

Sermon Hebrews 2:14-18 4th Sunday after Epiphany The Presentation of Our Lord

Sermon: 4th Sunday after Epiphany - The Presentation of Our Lord

Text: Hebrews 2: 14-18 (v.17)

Theme: Means of Grace (3rd FELSISA Values)

Goal: God came to us in His Son Jesus Christ; God comes to us nowadays in the Means of Grace

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Following our sequence of preaching on FELSISA Core Values, we come to the third one today: Means of Grace. Some people don't understand what this theological term means. It refers to the way, the means, used by God to come to us, to reach us, and to give us His grace of forgiveness and salvation by faith in Christ.

I – The Law of God

When God used to come to talk to human beings in biblical times, people always became very afraid!

Isaiah, when God called him to be a prophet, he cried out: “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty!” (Isaiah 6:5). The shepherds were terrified when the angel came to announce them that Jesus was born. (Luke 2:9).

This is the natural reaction of each of us, because God is Holy and we are sinners. *We believe that although the Law of God is necessary to reveal our sins and to heighten our dependency on God, it is only God's grace that makes us acceptable to Him and effects change in our lives.* (FELSISA Core Values booklet).

II – God came to us in His Son

God was always gracious, coming to the aid of His scared people, even in the Old Testament times. “Don't be afraid”, was the most

common first message of God to the terrified people to calm them. And He gave several promises that He would once come to mend the bad relationship between God and humankind. And this happened when Jesus came, the true Son of God, who was born as a human being.

Our text says: “Since the children have flesh and blood, He (Jesus) too shared in their humanity... For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people.”

Jesus is the grace and the love of God personified. He showed a gracious God not only when He was kind with the children, and when He healed many people, but He revealed a gracious God when He was sacrificed on behalf of all of us on the cross. He took our condemnation upon Himself to give us freedom and salvation. The text says: “...so that by His death He might destroy...the devil and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.” Due to Jesus’ death and resurrection, we don’t need to fear death and condemnation any more, but we believe that we have a gracious God by faith in Jesus.

The beginning of the Letter to the Hebrews (1:1, 2) says: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son.”

III – God comes to us in His Word and in the Sacraments, - the Means of Grace

But Jesus went back to heaven on His Ascension Day. How does God communicate with us nowadays? He comes to us in His Word and in the Sacraments, - the Means of Grace. How can we be sure that God

is gracious to us? By reading His Word and listening to it, believing that what is written there is the true Word of God; and by regularly taking part in the Sacrament of the Altar, as well as renewing our Baptismal vow daily by confessing our sins and believing in the forgiveness.

We cannot see Jesus anymore. We cannot listen to the living voice of God from heaven anymore. But we can be sure that God comes to us through His Means of Grace, which *makes us acceptable to Him and effects change in our lives. For this Purpose God entrusted to us (His church) His "Means of Grace" in the true proclamation of His Word and the right administration of His sacraments. These Means of Grace we share eagerly always motivated by the grace which we ourselves have experienced in Christ.* (FELSISA Core Values booklet).

The Sacraments are nothing but the Word of God added to some external, visible and touchable elements. So, Baptism is the Word of God added to water; and the Holy Communion is the same Word of God added to bread and wine. - The Word of God makes the big difference between common water and the Baptismal water, as Luther wrote: *For without God's Word the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the Word of God it is baptism, that is, life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.*

(Small Catechism, 3rd). - In the same way, we don't come to the Holy Communion just to eat bread and to drink wine like in a common supper. Luther wrote: *Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things (he is talking about forgiveness of sins, life and salvation), but the Words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." These Words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these Words has exactly what they say: "forgiveness of sins".* (Small Catechism, 3rd).

Conclusion: God doesn't talk to us in dreams and personal revelations anymore. God cannot be found in the nature, as some do retreats in the forest and hug trees to receive good energy from above. If someone wants to find God, he has to search in the right place where God reveals Himself: In His Word and in His Sacrament, the Means of Grace, chosen by God Himself to communicate with us and to give us faith, forgiveness and life in Jesus.

An old non-Christian couple got a Bible as a gift. The husband began to read it. After a while, he said to his wife: If it's true what is written in this Book, we are lost. – He had read only about the Law and felt himself condemned. – He continued to read the Bible. After another while, he said to his wife: If it's true what is written in this Book, there is hope! – He had read about God's promises. – He continued to read the Bible and at once he shouted to his wife: It is true what is written in this Book and we are saved by the grace of God in His Son Jesus Christ! – The Holy Spirit had worked in his heart through the Word of God, calling him to repentance and to faith in Jesus; and the old man shared his amazing experience with his wife.

Without the Means of Grace there is no Christian Church. The Augsburg Confession, Article V, says: *That we may obtain this faith, the Ministry of Teaching the Gospel and Administering the Sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the Gospel, to wit, that God, not for our own merits, but for Christ's sake, justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ's sake.*

May God preserve us as church and Synod in His grace and faithful to His Means of Grace, who reveals us Jesus, our Saviour. Amen.