

"The Simple Joy of the Christian Faith"

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 the pressure in our circulatory system 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, and so forth.

Permit a few more examples. $1+1 = 2$. Simple. But did you know that the mathematical 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 fishing*"? (For the record, I've never said the former.) You yawn when you're tired or bored. 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. Researchers 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 it feels to many like life itself is becoming ever more complicated. We know more, and as a result we feel less certain. That's also probably why so many yearn for simpler times. Things just seem to be getting more and more complicated, and we, in turn, are getting more and more confused.

That's why it's important that we return regularly to the simple basics of the Christian faith. Though Christianity itself is amazingly simple, God himself is incredibly complex, as can be the necessary *defense* of the various doctrines of Christianity. 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, and the text that will direct us back to the amazing simplicity of our faith is found in the 10th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans:

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 us also here this morning, 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 our problems that our God gave us in his Word are also just too naïve and simplistic to work in the real world.

So also we encounter inevitable problems and complexities pretty much every time we attempt a 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 forcing our own mental limitations and logic upon our God (if it doesn't make sense, it can't be right).

Yet at the risk of doing the very thing we said we weren't going to do this morning (which is to 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 confidently rest securely on God's Word, we first need to be sure we understand exactly what he is telling us. As this relates to our text, if we are saved by simple faith alone in Jesus, we need to understand why our text talks about "confessing with the mouth" and "believing with the heart."

When Paul mentions "**mouth**" and "**heart**," he is simply quoting Moses and what the Prophet wrote thousands of years earlier in Deuteronomy 30. The point he's making in our text is that far from complicated or unattainable, the faith by which we are saved is already ours. The truth that saves us is not secured away in the heavens or bound in the depths of the earth. Man does not acquire it by some arduous quest or perilous exertion. It is openly available and accessible to every man, woman, and child regardless of race, color, creed, or intelligence. Here, since he is speaking to Christians, he is emphasizing the fact that far from "out there somewhere" we already in fact possess all that we will ever need to be saved.

But just here is where some inject unnecessary complication by imagining that our text is telling us 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 – wondered if there is maybe something that you 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 you ever wonder why "**believe**" doesn't come before "**confess**"? The key is to look again at the words immediately preceding. Paul is making it clear that he is speaking to those who already have the gift of saving faith, 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.

Yet because so many misunderstand what saving faith really is, or define it wrongly, in our text the Holy Spirit through Paul *defines* this true saving faith. Saving faith is not, for example, the confession that Jesus existed, it is the confession that "**Jesus is Lord**." Nor does saving faith consist only in believing that Jesus died on the cross, but also that "**God raised him from the dead**." In our text, therefore, God the Holy Spirit is not adding to the complexity of the faith that saves, he is defining its simplicity. This faith, which already lives within us, is already ours, and this is the faith that, residing in our hearts, naturally flows out of our mouths as our confession of what we believe.

As to the word order, remember again that Paul is just using the order as it was originally written 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, or that we can't be true believers until we declare something out loud.

To further prove that point, note also all the passives in this text: "**be saved...is justified...is saved...be saved**." The faith that 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 naturally confesses that which it believes, that which it holds so dear. That faith is also not something that we need to look for, discover, or create on our own. As a child of God, it's already yours. It has already been given to you. It is already your personal possession.

The single most basic question that faces all mankind is this: *How can a human being get to heaven?* All other questions pale in comparison. The good news for you and me is that our text for this morning offers us a perfect, and yet perfectly simple, answer to this great question. Our text – together with the rest of God's Word – represents the authoritative difference between simple truth and clever, confusing fabrication. Again, simplicity is nowhere more important than in the discussion of how man can escape the eternal torment of hell and exist forever in the perfect bliss of heaven.

There is actually nothing at all mysterious in God's salvation plan, except where human nonsense clouds the pure, clear words of Holy Scripture. Strip away then all confusion and thrill to exactly what our God is here telling us. In Verse 4, just prior to our text, God tells us that "**Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes**." This is an awesome summary of the gospel. "**The law for righteousness**" is just another way to say "work righteousness"

– believing you can make yourself righteous and acceptable in God’s sight by obeying the law. Not only did Christ put an end to this false idea of how we get to heaven, he himself earned heaven for **“everyone who believes.”** Our text then follows with a simple definition of what that true saving faith looks like: **“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 both our own troubled hearts and the hearts of those in our lives. Again we read in our text: **“For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.’”** Don’t complicate this. Take these simple words at face value. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is your Lord, your Savior? Is your confession, your belief, that he not only died, but rose from the dead? Then these holy, inspired words represent God’s promise that **“you will be saved,”** that you **“will not be put to shame.”** No matter what sins you have committed, Judgment Day need hold no terror for you. 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.’”** This divine guarantee 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, shortcomings, or failures.

Use these words whenever and wherever the devil attacks you with guilt and doubt. 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.

Never lose the simple in the complex. Your confession is that Jesus is your Lord. You believe that God raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore God’s holy, unchangeable decree also applies to you: **“You will be saved.”** Remember this simple truth also in your witness to others. Complex argumentation can no more bring an unbeliever to spiritual life than shouting at a dead cow can convince it to sit up and play the tuba. Sinners are brought to faith by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit works

through the simple messages of law and gospel.

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”** and **“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.

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 – March 6, 2022

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 148 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

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 and as a token of our gratitude, not as an oppressive command.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40)

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 Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This?"

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

"The Simple Joy of the Christian Faith"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 144 (Stanzas 1-4) Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 144 (Stanza 5) Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Grant that Balm and Healing"

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 and around the world. 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 (29) Average (30) Wednesday (25)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Meyer baby shower
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Church Council Meeting

CLC News – Pastor Aaron Ude is considering the call to Immanuel of Winter Haven. Teacher Michaela Winters is considering the call to Berea Lutheran School of Inver Grove Heights. Mrs. Dawn Mayhew has accepted the call to Redeemer School of Cheyenne. Prof. Joel Gullerud has returned the call to Faith School of Markesan. Living Savior of Eden Prairie has called Luke Willitz, a former pastor recently added through colloque to the CLC Roster.

Baby Shower – A baby shower for Timothy and Hope Meyer is scheduled for this morning during the fellowship hour.

Lent – Having entered the season of Lent, please remember the midweek services offered each Wednesday evening through Easter. Our midweek services provide a special opportunity not only to study God's Word, but to identify blind spots in our lives that are frequently neglected – to identify sin and sinful trends that may be affecting us. This year's studies are centered around the theme *"It's Not God's Fault"* where we will seek to address the growing tendency to question or blame God whenever things do not go as we had intended or desired, and to be reminded that our God is always and only good, loving, and merciful to undeserving sinners.

Church Council Meeting – The Church Council is scheduled to meet next Sunday during the fellowship hour.