

# "The Sure Thing"

Text: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each of you, now and into eternity. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians: Ever notice how we seem to be much better both at looking back and looking forward than we are at focusing on the present? We always seem to be waxing nostalgic about days gone by or planning for the future, and in the process we tend to do a really poor job of appreciating what we have in the moment – right now. In so doing we rob ourselves of the only part of our lives that we can actually control – the present. It's all very predictable, and very tragic. It's predictable in that we can almost never learn to appreciate what we have until it's gone, and then it's part of that past that we can never regain. Children, for example, are always looking forward to being adults, and they miss the pure joy of just being a carefree kid. Young couples look forward to having children, and then young parents look forward longingly to the day they can get a good night's sleep, and then for the day when they can regain some of the freedom they sacrifice to be good parents. And then suddenly the kids are grown and gone and those same parents look back longingly to those "good old days" and wonder where the time went. Husbands and wives tend to live as though they will always have each other, and then suddenly they don't. Instead of living in the moment we tend to plan for a retirement that may or may not ever materialize.

This learning to live in the moment is one of the more difficult lessons to learn in life, and it tends to always go back to the fact that we have a hard time recognizing and appreciating what we have until it's gone.

These lessons are almost never learned all at once. They are learned little by little as each human being trudges through the successes and failures of life. It's only life itself that teaches us that the home run is nothing without the strikeout. The touchdown run is nothing without the fumble or the tackle for no gain. The A is nothing without the F, happiness is nothing without sorrow, problem solving is nothing without frustration, your job means little until you have no job.

The bottom line is that life is interesting because there *is* struggle. Success is only sweet when confronted with the possibility of failure. We really only appreciate the good times because there are bad times, and the future is intriguing – at least in part – because there is no such thing as a "sure thing" in a sinful world. *"Life is like a box of chocolates"* and all that.

Yet while this sort of thing might hold true in the secular, we need something more in the spiritual. While a certain amount of uncertainty and threat of failure

can lend excitement and interest to certain elements of life, we don't want such things when it comes to faith and eternity. There we want to take no chances – we can not *afford* to take chances. When it comes to our faith and our eternal futures, there we want a sure thing – a guarantee. There we want *certainty*. There we don't ever want to learn what we had by losing it.

The great news here is that there we *have* certainty - a sure thing – and we don't have to lose what we've got right this very moment to learn to appreciate what we've got. There – in connection with our eternal future – we have a rock solid guarantee from the only Entity that can ever guarantee anything at all. This is the comforting message of our text for this morning, found recorded in Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the Second Chapter:

ESV **2 Timothy 2:8-13 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful-- for he cannot deny himself.**

These are the verbally inspired words of our Holy God. What a blessing to have such words of truth to guide and direct our thoughts and actions in these turbulent and uncertain times. That God the Holy Spirit would so direct, instruct, and inspire the hearts of each of us this morning, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

You've probably all purchased products from companies that offered "Lifetime Guarantees" – only to discover that the "lifetime" part of the guarantee referred to the company's life, not yours. In other words, when you tried to return the broken product you found that the company was no longer in business.

This is just one example of the sobering truth that outside of the spiritual side of our existence it's hard to come up with one thing in this world that we can absolutely count on as a sure thing. Not one of us can know for certain which breath we draw will be our last, which sunrise will mark the end of the world as we know it, which loved one will still greet us among the land of the living on the morrow. For children of a merciful and loving God, this realization ought to arrive at the doorstep of our realization accompanied by neither surprise nor anxiety. But it often does, just as with the children of the world around us. In fact such things terrify the Godless,

who tend to reach for the tranquilizers at the mere *thought* that they themselves are not in control.

The world just plain does not fancy the idea of being out of control – in any situation. The truth of the matter is that we are in control of very, very little in this life – other than the ability to look at the present and appreciate what we have *right now*. If God decides that our time of grace is at an end, no amount of medical prowess or scientific research will alter that decision. If, on the other hand, God decides that our time of grace is to be extended, not even a chance encounter with a meteor the size of Wyoming can dictate otherwise.

The real bottom line problem that unbelievers have is the fact that God, and God alone, is in control of all things. The godless are not comfortable with letting God do the driving because they are not at all comfortable with letting God pick the destination. Because of our sinful old Adam, you and I often share their concerns. *"What if God does something to me that I don't approve of?" "What if God brings or allows some catastrophe into my life, or happens to just leave me to my own devices for a bit?"* Unbelievers seek to bury the very notion that they do not control their own destiny under a mountain of insurance policies, burglar alarms, air bags, bicycle helmets, and vitamins -- anything to give them the illusion that they are, somehow and in some measure, in control – anything to give themselves even a false sense of an impossible guarantee.

You and I will be tempted by the same sinful thoughts, which is really odd given the fact that you and I have been blessed with a different take on the way things are. We take great *comfort* in the fact that *we* are *not* in control. In fact it is one of our greatest joys and a source of great solace to know that **"our times are in His hands"** – that our all-knowing, all-powerful, all-knowing God is calling the shots. We can ask God for many things, but we are always asking with the understanding that since we cannot see the big picture, God alone knows what is best for us or for our loved ones and will filter our requests accordingly. No human being can possibly know such things. How much better, therefore, to be able to relax and let God control our lives. How much better to be able to accept whatever God allows into our lives with the certain knowledge that our wise, loving, and merciful God always knows what is best for us and will work all things in life to our eternal good. This is our first "sure thing" this morning – our loving God most certainly holds each of us ever so gently in his all-powerful hand.

Now while that is certainly a comforting thought, how do we know that it is true? God in his Word leaves no doubt. Just listen to these great, sure, certain promises from our God: **Hebrews 13:5-6** *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* <sup>6</sup> *So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"* Again in Matthew 28:20 Jesus assured us, *"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the*

*age."* And again in John 10:27-28, **"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me."** <sup>28</sup> **And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."**

These passages, and countless others, make this a reality for us – a sure thing. We know that this is so also because of that powerful passage at the very end of our text for this morning: **"If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself."** What, exactly, do these words mean? What do they teach us? What comfort are we supposed to draw from them? Just this: Truth is the very *essence* of our God – a defining characteristic that can never be separated from him. Though all others prove deceitful and faithless, God simply cannot break even one of his promises because truth is a core essential aspect of who and what he is. That means that if God has unconditionally promised to be with us always, to care for us, to shelter and to protect us, nothing in all of creation can change his mind. Nothing can make him go back on his word. When Paul in our text says that **"God cannot deny himself,"** he is both *teaching* us and *comforting* us. He is teaching us something about the nature of God himself, something profoundly comforting. God is truth, just as much as he is love. Both are elements of God's nature and cannot be removed or destroyed. Therefore when he makes a promise, he is simply not capable of going back on that promise. To do so would be to **"deny Himself"** (because these attributes are part of his very essence) and that God cannot do.

And that, dear Christian, is a rare guarantee in uncertain times.

These promises that **"God remains faithful,"** and that **"he cannot deny himself"** open for us whole new worlds of insight if we will but take the time to look carefully. The first such insight actually has to do with just exactly what every single human being can expect from the one true God when that one true God is abandoned or denied. Here too we have a promise from God in our text, and it says with cold finality: **"If we deny him, he also will deny us."** This is pure law. Rejection of God is starkly serious business. Unfortunately our society never seems to get the message. There are not many Gods; there is but one God. To worship a god of any description other than what he has revealed about himself in the Bible *is a denial of the true God*. Remember, this is the God who cannot deny himself – the God who is incapable of going back on his own word and promise, and he himself has promised in our text: **"If we deny him, he also will deny us."**

Do not overlook this *"certainty"* revealed to us in our text, for it is an ironclad promise that a denial of God most certainly brings God's denial of that individual. Jesus said it plainly in Mark 16:16: **"...whoever does not believe will be condemned."** Unbelief is more than just denying that

Jesus once existed as a human being. The demons believe that much. Unbelief is trusting anyone or anything other than Jesus Christ for the full and complete payment of our sin debt. Again, the world and our own sinful flesh would like to turn this into something other than what it really is. They would like to imagine that "believing in God" can mean as little as acknowledging that he exists. Unbelief is the rejection of our Triune God as he has revealed himself to us. Again the simple decree from Mark 16:16 makes this very clear for us: **"He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but whoever does not believe will be condemned."**

While the world might long for some input concerning this decree, though they yearn to exercise some control over the final decisions regarding eternity, there will be no compromise or vacillation by God on Judgment Day. This is another *certainty* because, again, God is simply not capable of saying one thing and then doing another. All who die in rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – which is unbelief – will spend eternity in hell. Again, a *sure thing*, but a very cold and sobering sure thing.

This, however, is obviously not the sort of sure thing upon which you and I focus this morning, since by God's grace you and I will never have to experience the result of unbelief. In fact it is the cold, hard fact that all unbelievers will be condemned on Judgment Day that serves to make the other sure things in our text fairly leap off the page and lift our hearts in thanksgiving to our God. If it is true, as our text most certainly assures us, that God cannot deny his own promises, then what great comfort and joy there is for sinners in the other guarantees in our text. There we read that **"if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him."** Does that mean that if we die in the faith, we will one day rise? While this is certainly true, this is not what these particular words are referring to. Here Paul is talking by inspiration about dying with Christ through conversion, particularly in baptism. Jesus referred to this dying and being born again when he spoke to Nicodemus about the facts of eternal life in John 3. In a moment, when the Holy Spirit worked his miracle of faith in our hearts, in that moment we died with Christ – died to sin and all of its entanglements. *"That being the case,"* God here promises, *"you shall also live with me in heaven."* Remember, God promised. He cannot lie. That promise is even reinforced – and to a certain extent clarified – in the next line of our text: **"If we endure, we will also reign with him."** This is another sure thing, and it ought to fairly take our breath away because here the Holy Spirit promises that not only will those who die in the faith go to heaven, they will also *reign there with Jesus Christ*. Simply amazing.

How we ought to rejoice in this promise. Revel in the comfort and guarantee of these rock solid, sure, words of promise from our omnipotent God, and be ready to give a reason to your neighbor when he sees the hope, the joy, and confidence that is so obvious in your life. God be praised for these precious words of certainty, and for the certainty of our salvation in Jesus Christ our

Savior – and enable us daily, moment by moment, to appreciate what you and I have – right this very moment. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ruth 1:1,4-19a** In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons...<sup>4</sup> These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years,<sup>5</sup> and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.<sup>6</sup> ¶ Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food.<sup>7</sup> So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.<sup>8</sup> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me."<sup>9</sup> The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.<sup>10</sup> And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."<sup>11</sup> But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?"<sup>12</sup> Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons,<sup>13</sup> would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."<sup>14</sup> Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.<sup>15</sup> ¶ And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."<sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."<sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."<sup>18</sup> And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.<sup>19</sup> ¶ So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Luke 17:11-19** On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee.<sup>12</sup> And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance<sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us."<sup>14</sup> When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed.<sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice;<sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan.<sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?"<sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?"<sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: [www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Michael McEnroe, President Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor Today's Organist: Angela Pfennig

**The 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – October 9, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 39 (Red Hymnal)

"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

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

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

**The Old Testament Lesson:** (Ruth 1:1,4-19a) The story of Ruth is a rare bright-spot during the rather dark period of the Judges in Israel. Ruth was not only rescued from unbelief and brought to faith in the one true God, she was also privileged to serve as an ancestor in the line of Jesus Christ. Truly, God is merciful.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 121 (Page 42) Read Responsively

**The Gospel Lesson:** (Luke 17:11-19) This is the rather familiar account of the Ten Lepers. We are taught more here than just the propriety of giving thanks to God for all of the good things that he does for us day after day. We are also here reminded that God calls and accepts souls into his Church from every nation on earth. As God called and saved the Moabite Ruth, so too did he rescue the Samaritan leper in this reading.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn –521 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"What God Ordains Is Always Good"

## The Sermon – Text: 2 Timothy 2:8-13 (Printed on the back page)

**"The Sure Thing"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Pre-Communion Hymn -521 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"What God Ordains Is Always Good"

## The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

## The Distribution

## The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn - 655 (Red Hymnal)

"I Pray Thee, Dear Lord Jesus"

## 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 (38) Average (48)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>- 9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship and Coffee time
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-6:00 p.m.</b>	– Confirmation Class
	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Worship and Organ Dedication
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship meal
	<b>-12:30 p.m.</b>	– Organ concert/demonstration

**CLC News** – Pastor Paul Tiefel has returned the call to Rock of Ages of Grand Rapids, MI.

**Organ Dedication** – The dedication of our new church organ has been scheduled for next Sunday, October 16, during the regular Sunday service. A fellowship meal is scheduled to follow, and thereafter a concert/demonstration by Mr. Barry Hay. Please make plans to attend, and bring a friend.

**Mission Helper Trip** – Plans are underway for a Mission Helper Trip to Nepal in the summer of 2017. More information is available at [www.MHT.LutheranMissions.org](http://www.MHT.LutheranMissions.org).

**ILC Visitors' Day** – ILC Visitors' Day is scheduled for Friday, November 11 on the campus of Immanuel Lutheran College in Eau Claire, WI. Activities include visiting classes, touring the campus, and attending the fall musical. More information is available from the Pastor. You will never regret including ILC as part of your college education.