

Alive in Christ: Alive to Proclaim!

A sermon based on Romans 10:8b-17

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"I have a secret I will take to the grave." Do you? Has anyone you know ever said that before? Sometimes it's something embarrassing you'd rather not bring up again or something shameful you want to wipe from memory. Often, it's a way to show others our trustworthiness...they entrust us with something important, something personal, something they'd rather not let become public knowledge, so we say, "I will take it with me to the grave."

Except it doesn't always make it there. You've heard of deathbed confessions. You're about to die; you can't be held responsible or be punished, so why not get it off your chest, clear your conscience, and pass away in peace.

Perhaps you've heard some well-known deathbed confessions, like, for instance, Geraldine Kelly, who shot and killed her husband, John Kelly, stored his body in a freezer (even had a moving company move that freezer from California to Massachusetts), and then, 13 years later, gravely ill with breast cancer, told her daughter where to find the body, which had been mummified. Or Christian Spurling, at the age of 93 and near death, admitted to being an accomplice to his stepfather, Marmaduke Wetherell, the mastermind behind the Loch Ness monster hoax, faking an image of the legendary beast and coaxing his good friend, Dr. Robert Kenneth Wilson, to sell it to the Daily Mail newspaper. Just prior to his death, Lieutenant Walter Haut signed an affidavit asserting he witnessed the wreckage of an egg-shaped craft and its extraterrestrial crew at Area 51 but he was forced by the military to announce that a downed weather balloon had been recovered there instead (I'll give you a few seconds with that one; your world has probably been turned upside-down!).

These confessions are not uncommon. Becky and I have one ready to go when we leave this life, but it's a little bit of different confession. It's not a secret. Last year, we did some work on our will with one of our Synod's deferred giving counselors (I know, we were a bit behind in that), and he gave us this idea for a wonderful confession to make in it: **"My dear loved ones, I lived in grace and I died in grace. There is no more beautiful sound than the word "GRACE." It comes from God and perfectly characterizes the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. He gave his life so that I could be saved by grace. I count my family as gifts of God's grace and I loved them dearly. All my blessings in life were further evidence of God's grace. You may accomplish great things in life, but don't ever trust in them. Grace alone saves. Please learn all you can about it. In your life let it be obvious that you are God's child and saved by grace alone. May the purpose of your life be to share the message of God's grace in Christ Jesus in every way that you can."**

I won't take credit for writing that; someone much more eloquent than I did. But that's our confession...not an admission of wrong, but an assertion of our belief. It's that kind of confession the apostle Paul is writing about today in Romans as he reminds we are alive in Christ...alive to proclaim Christ. And there're two ways we do that...with our confessing our faith in Christ and with our professing the gospel.

Listen to what Paul says, ***“The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess your faith and are saved.*“**

Based on those verses, what is confession? Well, what is being confessed here? Simply, ***“Jesus is Lord.”*** You know, that’s likely what the early Christian church used as their confession of faith, their creed, their “this is what we believe.”

We know that well. We have the opportunity to make a confession of faith every Sunday, whether with the Apostles’ Creed or the Nicene Creed. The word here “confess,” in the Greek language, it has this idea of “being of one mind.” So, a good definition for confess might be to “say the same thing,” “be in agreement,” which, again, is what we’re doing when we recite a Creed: “Here’s what we believe; we are saying the same thing; we are in agreement.”

But “confess,” in the Greek, has another meaning – a slightly different meaning, “to declare, to assert.” Confession, the Creed, it’s not only “we are in agreement with each other;” it’s also, “here’s what I believe; here’s my faith; here’s what I hold near and dear in my heart.”

“If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved,” Paul writes. That’s the result. You believe in your heart, you confess with your lips, and you will be saved. Does that send up alarms in your head? It does to me. You know why? It certainly sounds like Paul is saying here that confessing your faith is a requirement for salvation, as in, you can have a part in your salvation...just say, “I believe!”

The Baptist church, which teaches you can make the decision to believe in Jesus or you can accept Jesus into your heart, they use these verses as part of “The Roman Road.” Ever heard of it? It’s where they take 7 passages from the book of Romans to show how a person can come to faith and achieve salvation on their own. With these verse, they conclude, ***“Confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you are saved. Just call upon the name of the Lord and you will be saved!”*** It’s up to you!

Is that true? What does Paul write a few verses later? Verse 17, ***“Faith comes from HEARING the message...”*** Not, faith comes from confessing and saying what you believe, but faith in Jesus comes (is brought by the Holy Spirit) through hearing.

So then, how can Paul write, ***“If you confess with your mouth...believe in your heart...you will be saved”?*** Here’s a simple saying to keep in mind: Faith in Jesus is possessed inwardly and expressed outwardly. Confession is the outward indicator of what resides in here (your heart). Only that faith in Jesus, given through the message (God’s Word) saves.

So, that being said, what’s your confession? What is your declaration? What resides in here?

A good indicator? Your words. Friends, the Creed, such a simple way to confess your faith in Jesus. Maybe not as simple as “Jesus is Lord,” but it’s an easy way to tell others what you believe about our Triune God.

An even better indicator? Your actions. A pastor once wrote, **“The godly life of a believer is also a powerful confession of faith. It is said that the only Bible some unbelievers ever read is the life of a Christian with whom they come into contact.”**

That makes sense, right? You and I have spoken our creeds so many times, what’s the temptation? A mechanical recitation of meaningless words...we’re just saying that words; we don’t know what they mean; we don’t care what they mean. And that would be sad.

But what’s even more unfortunate is when what we confess here is not what we display out there.

You believe our God of grace loves all people, wants all people to be in heaven with him. But then some of the vulgar language you use when in the company of friends is literally asking God to send someone or something to hell? Or, the way you treat others, maybe it’s physical abuse or verbal abuse - screaming at them, tearing them down, gossiping about them.

You express confidence in God’s plan for your life, how you have eternal life to look forward to. But then, the moment something goes wrong, you’re doubting; you’re worried; you’re angry; you complain, asking, “Why, God, me?” Or a health issue surfaces, and your initial reaction is, “Is this going to kill me?” as if death would be the worst possible thing.

And we could go on. But why is this so important? If I know what’s in here, if God knows what’s in my heart, then why is what I display out here such a big deal?

There’s a word in verse 8, “proclaim.” We know what that means, but the added flavor the Greek gives it here is that we are speaking or announcing in a formal or official manner. We are functioning as heralds for God. We are official, public spokesmen speaking on God’s behalf, with our words and actions.

Randa Jarrar. Does that name ring a bell? She’s an English professor at Fresno State University. She called Barbara Bush an “amazing racist” on Twitter and said she was happy that “the witch is dead” within a few hours of her death. You can imagine the outrage, but even to today, she feels secure because she has tenure with the university.

Well, there’s a petition for her firing, not to violate her 1st Amendment freedom but because she is a representative of the university and is giving them a black eye. Officials from the school, while not reprimanding her, are trying to distance themselves from this situation, making it clear her views are not the views of the university.

Obviously, she’s not speaking on behalf of God. But we are. We carry the name Christian, yet we our confession - through our words and our actions – do you think it makes God proud? Or does it make God want to distance himself from us. Think about what you say. Think about what you do, as actions speak louder than words. As a baptized child of Christ, you are an official spokesman for Christ. And based on our performance of sin, on our uneven confession, he should distance himself from us eternally.

Thankfully, Jesus is Lord, right? That’s what we confess; that’s what we believe. Jesus is our Lord, the God of free and faithful grace. He is the God who saved us by grace, through his life, death, and resurrection. He didn’t distance himself from us. He came to live with us. He became one of us. And

where our confession falls short (particularly with our outward confession), Jesus doesn't. He never did fall short in his life here; he was perfect...sinless.

Yet, **"he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried."** On Calvary's cross, Jesus took our sins and suffered our death and hell. The sinless one became the sinner so the sinners (you and I) would become sinless. That's what God's Word says. That's what we believe. That's what we confess.

And then, finally, the best news of this entire Easter season...**"the third day, he rose again from the dead."** Jesus lives again. Sin, death, and the devil are defeated. Our salvation is complete. We have an eternity, not of separation, but of being in God's presence to look forward to.

Friends, Christ has done everything. The Word proclaims this glorious truth to us, and that same Word also works faith in the heart to believe and accept Christ's righteousness. The Word creates the confidence that can say, "This Jesus is my Lord." And so, again, **"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."**

Our salvation is secure and assured. That is the good news we trust because the Holy Spirit has brought us to faith in Jesus through the message...that very good news of the gospel.

That is the good news we now live and long to proclaim.

"You'll find Jesus there." An 8-year-old boy, scheduled to have open heart exploratory surgery, continued to repeat that phrase as the surgeon was explaining the steps of what would take place..."You'll find Jesus there." After the surgery, the surgeon, knowing the boy would die in a matter of months, questioned why God would do that and not allow the boy to live a normal life. God spoke to him and said, "The boy is part of my flock and will always be part of my flock. When he is finally with me there will be no more suffering and pain. He will have comfort and peace."

"You'll find Jesus there." Open your heart and see. God is there because of grace. That's our confession. Now let's make that our profession. Think about this. If you were dying from a terminal illness, and there was this antidote developed that could save you, and it did, wouldn't you want others to know of the incredible miracle?

Now that your heart's been changed, your life has been saved, you're on fire to proclaim. And there's no better time. What does Paul say? **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?"**

And God sends you...and me. A deathbed confession. If you were on your deathbed right now, what would your confession be? Mine's already planned out. Yours doesn't need to be as eloquent, but how about making it a declaration of faith, not an admission of sin. Make it about grace, not regrets.

And maybe (definitely) make that confession right now. Through Jesus, we've been brought from death to life. We are alive in Christ. Our hearts are vibrant with a faith that trusts wholly and solely in Christ. And so we want to...we will confess our faith, so in our words and actions, you'll find Jesus there. And we want to, we will profess the good news to others – you'll find Jesus there. How beautiful! Amen.