

Sermon Draft

Text: Philippians 2:1–4 (5–13) 14–18

Sermon: “Word of Life”

Again, this week, the liturgical setting is mission oriented. Ezekiel was sent, Joseph was sold into slavery, but he was still sent. Pentecost is the season in which the Church focuses on the activity of the Holy Spirit in extending the kingdom of Christ through the work and service of the Christian Church on earth.

Paul was like a father to the churches he founded. Some of us know what it means to be a father. We love our children. We want only the best for them. We worry about them sometimes growing up in a sinful and tempting world. Our greatest joys come when all is well with them, and our deepest sadness comes when they are suffering or sinning. Above all else, we want them to remain in faith in Christ, so that they will share eternal joy with us and with all believers in heaven.

That was the way Paul felt about his children, the congregation he founded in Philippi. They were living in what Paul calls “*a crooked and twisted generation*” (v 15), just as we are today, and Paul wanted nothing more than for them to continue in the faith “*so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain*” (v 16).

Paul pleaded with them, as I plead with you, hold fast to the Word of life! That would make his joy and mine complete (v 2). Yes, we need to be in God’s Word regularly. As we open His Word we are fed and nourished so that we may grow and stand firm.

In order for that to happen, in order for us to hold fast the word that will give us eternal life, Paul lays out for the Philippians and for us three concepts: “*encouragement in Christ,*” “*comfort from love,*” and “*participation in the Spirit.*” God enables us to hold fast to the word of life through “*encouragement in Christ*” (v 1a)—whom we receive through God’s Means of Grace.

Every time we hear or read God's Word, Christ himself comes to encourage us. Christians are to study the Word together here and daily at home, seeking to grow in understanding. And so much more, Christ comes to encourage us in worship, the place his Word is always offered.

In our Divine Service, Jesus comes to us in his Word, the message that he died and rose to save us, when it is read, as we hear his Law and Gospel rightly proclaimed by those called and ordained, and as we sing the Gospel in hymns.

In that Word, Christ actually speaks to us, especially when we hear, ***“In the stead and by the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins.”*** Also here, Jesus promises to listen when together we pray to him, thanking God for his blessings and bringing our needs before his altar.

And most tangibly, personally, Christ Jesus comes to encourage us here in the Sacraments. In Baptism, we were made Christ's own brothers and sisters, children of one heavenly Father as we hear the words ***“I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”*** At Christ's altar, we receive the strengthening of our Christian faith by receiving with absolute certainty the forgiveness of all our sins, because the true body and blood of Christ are placed into our own mouths in with and under the bread and wine.

Paul tells the faithful in Philippi, and us today as well, that unity in our worship life gives true encouragement in Christ. That is to say, our participation together in the Word and worship of the Church is the means by which God keeps us believing in Christ, keeps us holding fast to God's promises of eternal life.

God enables us to hold fast to the word of life by *“comfort from love”* (v 1b)—the love of the triune God, whom we confess in the Creeds. What comfort we have in the love of God the Father! God the Father provides daily bread for all people, *“all that I need to support this body and life”* (Small Catechism, First Article): food, clothing, house, home, family, friends, etc. He provides these things through the natural operation of his creation (sun, rain, soil) and by means of our various vocations.

We may sometimes think his provision is inadequate, but it is always more than we sinful people deserve, and shortages are often because of man's failure to be generous. Therefore, believers are to see and know the love of God the Father in every good thing we receive, whatever and however much or little.

What comfort we have in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ! Jesus provides the ultimate comfort for our lives by his sacrifice on the cross and his victory over sin, death, and all that is evil in our lives and in this world. His love is shown to us in the promise of forgiveness and new life given to us in and through faith. As we look to Christ for forgiveness and redemption, we are assured of his love. That is the very assurance to which we hold fast to remain in the faith even to eternal life.

What comfort we have in the ever-present love of the Spirit! In our Baptism, the Holy Spirit said to us, “You are now a child of God, loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son.” It’s always the Holy Spirit who works through the Word to assure us that every loving word of God to us is true. And it is the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Word, by reminding of Christ’s love for us, who guides us to love all people, especially all those he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies—that is, the whole Christian Church on earth.

So, Paul teaches the believers of Philippi and the Church today that a loving relationship between God and mankind is made possible and continues each day by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This mutual love among us is crucial to our remaining in faith, holding fast the word of life.

God enables us to hold fast to the word of life by “participation in the Spirit”—who creates in us “affection,” “sympathy,” and unity (vs 1–2). The Spirit creates affection of believers toward one another. Affection is that love Paul says is critical to be shared among the community of believers if we are to remain in faith, holding fast to eternal life.

Love, though, is not something that happens just because it’s commanded. Rather, from those who are in Christ—those baptized into him who therefore believe he has given them perfect joy forever—there will flow love for one another.

The Spirit creates sympathy for fellow believers. The critical attitude of sympathy also will flow out of the encouragement of faith in Christ. We all know brothers and sisters who are suffering through earthly ills or life’s troubles, who’ve lost loved ones, who are being hurt—even persecuted—by the culture, the world, and those who live outside of the Church. Sympathy is the sense of caring for these dear ones in their trials and sorrows, and God uses it to keep them from letting go of the word of life.

The Spirit creates unity of faith. Being united in faith is critical if we are to hold fast the word of life rather than lose our faith. Disunity with the community of the Church only leads to failure in every part of the mission and ministry of the Christian congregation.

Let it be our resolve in this congregation to study and learn God's Word so thoroughly that we all understand God's faithful doctrine and practice, not grumbling or questioning (v 14), but holding fast to the word of life (v 16).

That's what Paul desires for us, what I desire for you—and not just because it will make his joy, my joy, complete. Holding fast the word of life, that is, holding onto, continuing in, your saving faith in Jesus Christ, will give each one of you joy forever in heaven. And knowing you have that eternal joy will also lead to a joy-filled life in Christ as his people here and now, led by the Holy Spirit to live together united in the peace and harmony of faith in Jesus Christ.

Amen