

Sermon #1,200: Romans 1:1-6

4-10-16, 3rd Sunday of Easter “Good Shepherd,” Bethany-Princeton MN

JESUS’ RESURRECTION PROVES HIS WORD IS THE TRUTH

Prayer: Good and faithful Shepherd, Jesus Christ, of Your infinite love You laid down Your life for the sheep: We give You praise and glory for this Your unspeakable grace and mercy. We humbly ask You, feed us upon the pleasant pastures of Your Word, give us to drink of the waters of salvation, and guide us by Your Holy Spirit, that, as You know us and continually minister to our need, even so we may know You, gladly hear Your voice, and follow You, and by You be delivered from all our foes, until the whole flock shall be gathered in heaven about You, who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Sermon Text, Romans 1:1-6. Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God ² which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, ³ concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. ⁵ Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, ⁶ among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ:

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ feeds His sheep – with what?

As the Good Shepherd, He leads and guides His sheep – using what?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus defends and protects His sheep, but what does He use that is so strong to do this?

He does send pastors – the word shepherd in the Bible is *pastor* – to shepherd His people. But *they* aren’t strong enough. They are sinners, they do not lead perfectly, they make mistakes, they can’t (like Jesus) read minds or see when a sheep is lost or straying, they’re easily intimidated, susceptible to discouragement, they do speak or act wrongly. They aren’t enough.

So how can Jesus’ shepherding work? With the Word. This is what He puts into the hands of His under-shepherds, the pastors, to use. The pasture

is His Word. The still waters are found in His Word. His sheep are led to His Word, and led by His Word: ***“My sheep hear My voice,”*** He said, indicating how they are made His sheep and kept in His flock. He defends and protects His sheep with the sword of the Spirit – the Word of God – and the shield of faith, which comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

This is what pastors are to use to shepherd the flock of God. His Word. The Word they speak is not their own, but the Word of the Lord. The Law that they preach – the rod of the Good Shepherd – is not how frustrated they get by a person under their care, but it is what God directs them to say on His behalf, about sin. The Gospel they preach – the Good Shepherd’s staff that brings the sheep close to Him – consists not of the pastor’s own personal feelings, but the words of eternal life, which speak the mercy and love in God’s heart for sinners. The comfort pastors offer does not consist of their own ideas or opinions, but the promises of God. The power with which they preach is not a personal charisma; it is the power of God’s Word.

So it is vitally important that the words are true. Is God’s Word really true? Not, do you wish it to be true or do you think it is, but is it in fact true?

That is what’s at stake here. St. Paul speaks of this in the opening breath of his epistle to the Romans: **“the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures.”** He says that the Gospel, contained in both the Old and the New Testament, concerns – is wrapped up in – **“Jesus Christ our Lord.”** But is it true?

That is what verse 4 answers: that Jesus Christ was **“declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”** St. Paul says Jesus’ resurrection from the dead declared, **“with power,”** that He is **“the Son of God”** just as He said.

This is so important! When Jesus is risen from the dead it proves that He is who He said He is – the Son of God. Does He need to prove this? Maybe He doesn’t need to prove this to you. You believe He is the Son of God. But why do you believe it? Just because? Is it because you grew up in a Christian home? Is it because you’ve been in the church all your life? Is it because the Bible says so? Well, that last one is true, but we should know why.

The truth of the Bible itself is dependent upon Jesus’ resurrection. He is the center of the Scriptures. He is the message of the Scriptures. In John’s gospel especially, we hear Jesus repeatedly say that God the Father sent Him, that He does nothing on His own authority – we will come back to that

word, *authority* – and that He speaks the things that the Father has sent Him to speak and does those things the Father sent Him to do.

Jesus doesn't want anyone to believe in Him just because. He doesn't want anyone to believe just because they wish or want it to be true. It can open you up at some point to doubt. The devil wants you to base your belief on what you feel, think, or wish to be true. He doesn't want your faith based on something outside of you, something unchanging. The devil promotes the idea that it's a matter of opinion, up to each one's own interpretation.

The test of everything is whether Jesus rises from the dead. If He does not rise, then He is not the Son of God as He said, the things He spoke are not from God and the things He did are the lying wonders of a deceiver. But if He who was dead and buried is up and walking by His own power over death, the *fact* is that He is true. He is the Son of God as He said. His miracles then testify to the fact that He is God. And His words are true.

This is why the eyewitness testimony to Jesus is so important. But it is not just about Him. It is also about His Word. Because Jesus is risen, His Word is true. Here is how it works: Jesus told the disciples ahead of time He was going to be betrayed to the Jewish rulers, arrested, condemned to death, given over to the secular government officials, mocked, beaten, spit upon, and killed – even that He would be lifted up on a cross – and that He would rise from the dead the third day. It all came true, to the letter. What He said would happen, happened, not just in general but in all the specifics.

Well then, if that was true then so was everything else Jesus said. So what Jesus said when He quoted the Old Testament, for example when He taught about marriage by quoting Genesis 1 and saying "*in the beginning,*" that proves that Genesis 1 is true, that the Bible's account of creation is true, that God instituted marriage to be between a man and a woman. When He spoke about Noah, the ark, and the flood -- as He does in Luke 21 – it proves the Bible story of the flood is not just a story but it happened. Jesus speaking about Jonah and the great fish, in Matthew 12, proves that is true.

You can go on and on. Whenever you encounter someone who does not believe that what the Bible says is true – or that any one thing in the Bible cannot be true – the place to begin is with Jesus' resurrection, and the eyewitness testimony that has never been able to be disproven.

It proves everything in the Old Testament and New Testament is true! What the Bible says about itself – that every word is written by inspiration

of God – is true, because Jesus’ resurrection proves the words He spoke on earth were true, and also His resurrection proves that all the words in the Bible are true, and they are all the words of the Lord – the risen Lord.

This is why it is after Jesus is risen from the dead that He says: “***All authority has been given to Me***” (Mt 28:18). This is why – on the very day He rose from the dead – Jesus gives the church His special authority to forgive the sins of troubled sinners and also to withhold forgiveness from unrepenting sinners. He says that when they pronounce forgiveness on earth it is being done in heaven; in other words, it’s absolutely true!

Jesus’ resurrection gives authority to His Word when it’s spoken. This is how His shepherding works. He sends pastors to speak His Word that is absolutely true because of His resurrection. Pastors’ authority is only the authority of His Word. It’s the authority of the risen Jesus. Authority is not a bad word like our modern age thinks. Not if it’s the authority of Jesus, the risen Jesus. It means you can trust that His Word is true.

Now we can get all worked up about the atheists and those who mock Christians and make fun of “Bible thumpers” and the simple belief in God’s Word. They are despisers of God’s Word. We get angered by the attacks on God’s Word. We bristle at the apparent widespread acceptance and approval of many things that God condemns and how Bible-believing Christians are made to feel as if they are wrong and must change their beliefs to come in line with a society that rejects the Bible.

But we must examine ourselves and search our own hearts. We believe that God’s Word is true, but do we love His Word? Are we eager to hear His Word or do we get bored with it? Do we think hearing His Word in church is enough, and hardly ever read it at home? Does His Word form our faith? I think this last point is the one that really should strike at our heart.

I myself find that His Word does not form my faith as it should. I can find lots of reasons to be afraid, to feel nervous, to lack confidence, to feel unforgiven by God, to feel unworthy of Him, to feel accused, to feel that I am not good enough. I can find lots of reasons to lose hope, to worry, to feel that we are in dark times and the world is a very unfriendly place.

But none of that comes from God’s Word. It comes from inside, where the devil encourages me to look, into the heart of darkness. What the devil does not want is for me to look outside myself – to hear God’s Word, to hear my Savior, the living Lord, speaking to me. For that has real power and au-

thority. It is the Word that does not lie to me like the devil does. It is the Word that forms my faith. It is the Word that the devil cannot contradict with any authority.

One of my favorite preachers to read, St. John Chrysostom who lived way back in the 4th century, speaking on this part of Romans 1, said:

“Where do our countless evils come from? From ignorance of the Scriptures. It is from this that there are countless heresies. It is from this that there are wasted lives. It is from this that men do not reap blessing from their labor. For as men deprived of daylight would not be able to walk straight, so those who do not look to the light of the Holy Scriptures can only be sinning, because they are walking in the worst darkness.” (Homily 1 on Romans)

Most of our problems come when we get severed from God’s Word. When you are hearing lies from the devil in your conscience, when the darkness is descending upon you, when you are lacking hope, when you are filled with worries, when you feel unworthy or that you are not good enough, that is when you need to hear His Word. When you listen to God’s Word, you are listening to the risen Jesus. He gives the Word its authority. Let the risen Lord Jesus give the Word its authority when you hear it.

You are what His Word says you are: forgiven, righteous, holy, saved, safe and blest forever. That is the risen Jesus saying that is what you are. He sends His under-shepherd, your pastor, to declare this to you. It is true, just as He is true, for His resurrection is true. He is risen *indeed!* Amen!