

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

First Sunday in Lent

March 6, 2022

Psalm 91:1–13 (ESV):

My Refuge and My Fortress

91 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High

will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”

3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler
and from the deadly pestilence.

4 He will cover you with his pinions,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

5 You will not fear the terror of the night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,

6 nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness,
nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

8 You will only look with your eyes
and see the recompense of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—
the Most High, who is my refuge—

10 no evil shall be allowed to befall you,
no plague come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.

12 On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the adder;
the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

1st Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 26:1–11 (ESV):

Offerings of First fruits and Tithes

26 “When you come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, 2 you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the LORD your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. 3 And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare today to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to give us.’ 4 Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the LORD your God.

5 “And you shall make response before the LORD your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6 And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. 7 Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8 And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. 9 And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God. 11 And you shall rejoice in all the good that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.

EPISTLE: Romans 10:9–13 (ESV):

9 because, 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. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Gospel: Luke 4:1–13 (ESV):

The Temptation of Jesus

4 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. 3 The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” 4 And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’ ” 5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8 And Jesus answered him, “It is written,

“ ‘You shall worship the Lord your God,
and him only shall you serve.’ ”

9 And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written,

“ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,
to guard you,’

11 and ...

“ ‘On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ”

12 And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

13 And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Sermon 10 – First Sunday in Lent

“Heart and Mouth Disease”

Romans 10:8b-13

Dear friends,

Much as I hate to ignore the account of Jesus' temptation, one of my favorite parts in the whole Scripture, Romans teaches us some very basic lessons about the substance of the Christian faith, so let's do that. Paul tells us that the Christian faith has two parts, two actions that are meaningful, that have impact. He tells us of the implications of those actions. Faith is not just belief, faith necessitates confession, it demands that we be able to tell of it. The result of that telling is the reinforcement of the faith and the transformation of the self. When you believe, it not only changes who you are, it opens your mouth to tell of your belief and puts you in a special category. That is what Paul is saying.

He's framing it in the middle of a long discussion that he has in Romans about the fate of the Jews specifically. The Jews are in a weird place during Paul's lifetime, an uncertain place. They once were the chosen people of God, their faith was the true faith, but as the Jews begin to reject Jesus, they begin to lose that faith. They're missing the boat. Judaism was true until Christ came, then it became false, and Paul talks for three chapters about how difficult this is to unpack and understand. He talks about how it personally breaks his heart to see his countrymen reject Jesus as the Messiah. In the middle of all that, Paul says these words, because Paul wants people to understand exactly what a Christian is. It's not a matter of bloodline, who mom and dad were, and its not a matter of following rules. A Christian is one who believes and confesses. Jewishness matters not at all to God anymore, it isn't about that.

“But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9 because, 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.” Paul brings the Romans back to those basics by bringing them back to the Bible. What does the Bible say, he asks them. The Bible says that the word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. He identifies mouth and heart as the most important to your Christianity. He then tells us why. The heart believes, and the mouth confesses. With these two working in tandem, you're saved. Why does he say this? Because you need some kind of baseline for what a Christian is. What is the bare minimum that it takes to be a Christian? This. Believe with your heart that Jesus is Lord, and confess it with your mouth. We should not forget this, and take comfort in it. If you have a hard time getting to grips with the Bible, if all the doctrines you've been taught over the years seem like a confusing mess that you can never seem to keep straight, well, you're not alone. None of that is what makes you a Christian. It is what the heart believes and the mouth confesses that makes you a Christian. So why do we get so picky about what we say, and how we say it? Why is it so important to be precise about what we believe? Exactly for this reason. If belief is all that God requires of us, if being able to say that belief is so key, then let us make sure that our beliefs and our words are as good as they can be, as truthful, as correct as can be. This can make us Lutherans real sticks in the mud when it comes to the details, but its important to understand that it comes from a desire to get it right in as many ways as possible. However, Lutherans should also remember that for all our pride in our heritage and how tightly and effectively we communicate, it is not our heritage or how good we are at saying these things that makes us Christian. Paul doesn't tell us to confess really really well. He tells us to confess with our mouth, whether it be good, bad or ugly. Obviously we can't be lying, we have to get the information correct, but if you aren't much good with words, its really easy to be intimidated by the many ways something can be said and worry that you aren't getting it right. Paul reassures us that a confession is required, but he also reassures us that a confession is *all* that is required.

“10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” The two work in unison. The heart believes, and the mouth says. Saying with the mouth is described as a saving action, which should tell you how seriously God takes what we say with our mouths. If you ever wondered why we recite the Creeds every Sunday, this is one reason for it. There's other reasons, but this a big one. We want to make sure we know exactly what faith it is that we are believing, and we want to make sure we all have a baseline for how to say that faith. That is what the creeds are for. Here is what the faith is, here is what the faith isn't. Paul tells us that this does not shame us. It might bore us, if you've recited the Apostles creed for the ten millionth time, but it will not shame us. It is no shame to use the words of the ancient fathers, because those words got it, and we probably aren't going to be able to do much better with our own words.

Confessing is something that happens in the sight of both God and men. God is watching and listening closely when you talk about your faith, because that is what confessing is. Talking about your faith. It has a linked relationship with the faith itself, it feeds it. When you speak your faith, you make it stronger. God does not watch in judgment, He watches with grace, making this a gift to you just like it is to Him. He promises that whenever His words leave your lips, they are doing what He promises they will do, and what they will do is strengthen your faith. Furthermore, He promises His guidance and protection while you do it. It isn't just the faith that won't shame you, it is God that won't shame you. Maybe you'll stutter, maybe you'll say things in the wrong order, maybe the words will sound clumsy and stupid. Doesn't matter. God isn't ashamed when His people speak, and you aren't either. Hold your head high as you bumble your way through what Jesus has taught you, because it is what Jesus taught you, and that makes it trustworthy and good beyond anything we could ever come up with.

The church does this together, this is the proper and best way. No Christian ever lived long by himself, it is not good for man to be alone, and it is even less good for a Christian to be alone. The church's responsibility is both that faith and that confession. We nurture that faith by hearing God's words, and then we confess that faith by repeating

God's words. We do this on topics, talking about controversial things in our society. We do this on right and wrong, taking a stand for what God says is right rather than what man says is right. We do this on the simple fact that God exists. Confession is across the board, many things that seem like personal choices are opportunities to show and confess our Christian beliefs. Do we have to take advantage of all of them? No, that's kind of impossible.

So what are we confessing? We are confessing that we are sinful, and that God is here to save us from our sin. We are confessing that the reason we die is because of our sin, but that Christ rose from the dead to take away that sin and that death from us. We are confessing that Christ was who He said He was, He did what He said He did. We are confessing that sin makes us all the same, all equally damned, all equally in need of God's grace. We are confessing that calling on the name of the Lord saves us. You get the idea, I'm not going to keep going.

Heart and mouth. Sin is a disease of the heart and the mouth, it sickens our hearts with all kinds of wickedness, and it makes our mouths utter all kinds of foolishness and lies. Christ is the redeemer of the heart and the mouth, He purifies both, and He puts both of them to use not just in saving us, but in putting us together with the church so that we can save others. Work your heart by feeding it God's word. Work your mouth by trying to find ways to say that word, even if it never seems to come up in conversation it's still good for you. Each of these works complements each other. Your heart benefits from what your mouth says, and your mouth benefits from what your heart believes. Christ promises to place Himself in your heart, to place Himself in your mouth, to save you, and to make you useful to Him. I went to school for years to learn how to confess. I'm getting better at it, but when the moment comes I still mumble, stumble over my words and doubt that I've said the right thing. But that's not what's important. What's important is that my faith is in my heart, and if faith is in your heart, then faith will be in your mouth as well. God guarantees it.

Amen.