

Sermon Draft

Text: Romans 6:1–11

Sermon: “We Need Jesus”

Pastors sometimes get attacked for preaching “impractical” sermons. We’re sometimes told that we spend too much time preaching about doctrine and not enough time preaching about what people “really need.” We’re told that if we’re to remain relevant to people, we must address things that people are going through on a day-to-day basis. We don’t need “old stuff”; we need “new stuff.” We need to preach something more “real.”

So, let’s be real. Every living soul must come to grips with the fact that our lives are temporary, and we are all on the clock. None of us knows when our lives will end. Everybody is looking for something to fill the holes they have inside them. Deep down in places that no one likes to talk about, we all have them. Loneliness, insecurity, fear, loss, and need are common to us all. In this room, there are children who are afraid of the future. There are widows and widowers who are grieving the loss of their spouses. There are women who feel unappreciated and men who are afraid they’ve failed their children.

There are some in this room who are carrying a lifetime of guilt, shame, and regret. There are those here who appear to have everything and still feel lack and unease when no one is looking. There are those who feel at times as if they want to die. Everybody has holes to fill, and everyone is looking for something to fill in those holes. Everyone is dying to live. How is that for “real” so far?

To fill in those holes, we need something real. The problem is, we spend too much time trying to fill them in with something unreal. We humans seek every kind of diversion our fallen hearts and minds can devise in order to try and fill these holes within us. Entertainment, and technology, and achievement, and money, and false spiritualities, and sex, and drugs, and alcohol, and the glory of men, just to name a few.

We do everything we can to try and fill these holes, to ease our loneliness, to answer our questions, and to ease our pain. But none of it works, does it? For a moment, it might seem to work. For a time, it helps us to forget the holes, but the remedies of men vanish in time. After they vanish, we’re left again with those holes.

Again, to fill those holes, we need something real. That something real cannot be found in our elected officials, or in our favorite cable news shows. That something real cannot be found in social media, or on a concert stage, or in the rhetoric of some talking head, or in all the self-help books we can find at Barnes and Noble. The real things that fill the holes are flesh and blood. The real things that fill the holes are bread and wine. The real things that fill the holes are wood, and water, and dirt, and life and death. The real thing that fills the holes is truth. Not lies or half-truths. Real truth. To hear the real truth, we must listen to the Word of God.

Hear the word of our Lord concerning the truth. Hear the word of the Lord concerning our life today. Our Lord and Savior knew that we were going to need something to hold on to in this life, things that would sustain our faith, tangible things that we could look to for comfort and truth. God knew that the world would kick the stuffing out of us. Satan and his demons are not partying it up in hell, friends. They are roaming about the earth, looking for souls to devour. They are looking for you and me.

We have been afflicted before, and we will be afflicted until our time here on earth is done.

To comfort our weary souls and to strengthen our faith, the Lord has given us some real truth to hang on to. Witness today's Epistle: ***“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life”*** (vs 3–4).

Here, the apostle Paul directs the weary hearts of the Romans to something they can hold on to. Paul tells them that they are connected to Jesus. He reminds them that they have been washed with real water that was connected to a very real word. He proclaims that this was a real event and that something real has happened to them.

The truth Paul communicated here was not just to the Romans. He speaks to us today and to our Baptism. The old you died that day, and someone new was born. This really happened, and there were eyewitnesses. Real physical water combined with God's true Word has changed our entire future.

We are forever connected to the death and resurrection of Jesus. When he died, we died. When he rose from the dead, we rose from the dead. Now, everything is different. Now, when we feel uncertain about our identity, or value, or about what to put our hope in, we can look to that moment when Jesus joined himself to us with water, and we were changed. It is hard to live in this fallen world, but the reality of our Baptism gives us forgiveness, identity, salvation and hope.

Here's how practical that is. Paul continues, ***“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”*** (vs 9–11).

Paul here connects two historical events: Christ's death and resurrection and our Baptism. We were connected to the cross in our Baptism. Jesus' real flesh and real blood were nailed with real nails to real wood when Jesus hung on a real cross and experienced a very real death. He really paid for all our very real sins, saving us from a very real hell.

And when he rose again, he rose to live eternally in a very real heaven. And because we are forever connected to him at our Baptism, we, too, will live eternally. Really. That's what Paul urged the Romans, and us, to cling to as life sometimes kicks the stuffing out of us.

God knew that things were going to be too tough for us to go around thinking abstract thoughts about salvation. This is why God connected heavenly things to earthly things so that we have something to hold on to. This is why the worship service was meant to fill our senses. You come to the Divine Service and see that you are not alone. The room is full of God's broken but beloved children. We confess our sins together and see that we are not alone in our sin. We also see things in the worship service that we don't see anywhere else: an altar, a baptismal font, and a pulpit. These are God's means for bringing us salvation.

When you confess your sins and I announce God's forgiveness of sins to you, it is not a different forgiveness than you receive in your bedroom, but God wants you to hear it. He wants you to hear that you are really forgiven.

In the words of the sermon and the liturgy that we speak together, you hear that you are a sinner, but that you are also saved by God's grace alone.

God joins his real body and real blood to the earthly elements of bread and wine, and thus he gives us his real presence and a forgiveness we can taste. He really joins his real body and blood to real bread and wine that we can eat and drink. His body and blood give us life, and they strengthen and renew us so that we are able to cling to the faith in Jesus Christ that saves. Seeing, hearing, smelling, eating, and drinking. It seems that God has given us a lot of very real things to hang on to in this life. In this way, Jesus Christ fills the holes we cannot fill. It is Christ alone who can make us complete.

The Christian life is not a perfect life. We will at times be lonely and afraid, and we will suffer. Sin on earth, both ours and that of others, has made our lives the way they are. But the Christian life is also a life of assurance and hope. As you return to the world this morning, remember your Baptism. It is real water joined to God's real Word.

Baptism has made you alive where once you were dead in trespasses. It has washed away your guilt and has pardoned your regret and shame. Jesus himself has given you the mercy he won for you at the cross. Look to your Baptism daily, for there you will find your identity. There you will find your connection to the history of your people. There you will find life and salvation. Look to your Baptism. There you will find the reality of Christ. There is something you can hang on to in the trials of your daily lives.

Who says preaching doctrine isn't practical? In the name of Jesus.
Amen.