

## INI

2 Corinthians 4,1-12

Bernthal Installation — 29 January 2017

**Greeting:** To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Epistle lesson from Saint Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, which was read earlier, and which Pastor Bernthal chose for this service. The apostle writes:

For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, Who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One Who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

**So far the reading. Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Introduction:** We are indeed thankful that God the Holy Spirit led Pastor Bernthal to accept the Call from St. Stephen of the East and West Bay and today we rejoice that we will be installing him as the under-shepherd of Christ of these congregations and St. Stephen Lutheran School. We are also thankful that God granted him favorable weather so that he did not face snowstorms when crossing over into California over the Donner Pass – perhaps bad road surfaces but not bad weather.

That says something about Pastor Bernthal in particular and pastors in general – pastors do not get a pass from good things or bad things which befall all of us as human beings. As a matter of fact, since the

word “pastor” means “shepherd” in Latin, we also think of our great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and neither did He get a free pass from the good things or the bad things which befall all people.

Paul speaks of Jesus being Lord, but Jesus is a special kind of Lord. He is not a lord after the ways of the world but rather comes to us as the Lord of Salvation, seeking not His own good but ours.

This brings me to my sermon theme for today, “**Jesus Is Lord.**” I’ll develop this theme in three parts:

**1) God Speaks So We Speak**

**2) We Are Servants Who Faithfully Speak God’s Word; and,**

**3) We Have A Treasure In Earthen Vessels**

**1) God Speaks So We Speak.** The first spoken words ever recorded are God’s words – “Let there be light!” With these words, creation and our world and cosmos began. Indeed, with these words, time itself began.

This is what we confess in the First Article of the Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

Of course we know that God did not set creation in motion and then take a rest. Over six days He created the heavens and the earth; He created all things, visible and invisible – by the way, that is “visible and invisible” only from our perspective because nothing is hidden from God.

We know what God created was good. But our first parents doubted God, thought they could be like God, and plunged themselves the rest of creation into sin, whose wage is the darkness of death.

Now even though the world was plunged into sin, God continued to watch over His creation and sustain and uphold that creation. But nothing in all of creation could bridge the gap between the created and the Creator – a gap which had been created by sin.

So once again God spoke a Word – this time it was the Word become flesh, the Word of Salvation and God’s saving light shone forth in the face of God the Son, Jesus Christ.

In the beginning of John’s Gospel, John says that the darkness tried to overcome the light, but the darkness couldn’t. On Good Friday, it looked as if Death had won the battle as Jesus was taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb. But on Easter morning, Jesus rose from the dead and the Light of the Word had overcome the darkness of death.

Thus, the job of a pastor is to speak God’s Word. It is to speak the Word of Law which exposes and condemns sin, and then to speak the Word of Forgiveness which can only come from what God the Son has done for us. Here indeed light shines out of darkness in the very face of Christ.

Thus, in Christ,

## **2) We Are Servants Who Faithfully Speak God’s Word.**

Pastors are servants who base their service on Jesus, Who, as our Gospel lesson tells us, “came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus is indeed the Lord of Creation, but as He comes to us He is also the Lord of Salvation, and as such comes to serve with His very life.

Probably the greatest service we can render is to faithfully speak God’s Word and properly administer the Sacraments. This means there

are things to do and things to avoid. After all, that's what Jesus Himself did during His earthly ministry. On the night when He was betrayed Jesus was surrounded by His disciples and prayed to His heavenly Father, saying,

For I given unto them the Words which You have given Me; and they have received them and have known surely that I came from You, and they have believed that You did send Me. (John 17,8)

We speak the whole counsel of God, and base that counsel on the God-breathed Scriptures of the Old and the New Testament. We maintain that they are without error and reliable. We do not hesitate to properly use scholarship to back that up.

Let me give one example. We have hundreds of manuscripts which attest to the New Testament. There are some fragments of Gospels that are dated to within a generation of Jesus. Most complete manuscripts are within a hundred or two years of Jesus. Differences in manuscripts are for the most part copy errors – after all, everything was written out by hand. All of this means we can state without qualification that Jesus was a real, historical figure. Contrast that with the earliest manuscript we have for Julius Caesar's Gallic Wars – that manuscript is dated 900 years after Caesar lived. Does anyone doubt that Julius Caesar was a real historical figure?

We speak where God speaks and are silent where God is silent. We just went through a contentious presidential election. My take on that is that God does not tell us for whom to vote, but He does tell us for whom to pray. Thus, the faithful pastor is called upon to give spiritual advice – not political, economic, social or what have you. After all, Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world."

Paul also tells us that he does not use craftiness or adulterate God's

Word. That means neither adding to it nor subtracting from it. But subtler than that is twisting God's Word. In the Garden of Eden the old evil foe sowed the seed of doubt by asking, "Did God really say?" Today I guess the idea would be, "Well, you cannot expect what Paul wrote almost two thousand years ago to apply to today's modern and so-called more enlightened world.

Let me use another example. What about Paul's advise that women should cover their heads? Many might say this was sexist. But a Yale classics professor wrote a book about Paul. She thought she was going to expose him as a sexist and homophobic individual. When she started to research this she completely changed her mind. In the example about a head covering for women she saw that in Greek society married women and widows could cover their head the unmarried, those women who were not citizens, those who were slaves, indeed, even prostitutes had to go about uncovered. But what does Paul say without saying it? In the Church all women should cover their heads. What does that mean? It means that in the Church social distinctions should not apply but that everyone should be a first class spiritual citizen before God. She goes on to give countless examples of where Paul is to be considered to be up-to-date.

Paul is quite clear on another point as well – he doesn't speak about himself but always points to Christ. The faithful pastor is to avoid what we might call the "cult of personality," where it seems as if the focus is almost more on the pastor than on Christ. There are examples out there and I'm sure you can fill in the blanks.

Finally Paul says

**3) We Have A Treasure In Earthen Vessels.** Paul says that we have a treasure in "earthen vessels," or, as we might say, "clay jars." It is quite clear, that he is referring to himself.

In the Scriptures, an “earthen vessel” is a reference to human frailty.

In Psalm 31,12 we read: “I am like a broken vessel,” and Paul may well have had a reference such as this in mind as he wrote today’s text. In Psalm 12, David described those who were against him. The Psalm reads:

I am like a broken vessel.  
For I have heard the slander of many,  
Terror is on every side ...  
But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD. (Psalm 31,12-14)

And as far as earthen vessels, or clay jars, are concerned, elsewhere in Scripture we have descriptions of God being the Potter and we are the clay (see Jeremiah 18).

By their very nature, however, clay jars do not last. They can crack. They may chip on account of repeated use. If dropped, they may shatter into pieces.

Some clay jars may last, but only if extreme care is taken. For example, a Ming Vase lasts because it is behind glass or a barrier in a museum and people cannot touch it.

But as a clay jar, neither Paul, nor us for that matter, are specimens that are behind a barrier or behind glass. Not only can others touch and see him or us, but enemies can harass and press sore.

But in spite of this, God is pleased to put treasure in those clay pots who are believers. What is this treasure? It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ – His death and resurrection which gives us the forgiveness of sins. That’s the treasure which ensures that the clay pots are God’s, even

though they suffer the wears and tears of life.

Paul speaks about being “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Those are all experiences not only He went through, but they point to the life of Christ itself.

Just think of Jesus in His passion and the Cross. Here was One Who was “struck down” — stricken, smitten, and afflicted. Humanly speaking, Jesus was perishing, going into the very jaws of death. It would seem that the last enemy had the last word and would swallow up the Savior of mankind. But on the third day Jesus rose from the death and conquered death itself. Jesus died for our sins and rose for our justification.

Jesus assures us that because He has forgiven us, we are not crushed, we are not left in despair, we are not forsaken, and we are not perishing. Christ’s death gives us the forgiveness of sins so that at all times the life of Christ may be active in our bodies as well.

**Conclusion:** It is fitting that we begin and end with our Savior, Jesus. He took on our flesh and faithfully spoke God’s Word. He came as a Servant to give His life as a ransom for many – there on the Cross to pay the price for our sins. He came and as a Servant was struck down but on the third day rose from the dead, never to die again. In all this, Jesus was without sin.

Now pastors are neither without sin nor perfect – is any one here surprised at that? But pastors have a calling, a vocation to follow in the steps of the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, Jesus. Here we speak when God speaks and are silent when He is silent. Our focus is always on the saving work of God’s Son, Jesus. As under shepherds of the Lord Jesus pastors come to serve and to faithfully speak God’s Word. Finally,

pastors do not get a pass from the vicissitudes of life, but are assured that even in our bodily dying the life of Jesus may be manifest on our frail bodies.

Of course, while the focus today is on pastors, let it be said that this applies to all of us as Christians as well. Christ asks us to remain faithful to His Word and remain in His Word. He asks us that we serve Him by lovingly serving one another. He assures us that even though our bodies might be likened to fragile clay pots, He will be with us, forgive us, and give us life which in Him has no end. In Jesus, we have the light of God's forgiveness which gives us life and salvation. Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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