

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
November 4, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Bart Brauer
The gospel must be preached

—Mark 13:5-11

When we celebrate the Reformation, we are celebrating the gospel. The gospel has been preached since Jesus and his apostles. It has gone out into all the world, to every continent. It was preached at the time of our first Lutheran forefathers 500 years ago. It has been preached to the Apache people east of Phoenix for the last 125 years. The gospel is being preached now, and it will be preached until the end of this world. It has to be preached until the end. That is what Jesus emphasizes for us today. The gospel must be preached.

Three days before Jesus' death, he was walking out of the temple complex with his disciples. It was an impressive piece of engineering, and Jesus' disciples called his attention to it by saying, "Teacher, what impressive stones and what impressive buildings!" But Jesus burst their bubble by telling them, "You see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left on another. They are all coming down." Jesus' reply sobered them up, made them consider the coming destruction of Jerusalem, and got their minds thinking about the end of the world. So when they walked up the Mount of Olives, and sat there on the hill looking west over the temple complex, four of the disciples came to him privately and asked him about the end: when all these things would happen, what signs would tell that everything was coming to an end. It was a private conversation Jesus had with Peter, James, John, and Andrew, but through the Scriptures you and I are let in on the conversation, because the Holy Spirit wants you and me to hear Jesus' answer, too. As Jesus talks about the things leading up to the end, at the heart of his conversation is this central thought: *The gospel must first be preached to all nations.*

Preached. That word gets kind of a bad rap. People say they don't like to be preached at, and anybody who does that is preachy. Up here, thinking they are better than everybody else, condescending to other people. Oddly enough, some of the people who complain about preaching the most also tend to be some of the preachiest people you will ever meet. But there's nothing preachy about Jesus' kind of gospel preaching. Essentially, preach is the same as proclaim, announce, tell. It happens from the pulpit. In public one pulpit reaches hundreds, even thousands upon thousands of people over the years. Through TV and internet one pulpit can reach millions of people in a single day. But preaching also happens one-on-one. In private one pair of lips speaking the gospel reaches just one other set of ears. One set of fingers types the gospel and talks to one other set of eyes miles away. All this is preaching. The gospel being proclaimed to all nations.

The gospel must be preached. It's not intuitive. No one just knows it. You can stare at the night sky, scan the ocean surf, and search out every natural human sentiment, but in doing so you will never figure out the gospel on your own. It's a message from out of this world. The gospel is good news from God that must be preached. Preached by God directly, or preached by angels from heaven (as it was on Christmas and Easter), or most often, preached by people. People who have come to know and believe it because God has graciously given it to them and given them faith to believe it. That's you. That's me. That's us.

But the gospel is not the only message being preached. That's why up front Jesus issues a warning. "*Watch out that no one deceives you. Many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and will deceive many.*" The gospel goal is for people to meet up with the truth of God. But the many deceptions being preached make many people wander down the wrong paths. They lead people further and further away from God. They can deceive you and lead your soul away from God.

Anyone who spreads deception is really an imposter. Jesus says many will come in his name, claiming "*I am.*" "*I am*" is something God says about himself. So does that mean that men and women will come and preach and claim to be God? Some have. Some still do. But keep in mind: anyone person spreading deception is essentially putting himself or herself in the place of God. They put their word above God's word, whether they are doing it maliciously or ignorantly, and so they are imposters.

What are some of the deceptions peddled by the imposters? "You know, you are really not such a bad person. If you think positive about yourself and have your heart in the right place, you will find blessing from God." That's a deception. Jesus didn't die for good people; he died for sinners like us. "You have some bad in you, that's true. But if you believe in Jesus and do the loving and charitable things God requires of you, you will merit eternal life with God." That's a deception. If personal righteousness and eternal life could be gained through your love and your charitable deeds, then Christ died for nothing. "Love God with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself. What does God require of you? That you act justly and love mercy and walk humbly with your God. That's what Christianity is all about." That's a deception. Oh yes, those are Bible passages. "Love God and love your neighbor" is Jesus' simple summary of God's law. "Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly" was the prophet Micah's summary of God's law to his people Israel. But neither of those is what Christianity is all about. Jesus didn't come

to coach you up so you could aspire to become the best human being you could possibly be; he came to die for the sins of the world.

God's law is meant to make you aware of what a bad human being you are by nature. You should love God, but you are too in love with yourself to do it. You should love your neighbor as yourself, but you love yourself a whole lot more than you love your neighbor. You should act justly, you should love mercy, you should walk humbly, but your arrogance, your lack of concern, and your sacrifice of principle for favoritism make it impossible for you to do all that your God requires of you. And no matter how hard you try to make up for the huge gaps of inconsistency in your life, it won't change your status with God one little bit. Don't be deceived. Christianity is not about the law. Yes, God's law is a necessary part of the mix, because we have to know why we need Jesus Christ. But pastors, teachers, people, understand this and always remember it: Christianity is really about the gospel.

Jesus, the Son of Man, came to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mt 20).

Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Rom 4).

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them...God made Christ who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Cor 5).

Everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10).

You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Pt 1). Bought with the blood of Jesus—our school theme this year. This is the gospel. The gospel that must be preached, as Jesus says.

While this gospel is being preached to the end of time, there's a whole lot else going on. Jesus specifically mentions wars, ethnic clashes, natural disasters, and famine. A week ago, a man murdered 11 Jewish people in a Pittsburg synagogue. This last week, it was reported that in the country of Yemen, due to the war there, every 10 minutes a child under the age of five is dying because of severe malnutrition and preventable disease. This past week, severe lightning and wind storms in Italy destroyed millions of trees and killed 17 people. One Italian official saw winds reach 112 miles per hour and said the situation was "apocalyptic." Jesus says such things are not the end, but they are the beginning of birth pains leading up the end. Troubling as such things may be, Jesus tell us, "*Do not be alarmed...the gospel must be preached to all nations.*"

Don't be frightened, but *you must be on your guard*. Because persecution is always around the corner. You realize that of the four men Jesus was talking with that day on the Mount of Olives, James was put to death early on, Peter was executed later, John was sent into exile as an old man, and we don't know what happened to Andrew. Five centuries ago, men who tried to reform the church of their day were burned at the stake. Martin Luther lived under threat of death the last two and a half decades of his life, and many of the first Lutherans were killed in a war waged against them by the emperor because they were Lutherans. Hundreds and hundreds of thousands—possibly millions—of Christians were killed by communists in the past century. In the past week, gunmen from Islamic State ambushed and shot to death Christians who were returning home after baptizing a child at a monastery in Egypt. As one Lutheran writer recently noted, at least we still live in a country where for the time being our own sinful nature gets more in the way of preaching the gospel than outside persecution does.

"On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them." The gospel isn't something God only wants preached in little corners of the world. He wants it preached to all nations, including the rich, the influential, the powerful people of this world. Peter and John testified before the Jewish authorities. Paul testified before the Roman emperor. Martin Luther testified before the Holy Roman emperor, and nine years later a group of Lutheran princes did the exact same thing. As for us? Who knows what unpopular moral stance of ours may bring us face to face with authority in the coming days? But if those situations arise, we'll want to see them as opportunities for us to preach the gospel, just like the first Lutherans and the early apostles did. Because the gospel must be preached.

Whether it's a public venue or a private visit, all of us are called upon from time to time to give a reason for the hope we have, the Christian hope that we have from the gospel. Are you ever worried about what to do in those situations? Are you anxious about what to say? Listen to Jesus: *"Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit."* That was a promise Jesus originally made to the apostles. But doesn't that also apply to us? As we hear and learn the words of God in the Bible, as we come to truly treasure the gospel for ourselves, will not God the Holy Spirit, who taught us those words, also help us at the right time? Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. God will help you to speak the gospel. So don't be anxious.

The gospel must be preached. The forces of evil can try to mute it, but in the long run they will not be successful. The gospel is God's good news of what he has done to save the world through his Son, Jesus Christ. That message isn't going away. It's going throughout the world, because the word of our God stands forever. The gospel is going to be preached by somebody. Don't we want that to be us? Don't we want to have a part in that great work? By the grace of God we believe the gospel. By the grace of God may we also preach it. Proclaim it,

announce it, tell it. Let's give of ourselves and give of what God has given us to make it happen. That is how we celebrate the Reformation. Amen.