which is why those without faith dismiss Christ and His Church so readily.

The creeds, and confessions of the church like Luther's Catechism, are guides for seeing how God's Word fits together. It is good to have that basic overview of what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done for you. And for many generations, these simple writings have been shown to be in complete harmony with the complexity of God's Word.

Therefore, if you hear a Bible passage being interpreted in such a way that it contradicts one of the creeds or confessions of faith, then we know that someone may be trying to put that piece of the puzzle in the wrong place. This is your opportunity to help them understand the truth. Even the disciples got things wrong and needed to be corrected.

As Solomon says, "Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning" [Prov. 9:8-9]. I believe every day you learn something new is a good day.

Now, when you are putting a jigsaw puzzle together, different people have different strategies. Most everyone starts with the edges, because those are the simplest to put together, and it gives you a solid framework. We do the same thing with God's Word. Let's start with the clear and obvious truths and not step outside the framework. Let's even stay away from Revelation until we understand the Gospels and Paul's letters and Leviticus. But no matter what strategy you use when putting your puzzle together, one thing is necessary: time.

It is like I said last week: Ask yourself this question, "Did I come to know Christ through a great, mighty, eye-popping spectacle? Or was it through the daily

and weekly exposure to God's Word and the means of grace found in His Church?" My guess is that, for most of us, our parents or a faithful guardian brought us to the services in God's House, taught us the Commandments, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and we had no idea how dynamic of a gift we were receiving.

God has given us all the pieces of the puzzle, and He has shown us the picture of our salvation. It is my prayer that you spend time with God's Word. Don't say, "It's too confusing to read." Or "I don't have time to come to Bible class, or when I do, then I just keep having more questions than answers." It is true. The simple answers always lead to more complex questions. That was certainly the consensus of comments after last Sunday's Bible class.

Now none of us know all the answers, because there are some questions which simply cannot be answered. We must learn to embrace paradox – two truths which seem to contradict, but are both true. The Bible is not simply God's big answer book for life. It is not a "how to" guide. The Gospel contained therein is a Means of Grace. It is the means by which God has chosen to speak His word of promise to you and show you the picture of your salvation.

It is the process of working at the puzzle that allows you to grow in your understanding of God and what He has done for you – as the picture is revealed more and more throughout the process. But remember that, in Baptism, you already have everything you need. And remember that all of this is simply about Jesus, the Son of God taking away your sin through His broken body and shed blood on the cross, and defeating death by rising from the grave. God speaks that simple reality to you in His Word.

Spend some time with God's Word. This is where He speaks to you. As the letter to the Hebrews says, "Pay close attention to what you have heard, lest you drift away from it." Embrace and share that glorious, simple picture of your salvation found in the Word of God which He has mercifully revealed to you. Amen.