

"Let the Goal Dictate the Moment"

Text: Acts 4:8-14

God grant to each of us an unobstructed and uninterrupted view of eternity, directing each thought, word and action to that end and to the glory of the God who there resides. Amen.

Dear Representatives of one true Triune God:

Can any of you remember your time in kindergarten? I'm guessing probably not, except maybe a vague, random incident or two. Yet do you remember how you felt about kindergarten at the time? In case you don't remember, it was a big deal. It was one of those early milestones that kids tend to yearn for, in this case going to school for the first time and how it made you feel older and more important somehow.

Next question: Does anyone here feel that those nine months or so of kindergarten represented the pinnacle of your life on earth? Of course not. Same with elementary school, high school, and even college. Hopefully you enjoyed all of those experiences, but most understand that the school years were just preparation for the rest of life. In fact there wouldn't be much point in going to school if life ended at graduation. Preparation leads to something. It anticipates the arrival of something bigger, more important and longer lasting. Athletes, for example, don't train just to train; they train to compete. Education is intended to train you for not only your career but for life.

Christians can and should carry that one step further. Since this life is really only about the life that is to come, every aspect of this life (including education) should be geared toward not just this life but the next. Since Jesus Christ is the only gate or path to an everlasting existence in heaven, there really then is no getting around the fact that life is rightly all about Jesus Christ.

No doubt this is why the unbelieving world struggles so with the meaning of life – a recurring question in every generation. If they never come to know Jesus Christ, the answer will forever evade them. There is, after all, a reason the Bible repeatedly refers to the gospel as *"the mystery."* Unbelievers just don't get it – and never will unless and until *"the mystery"* is revealed to them by God the Holy Spirit, working through his Word. Until they hear with faith, man will always struggle to make some sort of logical sense out of that which *"surpasses all understanding."*

Yet Christians do get it because God's Word has not left us in doubt. While the world will continue to search for meaning and purpose, you know that God has already defined such things for his children. You therefore know *exactly* what the goal and purpose of life truly is and, knowing that, you can

also now know how to live "in the moment" here in time. To be reminded of these vital truths we turn to our text for this morning, found recorded in the Fourth Chapter of the Book of Acts:

^{ESV} **Acts 4:8-14** *Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." ¹³ ¶ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.*

These are the inspired words of God. In fact if they were not the words of God himself, we could well argue that spending any time on them would be an exercise in futility. Confident instead that our God gave us these, his very words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Our text begins with the phrase: ***"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..."*** We tend to skip over the ***"filled with the Holy Spirit"*** part because we don't fully understand what that means, or what it meant in Peter's day, when God at times spoke directly to human beings. What we can know, however, is that no one who is "filled by the Holy Spirit" could ever speak anything but the truth. It means that whatever we hear next is absolutely trustworthy and accurate, and we should use it (learn from it) accordingly.

Peter and John were filled with the Holy Spirit when they faced and addressed the very same group that shortly before had sentenced their Lord Jesus to death. Remember that fact as you read through this text. These were the same men who had forced Pilate to crucify Jesus. It had to be intimidating in the extreme for Peter and John to be hauled before them and condemned - even more so given the fact that, unlike their accusers, Peter and John were simple, uneducated fishermen. This sort of citizen routinely cowered before the highly educated Sanhedrin of the Jews.

Do you remember *why* these men had been summoned by the Jewish authorities? Peter had healed a lame beggar – a man *born* lame. Jesus, you will recall, also healed a man with a congenital handicap (blind from

birth) but he did so on the Sabbath – which was the point on which the Jews accused him. This man was healed, but not on the Sabbath. So what was the real reason for summoning Peter and John? They preached Christ.

At least the Jewish leaders had finally abandoned their pretense and hypocrisy and were finally admitting their true and basic motive: they hated Jesus Christ and the gospel that he taught. Peter and John also however revealed the basis for all that they did. Performing a kindness to a suffering human being was not an end unto itself; it was an act carried out in the moment *that advanced their life-defining goal.*

Peter pointed out the ridiculous nature of the charges against him when he said, **“Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man ...”** Even the Jews had to admit that to arrest these men for healing a man born lame was itself rather, well, *lame*. Peter knew their true motive, so he continued: **“Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well.”**

That, in fact, was the real deal, wasn't it? These men couldn't care less about a lame beggar. Their hatred for Jesus, however, permeated their whole being. Suffice it therefore to say that those men were *not* filled with the Holy Spirit. No one who is filled with the Spirit can, at the same time, be filled with such blind hatred toward something as pure and holy as the very Son of God. Peter knew this, which was no great insight. What is far more interesting here is the fact that he tackled the real problem head on. Remember that he stood before cruel, bloodthirsty men. They had screamed for the blood of Jesus, and they would certainly not hesitate to do the same with his disciples. Yet note well what Peter did, for his actions reveal one of the great lessons for us in this text. We know that his actions were right and God pleasing here, since we know that he was **“filled with the Holy Spirit.”** So it is that we note with great interest that the very first thing that he did was to deflect the attention away from himself and onto the Lord Jesus. This really wasn't all about Peter and John. This was all about Jesus the Messiah, and the Holy Spirit wanted the Jewish rulers to be clear on that fact right from the start. It is also very enlightening to note that the Holy Spirit made this clear with a proclamation of both pure law and pure gospel. The law message here couldn't be missed. Peter said, **“By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified...”** Then also the gospel: **“...whom God raised from the dead... And there is salvation in no one else.”**

Do you remember when Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, first came out? The Jews immediately condemned the film as anti-Semitic, and most Christians were quick to run for cover. How or why anti-Semitic? Because the movie blamed the Jews for killing Jesus. Interesting to note that Peter here accuses the very Jews who killed Jesus *to their faces*, and they make no denial. Of course the Jews killed Jesus. They did so by means of the Roman cross. Why would these men even try to deny it? They were still overjoyed to be rid of the man, and regarded his death as a good thing. Yet such distractions are also of the devil. What is important here is not who killed Jesus but *why he had to die*. His life actually wasn't taken from him, he willingly gave his life as the payment for sin. Jesus did what he did for sinners – like you and me.

Peter goes on with words of power that truly shocked his Jewish accusers. It wasn't necessarily the *message* of the words that shocked them (although that message certainly could have and should have) but the *source* of the words. Hear again Peter's closing message and the reaction from the Jews: **“This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”** The reaction of the Jews? **“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”**

Why couldn't these educated rulers bully those poor dumb fishermen into submission? Clearly because those poor dumb fishermen were filled with the Holy Spirit. When man fights God, man always loses. The Jewish rulers finally came to realize what they were up against, didn't they? Those ominous words of our text make this clear: **“And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.”** Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit, had thus faithfully fulfilled their divine calling. Far from accepting any praise for healing the lame beggar, they had immediately and expertly redirected attention from themselves to their Savior. This wasn't all about man. It was all about Jesus Christ.

Here is the great and practical message for us in this text. We are often extremely poor at recognizing that it's not all about me. Try applying that simple phrase to the various problems and frustrations in your life (career choice, child rearing, even witnessing) and you will quickly see just how important this whole topic really is. Christians are called to selflessness – to service not to self but to our God and to our neighbor. Even when we witness to others we tend to burden ourselves with the notion that we are spreading our own ideas or our own beliefs, and we tend to share them as such. We personally believe the message we are sharing, of course, but we err greatly whenever we fail to simply reflect our Savior Jesus in all of our words and actions. It's all about Jesus, *because Jesus was all about*

us. We share *his* words, not ours, because his words tell of the only passage to eternal life. Our calling is to reflect the truth and glory of our Lord Jesus, and to direct the focus of others onto that One Pure Light. There they will see the very thing that salvation is made of: Jesus Christ, who wrote a check to God the Father (drawn on his own personal store of perfect behavior) as payment in full for the sins of the world. God the Father accepted his Son's payment, and has, as a result, declared every one of us innocent of all sin. Our sins have been forgiven, free of charge to you and me, always and only because Jesus paid the bill. Believing that Jesus did what he said he did, his perfection is ours – which means full and complete forgiveness of our sins, now and for all eternity.

But there's one other application that we need to make here, one other truth that we need to recognize. The Bible gives what at times sounds like conflicting guidance, for at times we are told to "live in the moment," and then again we are told to live with our eyes fixed not on this life but on that which is to come. Compare what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount with what the Holy Spirit told us in Paul's Letter to the Philippians. First in Matthew 6:34 Jesus said, ***"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."*** And then in Philippians 3:18-21 we read: ***"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."*** How can we do both? How can we live in the moment and still live with a view toward the eternity that will follow this life?

The answer is not difficult. God's will is that we do both, but that means recognizing that earthly life is to eternity as kindergarten is to life. It means directing every word and action here in time (living in the moment) with a view to the eternity that will follow (focusing on eternity). That means, for example, that acts of charity and kindness are never to be an end in themselves but a means toward a goal. Peter and John did not heal the crippled man in our text just so he could have a better life on earth but so that he (and countless others) could come to know Jesus Christ. In fact this simple truth (letting the goal of heaven dictate each moment of our lives) changes everything. It is profoundly transformative in that it casts every single one of our actions and decisions in a different light. Every thought, word, and action is then judged on the basis of eternity. Each decision is made on the basis of whether what I do will advance or hinder the kingdom of God, both for myself and for my neighbor.

God grant us grace to be selfless, as was our Savior, and to reflect Christ's glory in every aspect of our lives – all with a view to the eternity that will

follow this short time on earth. To do otherwise would be roughly the equivalent of imaging that life began and ended with kindergarten. Walk instead through this life remembering that one great day every human being will stand before our Creator, to be judged on the basis of his or her relationship with Jesus Christ. God hasten that great day, and direct every single one of our thoughts, words, and actions here in time accordingly. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **Isaiah 55:1-5** "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

ESV **Romans 9:1-8** I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ ¶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost – August 6, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 237 (Red Hymnal)

"All Glory Be to God on High"

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

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

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 55:1-5) Our Old Testament lesson draws a striking comparison between earthly food and drink, and spiritual food and drink. While all men realize the need for the physical, most neglect their far more critical spiritual needs. Tragically, the focus of Christianity today has shifted from the spiritual needs of mankind and is now focused on the lesser needs of the body. God give us wisdom to seek and to share the greater good.

Psalm 91 (Supplement page 33) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 9:1-8) There is no doubt that Paul had a deep and abiding love for his own people, the Jews. Yet it is foolish to imagine that God's favor is based on anything other than faith in the Promised Messiah. When the Jews rejected God's Son, God also rejected them. When the Jews rejected Paul's message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul also turned away from his own people and took the message of the gospel to the Gentiles. Christians are the new "Israel."

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 540 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"With the Lord Begin Thy Task"

The Sermon – Text: Acts 4:8-13 (Printed on the back of this bulletin)

"Let the Goal Dictate the Moment"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 540 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"With the Lord Begin Thy Task"

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn - 535 (Stanzas 1-2, 9) (Red Hymnal)

"Rejoice, My Heart, Be Glad and Sing"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (33) Ave (44)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
Monday	-10:00 a.m.	– Study Conference in Hecla
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship/Coffee Time
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Richard Kanzenbach is considering the call to St. Luke's of Lemmon. Teacher Matthew Thurow is considering the call to Faith of Markesan. Messiah of Eau Claire has called Teacher Valarie Hammet.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday following the fellowship time.

VBS – The dates for our Summer Vacation Bible School have been set for Friday and Saturday, August 18-19. A flier distribution is also being planned to precede the VBS sessions. For more information on the flier distribution please see Angela Meyer.

Partners In Ministry Program – The new Partners in Ministry Program is designed to link active CLC called servants who have SAF loans with sponsors who agree to provide matching funds for payments on those loans. The donor and recipient remain anonymous to each other. To participate, or for more information, please contact the ILC Business Manager, Jim Sandeen, [715-836-6622](tel:715-836-6622) jimsandeen@gmail.com.

ILC Contractors and Volunteers – Immanuel College in Eau Claire is compiling a list of licensed and bonded CLC contractors to consult and/or bid on maintenance and construction projects at Immanuel. Please see the Pastor for more details. They are also looking for volunteers to clean the newly renovated Boys' Dorm during the first two weeks of August.

Annual Harvest Festival – Prince of Peace of Hecla is celebrating their annual Harvest Festival next Sunday (August 13) at 4pm at the Marvin Hansen farm north of Hecla. A meal will be served after the service. More information is available from the Pastor.