

Wednesday, March 13, 2019 – Lent Midweek II

**“Preparing to Confess”**

2 Corinthians 5: 17-21

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Structure

*Adapted from CSL “The Gospel in Seven Words”*

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Seven words. That’s the limit. It’s not that there’s something magical about the number seven.

We could have gone with five, or ten, or eighteen. The point is that we need to be prepared. For the sake of those who are living and dying in sin; for the sake of our brothers and sisters who need to hear again and anew the life-giving gospel; for the sake of our own understanding of God’s love for us in Christ, we need a short, sweet and *substantive* summary of the good news of our salvation.

Being prepared is not my idea. It comes from God, through the apostle Peter. “Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that you have.” That’s the apostle’s direction in 1 Peter 3:15. And that’s what we’re doing here during this season of Lent.

We’re preparing for Holy Week by preparing to confess the hope we have in Christ.

Last week we considered a number of seven-word summaries of the gospel that I came across in an article. As I mentioned last Wednesday, none of these summaries says *everything* about Jesus and his work of salvation. That would be impossible. As John says in the last verse of his Gospel, if we tried to describe everything Jesus did and said there wouldn’t be enough room in the world for all the books! But each of the summaries we considered last week tried to capture the heart of the good news in just a few words. Tonight, I’d like to take a closer look at the components of a faithful Christian confession. When we open our mouths to proclaim the good news, what are we going to say?

Confessing the gospel begins, in many ways, by confessing something about ourselves. It begins by acknowledging who we are as confessors. And who are we? Who are you? At our most basic, we are creatures. We are the handiwork of the Creator. As Psalm 139(:14) puts it, we are “fearfully and

wonderfully made.” We are God’s children, made in his image. The crown of his creation, his precious sons and daughters.

But *faithful*? That’s another story. Fragile, yes. Fallen, indeed. Failing, everyday. Sinful, to put it simply. To confess the gospel, therefore, involves admitting something about our sin. It requires acknowledging that we need to be saved. In the article I mentioned last week, there were a number of good and faithful summaries of the gospel. I’d like to look at a few of them more closely with you tonight. “In Christ, God’s yes defeats our no.” “God, through Jesus Christ, welcomes you anyhow.” Notice that Jesus is central in each of these confessions. That’s crucial! But notice also that they aren’t *only* about Jesus. They also say something about us. To be more specific, they each point out that there is something wrong with us. God defeats “our no.” God welcomes us “anyhow.”

Consider the first of those two summaries. God’s yes defeats our “no.” It’s referring to our “no” to God’s commands. That’s our disobedience. God speaks clearly in the Scriptures, and yet we so often disobey him. “No” also describes our response to God’s promises. That’s our lack of faith. God promises so much to us, and yet our faith is often so weak. The little word “no” captures the many ways in which we turn away from God.

Or take the second version. God welcomes you “anyhow.” The “anyhow” reminds us that God would be entirely justified in not welcoming us back to himself. We have given him many reasons to exclude us—from the way we treat one another, to the way we expect him to serve us, to the way in which we idolize ourselves. “Anyhow” is a confession that we have no right to ask anything of God. Both of these descriptions highlight that there is something about us that isn’t right. And that’s important, because the gospel begins with the fact that this world (and each of us in it) is not right. At one time, of course, it was. The world was perfectly right! Adam and Eve were in the garden of Eden and they didn’t need additional good news—everything was already good. It was very good! But ever since their “no” to God’s command, things have been wrong. Terribly wrong. The Old Testament is the

story of the people of God going wrong over and over again. It's the story of people hurting themselves and others through their sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. It's a story that continues in your life and mine.

This is important for us to acknowledge as we prepare to share the gospel with others. It leads us to confess humbly, for we are just as guilty as anyone else. This also helps us communicate to others why our beliefs about Jesus matter. Until people see and understand and believe there is something wrong with them, the idea that Jesus saves won't mean anything.

So, the first step in crafting a description of the gospel in seven words is to think about how to convey our universal need for a Savior. That doesn't have to be the first thing we say, but it needs to be clear.

After we've communicated the problem, the next step is simple. And joyful! We preach Christ crucified and risen, Paul said. And that's good news! It is the good news that God has sent his Son Jesus to save us—from sin, from death, from the devil. But not just that. He also saves us from meaninglessness, from loneliness, from brokenness. He restores us. He renews us. He recreates us. He brings us back to himself. The good news is that God was in Christ Jesus, reconciling the world to himself.

Indeed, that's a seven-word summary right there! "God was in Christ, reconciling the world." This version picks up on 2 Corinthians 5. Listen again to what Paul wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself."

God, through the person of Jesus, came into the world to reconcile his creation to himself. To make things the way they should be. To right that which we had done wrong. To restore us as creatures,

dearly loved by our Father, completely forgiven through faith in his Son. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world.”

This version of the gospel highlights the universal nature of Christ’s work. He didn’t just come to reconcile you. He didn’t just come to reconcile me. He came for all people, all the world, to bring us all back to the Father.

Now it’s true, this version of the gospel doesn’t tell us everything we need to know about Jesus. Much needs to be unpacked. But it contains the heart of the good news, and it might provide a starting point for more conversations.

Speaking of conversations, tonight I did most of the talking. But during the week, I’d like to ask you to do some work. I want you to think about the people in your life who need to hear the good news of Jesus. Think about where they are in life. Think about your relationship with them. Think about our seven-word summary tonight—“God was in Christ, reconciling the world”—and remember that he came to reconcile them, too.

But don’t limit your thinking to this particular way of speaking. Consider other ways of describing what God has done for us in Christ. And as you do so, jot down some notes. If a hymn or a prayer or reading sparks your thinking—even this evening yet, make a note of it. Take your bulletin home with you. Use it as a scratch pad to get ready for next week. In the name of Jesus, Amen.