

No Chance of Failure
4th Sunday after Pentecost
10 July Anno Domini 2011

Grace, peace and mercy from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Some stuff works, some stuff don't. We want stuff that works. Even more frustrating is some things that use to work no longer do. That's the challenge of our nation's economy. What was working in the past may not work now. I'm not going to get into that sort of stuff.

Thank God - and I mean that in all seriousness - thank God that our salvation and our work as His people doesn't depend on us, or our smartness, talent or efforts. In our Old Testament lesson, God tells us that there is no chance of failure because He has taken the "chance" out of it. Our message this morning is that simple truth: **No Chance of Failure.**

Here is the guarantee of God ***"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."*** The church belongs to God. It is His creation, and it is His work. He created it by the power of His Word. When we want to see the Church living and thriving as God would have it thrive, all we need is to faithfully hear His Word, and proclaim His Word, and share His Word. If we are faithful and live in and under the Word, then our churches will be precisely what God intends them to be. That is His (†) promise.

Our text actually contains several promises, but they are not all as encompassing as the one to which our theme refers. For instance, there is the promise of **joy** and **rejoicing** and **peace**. These are promises we can all look forward to with eager anticipation. The challenge of this particular promise is no different than that of any other promise from God. It is the challenge to believe it. Oh yes, you can receive food and sunshine and such without faith. But without faith, it's just received as 'something that happens'. With faith it is received as a blessing from God.

You see, the guarantee of God will change your life and the living of it significantly, if you believe it. And that's the problem! It is so hard to believe! Men through the ages have stumbled over it. The Church in our age stumbles over it. The guarantee that God gives us here is that **HIS WORD WORKS**. People often imagine that they need to use clever programs and nifty gimmicks to make things happen, those right sorts of things happen in the Church. Men want to devise ways to be more effective and find things one can do aside from proclaiming and listening to the Word of God to make things seem more powerful, or feel more substantial, or provide us with goals that we can accomplish clearly and demonstrably and thereby seem to be more relevant.

Christians say that they believe in the Word of God and we as Lutherans, especially, talk about God's powerful Word - ***living and active and sharper than any a two edged sword*** - but then we go on behaving as though everything depended upon us. The guarantee of God here is that He is going to do it, whatever 'it' may be, not us. We actually find ourselves in a situation similar to Israel in 2 Samuel 5, where God routed the enemies of His people with the sound of marching in the treetops, or 2 Chronicles 20 where the enemies of Israel were brought by God to fight one another on the battlefield and destroy one another without Israel even lifting a sword.

The promise of God is that He will do it. He will accomplish what He desires to do - build His church, cause us to believe, summon men to His side, cleanse us and make us holy - all by His Word. But we act as if Holiness were our doing. We talk as though the survival and growth of the church depended completely on us. We need to be doing the right sort of things. We've had some leave our little congregation because they believed that we weren't willing to do what it takes to build a church and survive as a congregation. But our lives individually and corporately are in the hands of God. He will make it happen, and the power - and the tools - and the weapon - and the seed - and the means by which God will make it all happen, is His Word. We needn't worry, trust God - and stand back like Israel of old and see the glory the Lord as He accomplishes in us and through us all that He has promised and all that He intends by means of His Word. There's no chance of failure.

Of course, another problem we experience is God's Word doesn't necessarily accomplish our goals, our ambitions or our man made plans. It was never intended to. Our flesh often wants to see something other than what God intends to accomplish -like something that brings us the glory. We want numbers. We want admiration; we want praise from the community, or praise from the Synod. We want to feel special when we leave the worship service. We want financial security, maybe even prosperity!

But that's not what the Word of God is about. It's about the member who comes to the pastor and says, "I used to be troubled by growing old and the prospect of dying. Now, thanks to a proper understanding of God's Word properly preached and taught I am no longer afraid." You might want to ask, "But how does that help build a church? How does that make our congregation larger? How does that improve the congregation's bottom line?" I would answer with: "Those things don't matter, not nearly as much as we think they do".

The Word of God was not spoken by God to enhance the bottom line of the congregation, or build physical structures. It was spoken to comfort, to heal, to forgive, and to save. In the example I gave - which really happened a few years ago - the Word of God accomplished what it was spoken to accomplish, the comfort of a child of God as she faced the great and frightening questions of illness and death. It brought that peace, of which the liturgy speaks so eloquently and so frequently, the peace that passes all understanding.

The hard part about this is that it takes us and our ambitions out of the equation. God says, ***"My Word will not return unto to me void - empty - without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."*** So, what if the Word doesn't accomplish what you desire? Well, it isn't your word, it isn't my word, it's God's Word. And it accomplishes what He intended. And it does it every time, with no chance of failure.

Of course, our modern and practical minds tell us that it cannot be 100% effective. We look around us and see how the church is faring and say, "It must not be working!" What isn't happening, in that case, is faith - and faithfulness by us. The Word of God is not failing. But people still jump at the opportunities that seem to be ever present to "grow the church" by what we do. They calculate, and labor, and program, and organize, and do everything they can to achieve a measurable and pleasing result. But the truth is that's false security, for the Word of God works every time. I don't say that because I see it, I say it because God says it! ***My Word shall not return without accomplishing what I spoke it to do!***

All that is required of us is faithfulness. If we trust God's promise, we only need to use the Word. We need to learn the Word. We need to live the Word. We need to study the Word. We need to speak the Word. And we need to trust the Word. We don't need to structure our presentation

of it so it can be more effective. We don't need to decorate the church so the context of the Word is more inviting. Those things aren't evil, but they're not necessary either. The Word works because God gives it the power to do so.

Many of our problems as a Synod, and maybe some of them as a congregation, are based in the reality that we really don't trust the Word of God. We talk a lot about trusting it and believing it, but we really don't expect it to work. Some think they have to make it work. Some people think it's our effort and our programs that make the church grow and strengthen our Synod - but it's really the opposite. Our Synod grew fastest when her members trusted God and clung to His Word, faithfully. When the Synod instigated all sorts of programs and modernizations she began to falter. And that lack of faith and splitting of hairs resulted in ineffectiveness. So the "experts" said, "*See! You can't just trust the Word of God!*" as though they ever did.

That's why this promise challenges us. It's in opposition of our expectations. It ignores our ego's, it challenges our original sin and human nature. But if you just listen and speak the Word of God, be faithful, and trust God, and everything will work out right - not "everything will work out pleasantly," or "every moment will be happy," or "you will you be the envy of the community," but it will all work just the way God wants it to work. And that's the will of God?

God wants us to know Him, to trust in Him, and to live with Him in joy and peace forever. We need to confess that we are great disappointments to God - that we are sinners. We mess everything up. We are not good or decent or holy. We are sinners - and He is our Savior, He has purchased us from sin, death and the devil. And on the cross bore our guilt and sin and shame. He has now poured out forgiveness and life and salvation upon us. The peace I mentioned earlier is the fruit of trusting God, and of believing that your sins are forgiven.

Our flesh wants to see things, to be able to measure and appreciate what is happening. But the Church happens in the hearts and lives of men and women – it's not something you do, God speaks His Word to create and sustain His Church. It's your hunger for the measurable and pleasurable results that makes things like social ministry so inviting - you can count the pounds of food or the number of quilts distributed, you can count the money donated to "worthy causes," you can measure 'how much' and 'how many' and how close on the goal of contacts for Christ you have come. And that makes you feel like you're accomplishing something.

But the true work of the Church is accomplished by the Word of God - not by your efforts, however good and praiseworthy they might be. God's Word works. There's no chance of failure when you humbly and faithfully use His Word. If you use the Word of God faithfully, good things are happening, but they are God's good things. And that's a guarantee with no chance of failure.

For in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, all your sins are forgiven, in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit, you have His (†) word on it. In Jesus name, Amen and Amen!

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. AMEN...