

Sermon: 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Theme: God's Word Alone (FELSISA's 1st Core Value)

Goal: The Word of God is the only source to know the true God and to receive grace through Christ

Dear Friends,

Introduction: During this Epiphany Season until the beginning of Lent we will go through FELSISA's Core Values, Mission and Vision in our weekly messages. It was prepared by the pastors of the Synod in two consecutive Conventions and it was asked to be shared with all the members of the church. The goal is to strengthen our unity and to open our eyes to the many opportunities we have as churches and Synod to walk and to work together on a common ground.

The FELSISA - Free Evangelical Lutheran Synod in South Africa is a Confessional Lutheran Church...which proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ on the basis of (1st) an unconditional commitment to the Holy Scriptures as the inspired and infallible Word of God and (2nd) to the Lutheran Confessions contained in the Book of Concord as the true and faithful exposition of the Word of God.

*Apart from its committed adherence to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions, the identity of the FELSISA also finds expression in a number of "core values." The cores values articulate its deepest scriptural convictions, which drive its ministry. It provides the answer to the question: **Why** do we do what we do. As such it also describes "**Who we are**".*

*In short, the Core Values can be summarized as **Receiving God's Grace, sharing Christ with all.***

The 1st Core Value is *GOD'S WORD ALONE*, one of the pillars of Luther's Reformation: *SOLA SCRIPTURA*; and we will link it with the Epistle for this Sunday, which highlights how God comes to us and how He works in us through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. The other Core Values are:

2. *Cross of Christ*

3. *Means of Grace*
4. *Welcoming all*
5. *Equipping of God's people*
6. *Caring for the world*

I – The Scriptures come from God and are addressed to His people (vv.1-3)

The Apostle Paul is one of the many people who wrote the Bible. But he is very clear in all his writings that his letters are not mere personal letters, but there are messages of God to His people. Paul was called by God to be an apostle and he writes not only to the church in Corinth but to “all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus – their Lord and ours”, this means, to us as well. Paul says that we were “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy” and he wishes “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

We believe that God's will is revealed and expressed in the Holy Scripture. As a result our thoughts, decisions and actions are to be informed and guided by God's Word alone.

The Bible is a book given to us not to be stored in a nice shelf or to be used as a decoration ornament, but to be read, to be believed and to be obeyed.

II – The Scriptures give grace in Christ Jesus (v.4)

Only through the Scripture we receive God's grace, the free salvation by faith, without our merit or effort. Paul wrote, “I always thank God for you because of His grace given to you in Christ Jesus.” This is the second pillar of Luther's Reformation: SOLA GRATIA, By Grace Alone. Without God's Grace we are lost, because we are still sinners.

We confess that although we are set free from the power of sin for eternal life, sin remains a continual struggle. It diverts from God's purpose and enhances self-focus and self-preservation.

Only by God's Grace, believing in Jesus, we are forgiven daily and we can approach God with confidence, as we preached last Sunday about our new life in Christ since we were baptized. We can grow in our spiritual life, as Paul wrote:

III – Through the Scriptures we are enriched in every way (v.5, 6)
“For in Him (Jesus) you have been enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you.” If you miss God closer to you, be sure that He is always at the same place: In His Holy Word and in His Sacrament. Maybe you are far from Him. Come closer. Don’t miss any opportunity to hear His Word in our Services, to read it at home, to study it with your brothers and sister in the weekly Bible Study. You will be “enriched in every way – in all your speaking and in all your knowledge,” because “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work..” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

IV – The Scriptures share God’s spiritual gifts (v. 7)
The Christian life is always a life of expectation. We are in the world but we don’t belong to the world any more. We belong to Christ and we lift our eyes up to the day He comes to fetch us to His eternal Kingdom. But while we are here, we develop and use the gifts God gives us to serve Him and to serve our family, our fellows and our society. The gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and are improved in us by the Word of God. Paul wrote: “Therefore you don’t lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.” We don’t have all the same gifts, but each of us has special talents. Combining these gifts, working together hand by hand, the name of God is glorified and His will is done.

V –The Scriptures make us blameless before God (v.8)
Because Jesus is the Word of God made flesh, and because we receive Christ and all His blessings through the Scripture, we can say that the Scripture prepares us to be blameless before God when we are called. Paul wrote: “He (Jesus) will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” We often get desperate about our weaknesses. It is not the right time to look to us and to our sins, but to look to Jesus and to His grace. Only by Him we are kept strong and blameless. Psalm 119:105 says: “Your word is a

lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” We shall not come to the church and to the Holy Communion when we are well and feel strong only; but just when we feel weak and miserable, the altar of our God is the best refuge to find strength and hope! *In spite of the fact that Paul found much in the Corinthian Christians to criticize, he still called them “sanctified” – not because of their conduct, but because of their relationship to Christ.* (CSSB 1747). *Even on judgment Day our salvation depends 100 percent on this incredibly gracious declaration of God, not on the actual righteousness of our everyday lives... The word ‘blameless’ is meant in a forensic sense; that is, God, by grace and because of the merits of Jesus Christ, declares us blameless even though in behaviour we aren’t.* (Series A, 43).

VI – God is faithful to His Word (v. 9)

And there is no doubt about God promises in the Scripture. We can believe it with our whole heart. Paul closes our text with the assurance: “God, who has called you into the fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.”

The promises of God’s Word calls for “trust” worked by God’s Spirit in and through his Word. In all actions and decision-making we are therefore committed to trust God’s Word alone. Psalm 33:4 says: “For the word of the Lord is right and true, He is faithful in all he does.”

Conclusion: “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it”, says Jesus (Luke 11:28). Martin Luther, explaining the 3rd Commandment, says: We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. God’s Word Alone is a Core Value and the common ground of our church and of our Synod because only the Scriptures reveal Jesus and by faith in Him, gives us eternal salvation. Amen.

(The quotations were taken from FELSISA Values, Mission and Vision booklet).

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 19 January 2014