

## NOW IS THE DAY OF SALVATION

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

24 June Anno Domini 2012

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2 Corinthians 6:2

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

Please listen carefully to the Word of the Lord from 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verse 2: ***“Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”*** So far the text.

It’s still early in the Pentecost season, and our lessons for today remind us that we are in the same position as the Christians were in the early Church just after Pentecost: we hear that Christ has died and Christ is risen, but we don’t see Him. In fact, we trust that Jesus is our Savior in spite of the things that we do see or cannot see.

The Old Testament lesson gives us an excellent example in Job. At the start of the book, Job is a wealthy man with everything going for him. Quickly he is stripped of his goods, his home, his family and his health. He’s surrounded by friends who say, “We know what we see, and we clearly see that your life has become a shambles. The evidence is irrefutable: what have you done to anger God. Your life is evidence that the Lord is out to get you.” In our Old Testament lesson, we have part of the Lord’s rebuttal: He’s the One who created all things, and it’s arrogant for us to think that we know His will and plan for our lives. To contradict His Word by other evidence is to follow dark counsel, because these are “words without knowledge.” In other words, God says to Job: “You don’t know My will for you, not by the events of your life or by the advice from your, dear friends; you can only know what I think about you because of what I say about you in My Word”.

***“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ”***. Faith is trusting in what you do not see, in spite of what you might see. I love the line from the Tim Allen Santa Clause Movie. His son Charlie says: “Seeing, is not believin’-believing is seeing!”

The Gospel lesson gives us another excellent illustration: The disciples are about to drown; at least, that’s what they believe. They’re in the middle of the lake, caught in a horrific storm. The boat is filling with water, and there is Jesus—asleep on a cushion. The disciples do some quick visual math: big waves, sleeping Savior must mean that God is oblivious to their plight. Forget the Scriptures promises of Psalm 121:4: ***“He who keeps watch over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.”*** According to His human nature, Jesus is sleeping; according to His divine nature, He holds all things in His hand. But the disciples go with what they see, not the Word, and in a panic they wake Jesus up. He rebukes the storm with a Word. Then He rebukes the disciples with a Word: ***“Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?”***

***“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ”***. Faith is trusting in what cannot be seen, in spite of what you do see.

In the epistle for today St. Paul is preaching the Gospel entrusted to him. He’s declaring that Christ has died for the sins of the world, and that Christ is risen again. He’s proclaiming forgiveness, healing and life. He’s preaching to all the fulfilled promises, that Jesus has conquered sin, death and the devil. That’s why St. Paul’s proclaims in our text: ***“Now is the day of salvation.”*** for when you hear the Word of God, God is proclaiming salvation to you. As He rebuked the storm while in the boat, by His Gospel Jesus is rebuking sin, death and the devil; and He is giving you peace and forgiveness and faith. That’s the message. That’s the Gospel. That’s the Word of the Lord which St. Paul is preaching—and what a wonderful, life-giving Word it is.

Now, how does it look? One would expect a message of salvation to be surrounded with joy, glory and all sorts of good feelings, sights to behold. But this is how Paul describes it: ***“As servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger....”*** That’s hardly a glamorous description, but it is certainly true of Paul’s life as an apostle. In the course of his ministry, he was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked and snake bitten. He was imprisoned. He was blamed for riots even though his opponents stirred up crowds against him. Elsewhere

in 2 Corinthians, he tells of his enemies' great criticism of him is that he isn't an effective speaker: Paul doesn't speak in a dynamic, engaging way.

So it makes me wonder: Given the word on the street, how many congregations of today would call St. Paul to be their pastor? I know of congregations where the call committee has interviewed pastors more concerned about personality and programs and little concern about doctrine. So could St. Paul receive a call today? "Sure, he might say the right stuff, but not very eloquently. Furthermore, he's got a criminal record—he's been in and out of jail several times. Trouble follows him wherever he goes, and fights have been known to break out. Have you seen the scars on his back? You would have to admit that he's not the safest choice out there."

By nature, we judge people by what we see. So, people are tempted to judge a pastor by outward qualities. This is wrong and it's harmful to the Church. Sooner or later, this congregation will need to call a pastor; or else you'll move somewhere else and have to evaluate a pastor. The temptation is to make your decisions on the external appearances: does he look like a pastor, act like a pastor, does he have the stuff? (Whatever that stuff maybe?) But you are to judge the messenger by the message. After beatings, stonings, imprisonments and more, I'm willing to bet Paul didn't look any better than he sounded, he had tacked up some miles on that body. But he spoke the Word of the Lord. He proclaimed the day of salvation. That's what makes a pastor a good pastor. That's what makes him a faithful pastor.

We walk by faith, and not by sight—and often we are challenged to do so in spite of what we see. ***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ***; if your pastor is not preaching Christ's Word—His Law and Gospel, then the Spirit isn't at work in that proclamation and faith isn't coming.

Like pastors, the same holds true for congregations: the consistent droning of the day is that a congregation is to be judged on its friendliness, by its appearance, and by the number of programs offered. Certainly, a congregation should be friendly, and good stewardship leads us to maintain the things we have. Programs can be beneficial or not. But none of this is the measure of the life of a congregation, because the Church derives its life from Jesus, her Savior.

When you seek a place to worship, the first question should be: Is the Word of God taught in purity and truth? Are the Sacraments administered according to the Lord's Word? Do I leave the service with the comfort that my sins are forgiven. If the answer to each of these is yes, then the Lord is at work there to give faith and forgiveness of sin. If the answer is no, then all the friendliness, nice facilities and programs won't save a single soul. ***Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ***. We walk by faith, not by sight. That's why we place such a great importance on faithfulness to the Word in doctrine and practice, in preaching and worship. I was reminded of this over the past few days. Oh how thankful I am, for the overwhelming support in this congregation for the proclamation of the Gospel; though—and I speak out of love—I am sometimes fearful that we do not always truly understand how much life there is here, and how alive this congregation truly is. Christ is here to give life: thus you are very much alive. ***Now is the day of your salvation***.

What is true for pastors and congregations is also true for individuals. As a Christian, you walk by faith and not by sight. You trust that you are God's beloved child for Jesus' sake, no matter what anyone else says—outside of you or inside of you. Consider these words from our text: ***"We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and not yet killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything."*** The devil, the world and your sinful flesh will launch all sorts of false accusations against you; but rather than believe those lies, you cling to God's Word. You walk by faith, not by sight. Greater is the testimony of God than the testimony of men.

You will be treated as an impostor: the world will launch all sorts of accusations that your faith is a damaging thing. Satan will call you a fake; he'll tell you that you're just pretending to be Christian that you're really a miserable sinner. You'll be treated as an impostor, but the Lord says you are true. He speaks His truth into you and says, "You are true. You are a genuine believer and have union in Me, because My Son died for

you. The devil is a deceiver—he'll try to persuade you with lies that you are a false Christian—despite your repentance and faith. But in God declares in His Word, you are His child."

You'll be treated as an unknown, a nobody, a person God can't possibly care about. But you are well known—well known by the One who does matters. For the Lord declares, "I know you. I formed you in the womb. I washed your sins away and put My name upon you. The world says that you're an unknown nobody, but the world is in denial: and on the Last Day, Jesus will say to them, "Depart from Me—I never knew you".

You'll be treated as dying; and, in fact, your body will eventually testify to you that death is near, the world and Satan will say that the Gospel is of no help. But your Savior declares, "I have died for you and I am risen from the dead. I bring life through death; and after the death of your body, I will raise you up to life everlasting with Me.

You'll be treated as punished— the world teaches that believing one is sinful should be considered damaging. Why would you kick yourself for what everybody else is doing freely? See how happy they look while sinning! Why do you suffer the loss of friends, fun, promotion, whatever, for holding fast to God's Word? But the Lord says, "The world may say that you are punishing yourself by depriving yourself of sin, or by confessing your sin. I tell you the wages of sin is death—that sin which the world glorifies—is death. While the world may regard you as punished, I call you not killed—not dead in sin. I declare that you are alive in Christ; and alive in Him, you have not the punishment of sin, but the reward of life eternal.

You'll be treated as sorrowful: in fact, there will be times when you know only sorrow and cannot find joy. But even when it is given to you to grieve great loss, your faith still clings to Christ; and He declares, "For the joy set before Me, I endured the cross and scorned it shame. Now I set that joy before you. You have life in My name." Your sorrows will pass. Your joy in Christ will last forever.

You'll be treated as poor: sure, you will not have all the things that your sinful nature covets, wants or craves. But the Lord declares, "For the sake of Jesus, you do not lack what is most needed: forgiveness and life in My name. I will give the daily bread that you need, though maybe not all that you want. But rest assured of this: whoever you are, you are not in poverty. You have an abundance of grace. You have all the treasures of heaven: you are rich in Me, because in Me heaven is yours.

Thus, it may seem for a while that we have nothing, yet in Christ you possess everything.

You don't see this with your eyes. You hear it, for God proclaims it to you in His Word. Daily, then, repent of interpreting His love for you by what you see and by what you experience. Remember the cross, St. Paul says, "***I know that God loves me and works all things together for my good.***" It is not easy to say, especially when enduring affliction and trial: that's why, whether it brings affliction or joy, each day repent of your sin and rejoice in God's faithfulness to you.

For Jesus is faithful. He tells you again and again in His Word of His love; and by His Word, He is present to fulfill His promises of His grace. This is your cause for rejoicing, because now is the day of your salvation—because in Jesus all sins are forgiven in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name Amen and amen.

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