

"Confess, Believe, Live"

Text: Romans 10:8b-13

May the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ – the focus of the season we have just entered – lead you to contemplate just how great and how precious is your personal gift of forgiveness of sins and Eternal Life. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Most things in life tend to be pretty simple – straightforward – and only get complicated when they are challenged, or when you have to somehow *prove* what seems so simple and obvious. This applies to both secular and spiritual truths. "*Life begins at conception*," for example, is just simple common-sense, until someone baits us into trying to prove that statement medically or scientifically. That doesn't change the truth; it just makes everything more complicated. It's simple to say that the body breathes in oxygen, which the lungs then introduce into the bloodstream. But then try to explain how those oxygen molecules get into the bloodstream without the molecules that make up blood leaking back into the lungs between breaths – especially when blood-pressure is higher than the pressure of the air in our lungs. Or try to explain how the lungs distinguish between the oxygen molecules and all the other gases we breathe in, like Nitrogen, Carbon dioxide, Argon, Helium, Neon, Methane, and so forth.

Permit a few more examples. $1+1=2$. Simple. But did you know that the proof for that simple equation is over 300 pages long and wasn't conclusively demonstrated until fairly recently? Or take the simple English word "the." Simple, until you try to teach someone English. Why do we say, "*I have the flu*" but not "*I have the cold*"? Why do we say "*I love the ballet*" and not "*I love the cable TV*"? You yawn when you're tired or bored (which, hopefully, none of you are doing now). Simple. Try explaining why scientifically. A host of scientific and medical studies have proven conclusively that the reason we yawn is *not* to draw in extra oxygen, which is what most think is happening. Nor can anyone explain why yawning is contagious. You like what you like, right, and enjoy what you enjoy? Simple. Not so, say the scientists. What we like and dislike is determined in large part by what others believe they like and dislike. Have you heard of the "Chivas Regal Effect"? Chivas Regal's sales exploded when they did one thing: they raised the price of their product dramatically. Suddenly, magically, everyone liked their product more. Scientists have found that when consumers taste something that they are told is very inexpensive, they "like it" much less than when they try the exact same product but are

told it is outrageously expensive. Same when they are told something is popular or unpopular.

This is exactly why life itself is becoming ever more complicated – we know more, and as a result we feel we know less. As the pieces of the puzzle get smaller, it stands to reason that it will be much more difficult to assemble the whole puzzle and see the big picture. That's also probably why so many yearn for simpler times. Things just seem to be getting more and more complicated.

It's actually important that we do just that from time to time in connection with the Christian faith – that we return to the simple basics. Though Christianity itself is amazingly simple, the necessary *defense* of Christianity makes it seem impossibly complicated. From time to time we just need to step back and return to the simple, straightforward foundational truths of what we teach and believe. That is our goal this morning. The text that will direct us back to the amazing simplicity of our faith is found in Paul's Letter to the Romans, the 10th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Romans 10:8b-13** ***"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

So far the Word of God. These words are true and perfect, for they are God's words. They are also clear, simple, and yet highly instructive. That God would use them to instruct, comfort, strengthen and encourage also here and now, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by Your truth O Lord, your Word is truth.**" Amen.

One of the more common charges brought against the Christian faith, and therefore against those Christians who hold to and promote that faith, is the notion that the difference between going to heaven and going to hell just can't possibly be as simple as we make it out to be. In fact, to the world, most of the solutions to problems that our God gave us in his Word are also just too naïve and straightforward to work in the real world.

Then come the inevitable problems and complexities – when we get caught up in the defense of our positions and beliefs. The fact is it is neither the problems nor the solutions that are too complex. The fault lies entirely with man's sinful refusal to address the problems with *God's* solutions, or man's insistence on making God's wisdom too convoluted or disjointed.

Yet at the risk of doing the very thing we said we weren't going to do this morning (make God's Word complicated) we need to bore down a bit into the words of our text. We do so not in an effort to make them more complicated, but to make sure that they are every bit as simple and obvious as they appear. In other words, before we can truly admire the simplicity of God's Word, we first need to make sure it actually is God's Word.

The first point Paul makes in our text centers around the words "**mouth**" and "**heart**." Paul is here quoting Moses and what the Prophet wrote thousands of years earlier in Deuteronomy 30. In other words, the Holy Spirit is here quoting himself. He's making the point that the truth that saves human beings is neither complicated nor unattainable. That which saves us is not secured away in the heavens or bound in the depths of the earth. Finding it does not require an arduous quest or perilous exertion. It is, in other words, openly available and accessible to every man, woman, and child regardless of race, color, or creed. In fact in speaking to Christians he is emphasizing the fact that far from "out there somewhere" we actually even now possess all that we will ever need to be saved.

The Holy Spirit through Paul then goes on to further explain what he means by "**mouth**" and "**heart**" when he says, "**... if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead...**" That's where "**mouth**" and "**heart**" come in. What we need is already in us. The faith that lives in our hearts naturally flows out of our mouths as our confession of what we believe.

But doesn't this seem to indicate that we have to *do* the confessing, and the believing, if we are to be saved? Have you ever read this text and wondered about that – that there is maybe something that I need to do for all of this to work? Maybe even something mechanical like saying, out loud, "**Jesus is Lord**"? Or have you wondered about the word order? Did it ever occur to you that it seems that "**believe**" should come before "**confess**"? Look again at the words immediately preceding. Paul is making it clear that he is speaking to those who already have these gifts, those who already have the "**word of faith**" in their mouths and hearts. Paul is therefore telling them (and therefore also us) that they don't need

to look for anything else, certainly not anything they themselves have to supply.

As to the word order, Paul is just using the order as it was written originally by Moses. Don't put more into it than that. We are not told here, in other words, that we must supply some sort of confession before we can believe.

To further prove that point, note also all the passives in this text: "**be saved...is justified...is saved...be saved.**" What Paul is holding up for us to examine is not something that is earned; it is something that is done for us and given to us. The faith that saves is created in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit, and that faith can't help but to confess that which it believes, that which it holds so dear. And that faith is not something that we need to look for, discover, or create on our own. As a child of God, it's already yours.

This brings us, logically, to the single most basic question that faces all mankind: *How can a human being get to heaven?* All other questions pale in comparison to this basic issue. The good news for you and me is that our text for this morning offers us perfect, and yet perfectly simple, answers to this great question.

Our text – together with the rest of God's Word – represents the authoritative difference between simple truth and clever fabrication. Again, this critical difference is nowhere more important than in the discussion of how man can escape the eternal torment of hell and abide instead in the perfect bliss of heaven.

There simply is nothing at all mysterious in God's plan, except where human nonsense clouds the pure, clear words of Holy Scripture. Listen again and thrill to God's unambiguous words in our text: "**If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**" This is the sort of straightforward simplicity with which we are to comfort our troubled hearts. Again we read: "**For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.'**" Do you believe in Jesus Christ? Is your confession, your belief, that he is your Savior? Then these holy, inspired words represent God's promise that you will never be put to shame. Judgment Day need hold no terror for you, despite your past sins. Again the pure and simple words of our text: "**For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.**"¹³ **For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'**

The promise is yours no matter what sort of blood is flowing in your veins and no matter who your parents were or are. God doesn't judge according to such things. The promise is yours without you adding anything that has not already been given to you. These words assure you that you are a child of God and an heir of everlasting life in heaven. They apply to you regardless of what you have or haven't done. Hear that again: this promise is yours despite your sins and shortcomings.

Use these words whenever and wherever the devil attacks you with guilt and depression. Note that they say nothing whatsoever of your past sins, for those sins cannot be used against you. Jesus paid for them, and in paying for them he removed them from the proceedings of Judgment Day. Your past sins are inadmissible in God's divine court. The very One who will one day judge you has declared it to be so. Another has been punished for those sins, in your place. The Judge has so ruled, having set his seal to that decree in the form of the empty tomb on Easter morning.

There is also a critically important fact to be learned here relating to our witness and outreach to the unbeliever. Here too we need to recognize our own natural tendency to dismiss the simple in favor of the complex. Our text reminds us that complex argumentation can no more bring an unbeliever to spiritual life than shouting at a dead cow can convince it to hop up and play the saxophone. How then do we go about winning souls? What good is our witness if the sinner cannot be convinced? The sinner can indeed be convinced, but only by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit works through the simple messages of law and gospel. The message that they need to hear is that we sinned, but God saves through faith in Jesus Christ, who paid for that sin through his death on the cross. It is through that simple message that God the Holy Spirit creates and preserves saving faith.

Clever might be good for adding bodies to the pews, but it's lousy for adding names to the Book of Life. Now more than ever the world needs to hear a crystal clear proclamation of the truth – the truth as *God* has declared it. There are many kinds of courage, but what the world needs from you and me is a plain, simple, *courageous* witness of these basic truths - uncompromisingly offered without fear of consequences.

Grab hold then of the simple joy of these words in our text: **"everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."** This alone is the reality that saves. **"Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame."** What a joy to hear such words and to know that they are now and forever true. Our sins are forgiven. Salvation is ours through faith in

Jesus Christ, our Savior. This is God's Word of Promise. Simple. Perfect. Priceless. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 26:5-10** "And you shall make response before the LORD your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. ⁶ And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸ And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. ⁹ And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O LORD, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the LORD your God and worship before the LORD your God.

^{ESV} **Luke 4:1-13** And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness ² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." ⁴ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone.'" ⁵ And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, ⁶ and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. ⁷ If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸ And Jesus answered him, "It is written, "'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'" ⁹ And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written, "'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,'" ¹¹ and "'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" ¹² And Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³ And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.

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The First Sunday in Lent – February 14, 2016

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 145 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Refuge of the Weary"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Deuteronomy 26:5-10) Our Old Testament Lesson speaks of the origin of the Jewish Offering of Firstfruits. Since the Lord has also brought each of us out of the bondage of sin, through the death of Jesus Christ, we also now bring our "firstfruits" to our Lord each week in thanksgiving. God would have us regard giving as a privilege, not as an oppressive command.

Psalm 51 (Supplement page 28) (Brown Hymnal)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 4:1-13) We can learn much from Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. We learn to expect half-truths from the devil; we learn to combat temptation with the Word of God alone; and we learn that we do not *have to* sin. God through his Holy Spirit offers us help in times of trouble to overcome all temptation. God grant each of us the wisdom to seek that help in the Word of God, and to fight the fire of temptation with the fire of his Word.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 376 (Red Hymnal)

"Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 10:8b-13 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Confess, Believe, Live"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

Offering followed by the Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 375 (Verses 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"If Thy Beloved Son, O God"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 305 (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 48 (Red Hymnal)

"How Blest Are They Who Hear God's Word"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (36) Average (46) Wed (20) Organ Fund (\$18,930 of \$22,000)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today

-9:00 a.m.

– Sunday School and Bible Class

-10:00 a.m.

– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion

-11:15 a.m.

– Fellowship and Coffee time

-11:30 a.m.

– Church Council Meeting

Tuesday

-6:00 p.m.

– Confirmation Class

Wednesday

-7:00 p.m.

– Midweek Lenten Service

Next Sunday

-9:00 a.m.

– Sunday School and Bible Class

-10:00 a.m.

– Sunday Worship Service

-11:00 a.m.

– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Luke Bernthal is considering the call to Mt. Zion of Detroit. Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia. Teacher Nathan Wales is considering the call to Gethsemane of Spokane. In January the CLC membership responded to our Synodical deficit with the largest monthly offering in our Synod's history.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet after the fellowship time this morning.

Organ Update – We were informed this week that our organ has been built and the company is now applying the finish to the console to match our church's interior. Offerings are about \$3,000 from our goal.

Confirmation Class – Please note that Confirmation Classes have been moved to Tuesdays for the rest of the Lenten season. Please let the Pastor know of any scheduling conflicts.

Congratulations! – A healthy baby boy was delivered to Zachari Meyer and Whitney on Thursday in Fargo – Sterling Archer Meyer. Thanks be to God, who gives good gifts to mankind!