

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Reformation
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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
We proclaim the everlasting gospel

Then I saw another angel flying in the middle of the sky. He had the everlasting gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people. ⁷ He said with a loud voice:

Fear God and give him glory,
because the hour of his judgment has come.
Worship him who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water.

—Revelation 14:6,7 EHV

On February 22, 1546, Johannes Bugenhagen, Martin Luther's pastor and friend, stepped into the pulpit at the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. With Luther's lifeless body lying in a casket at the foot of the pulpit, Bugenhagen delivered Luther's funeral sermon. Referencing Revelation 14, he said, *"This angel who says, 'Fear God and give him the honor,' was Dr. Martin Luther. And what is written here, 'Fear God and give him the honor,' are the two parts of Dr. Martin Luther's doctrine, the law and the gospel, through which all of Scripture is unlocked and Christ, our righteousness and eternal life, is recognized. To these two he has also added this passage ('the time of his judgment has come') and has taught regarding proper prayer and invocation of God the heavenly Father in Spirit and in truth. As the angel also says in Revelation 14: 'Worship the one who has made heaven and earth.'"*

Of course, Martin Luther was a man and not an angel, nor do men become angels when they die. But the word "angel" means "messenger." And what Bugenhagen saw was the one message heralded by both this winged messenger in Revelation 14 and this human messenger who went by the name of Martin Luther. Both fearlessly proclaimed the one message of the everlasting gospel.

But the angel, the messenger, of Revelation 14 represents more than just one person. This angel has flown throughout the history of the Christian church, and it continues to soar in the air and shout its message in our day. The messengers have proclaimed the everlasting gospel so that it has reached the ears and souls of you and me.

I don't know if you realize this or not, but it truly is a miracle that we are here this morning. You might think, "Well, not really, we come to church every Sunday. It's no big deal." But do you realize how many people over the years have tried to destroy Christ's Church? Do you realize how many governments have tried to silence Christ's voice through his everlasting gospel? Do you realize how many poisonous false teachings have threatened to tear the Church apart? When you study history and look at those forces, you realize that it is truly a miracle of God's grace that we are here studying the untainted Word this morning.

To really see the significance of this flying angel or messenger in our text, we need to go back to the previous chapters in Revelation 12 and 13. In those chapters, John sees some of the enemies that seek to destroy Christ's Church. In fact, in three of the four visions leading up to the verses of our text for today, the Apostle John pictures for us what the enemies of the gospel look like. These are visions, pictures, of Christ's enemies.

The first enemy, John writes, is **"a huge red dragon that had seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads"** (12:3). It's a picture of Satan himself. But Satan doesn't attack alone. He enlists in his war against the church two other deadly monsters, **"a beast rising out of the sea"** (13:1) and **"another beast coming up out of the earth"** (13:11). We don't have the time today to go through all the details of these beasts. So, let's identify the beast from the sea as Satan's evil use of secular government and the beast from the earth as Satan's evil use of false teachers.

Revelation warns the church that one of its fiercest enemies will be the state, the rulers of this world. And we don't have to think too long before we can remember instances where the government was the enemy of the church. The Roman Empire, renowned for its supposedly fair court system, put many of Jesus' apostles to death unfairly. In fact, you remember that Jesus himself was given the death penalty by Pontius Pilate in a case where the evidence against him was sketchy at best. History is full of examples of governments ferociously attacking Jesus' Church, burning church buildings, intimidating, torturing, and even executing people for daring to call themselves Christians.

We don't need to look too far back into history before we find governments that have been openly hostile to Jesus and his followers. The government of Luther's day wanted to squelch the message of the Bible. But so has Nazi Germany, Communist Russia, and Islamic Fundamentalist Governments. History shows brutal dictators who view Christianity as a threat to their power.

And yes, this beast of secular power is still alive and well in our world today. We don't need to cross oceans to find him. We face this beast right here in our own country. Now I say this as one who loves the United States of America. I am incredibly thankful to the Lord for the rights and freedoms that he has given us through our democracy. However,

Christ and his church are under attack within our borders. We see an agenda that clearly goes contrary to the will of God. It doesn't take great study to see the agenda that attacks God's will revealed in the 10 Commandments. And the attacks are aggressive. Revelation shows us what this beast wants to do. The beast is trying to destroy Christ's church.

Now, of course, it isn't the church's job to change society. It isn't the church's job to create laws and police people's lives. The Church's God-given mission is to proclaim the everlasting gospel and save souls. And yet, we are all messengers of the Lord, angels in a sense. God wants us as individuals to stand up for the beliefs and teachings that he has entrusted to us. We don't sit idly and quietly by as we see this beast gaining power. Angels of every age need to boldly proclaim the message like Martin Luther and countless others have done, **"Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water."**

How do we do that? Here's one way. As Christians who live as citizens of the United States of America, we have the privilege of electing people to be our representatives. As we do that in just a few weeks from now, ask yourself, "Which candidates and policies will 'fear God and give him glory?'"

But remember that there is another beast that John sees in his revelation as well. And this beast doesn't come from the outside, rather he comes from inside the church. Revelation 13 describes it in this way, **"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth. He had two horns like the Lamb, and he spoke like the dragon"** (13:11). This beast is even more dangerous than the first! This beast doesn't come out and say, "Watch out! I'm the big bad wolf!" No, instead he looks like a lamb, not even a lamb, but *the* Lamb. He wants to look like Christ. He looks so innocent, so nice, so loving, so harmless, and yet his words, his teachings, are from the dragon, from Satan himself.

In Martin Luther's day, this beast represented the powers in the Church. They tried to appear as servants of God, but their teachings were directly against the gospel of Jesus Christ. Under this beast, heaven and the forgiveness of sins became things that you could acquire for yourself, if you just did the right deeds or paid the right amount of money. And this beast fooled many people. They thought he was from God, but he was really filled with demonic power.

In our day, we too experience this beast that has the appearance of a harmless lamb but speaks with the voice of the devil. For example, Mormonism and Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be Christian, but they are not. They proclaim a message of works, not grace. They do not proclaim the everlasting gospel that Jesus came to live as our Substitute. No, they claim him as a good example to follow or as one who canceled Adam's sins, but you have to do the rest. And the message poisons people for eternity.

This beast continues today to ridicule those who hold to the teachings of the Bible. They call us old-fashioned, archaic, irrelevant. This hatred and mockery that is directed toward those who are faithful to the teachings of Scripture parallel the enmity that was directed against the Messiah by the religious leaders of his time.

But in the midst of these enemies of Christ's church, we have hope. Go back to Revelation 14. **"Then I saw another angel flying in the middle of the sky. He had the everlasting gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said with a loud voice: Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the sky, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water."** He is in the middle of the sky, untouched by these beasts.

Where do you see these angels flying today? Where do you hear the message of these messengers? The gospel flies when our teachers say to their classes, "Jesus is risen for you and for me. Look, his body is not in the grave." The gospel flies when the teacher proclaims, "God created the heavens and the earth. Evolution is a false religion. The Bible is the truth." The gospel flies when a pastor baptizes a former Mormon saying, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The gospel flies when the professors at our schools teach the next generation of church leaders, telling them "Jesus gives the world forgiveness that is full and free."

In fact, the gospel flies as every Christian man, woman, and child witness in their lives to the world. There are hundreds of thousands of us scattered all over the world flying with the gospel. Right now, Pete is witnessing to Li in Hong Kong. Tim is studying the Bible with James in Times Square. Pastor Smith is explaining the truth of the gospel to Hiroko in Japan. And in Mesa, Troy is witnessing that death for a Christian means eternal life. So together, the gospel flies through God's people.

But let's get personal for a second. Is the gospel flying through you? Do you always look for opportunities to witness to the love of Jesus to others? In your personal budget, what receives the larger share: your offerings or your entertainment? When was the last time you brought someone brand new with you to church? Have you done everything in your power to share the gospel? It is a question of honesty with yourself and God. If the gospel is not flying on all engines in your life, you have sinned against God who has called you to be the salt and light of the world.

And yet what does our God keep on doing for you and me? He keeps on coming to us, doesn't he? God has made sure that angel after angel after angel has flown into your life to make sure you remain in Jesus. Our parents, our

teachers, our pastors, and even our children are God's messengers to us, proclaiming "Jesus has forgiven you for all your sins. Yes, he forgives you for the sins of timidity, of fear, and of selfishness." He sends to you angels to personally speak the words of the gospel. Your God loves you and comes to you through angels, through his messengers. Jesus has lived his perfect life as your Substitute.

When you look at your own life, you have the confidence and assurance that you are right with God. In his amazing grace, God has brought messengers to you. The gospel took flight as it flew to your life. And through that gospel, that good news about Jesus, God the Holy Spirit has brought you into his family. It's a miracle that you are here today. It's a miracle of God's grace.

Please don't take that for granted. I pray that you stand before God in tremendous awe and joy because he has given you the saving message of salvation. Heaven is yours. Your sins are forgiven. God has given you eternal life. Right now! Believe that! Treasure that! And then respond to it!

We respond in thanksgiving, don't we? We worship God! We serve him! We want to learn more about him. We want to be in his Word, listening to what he tells us. We want to be looking for opportunities to be his angels, his messengers, in our world.

Shortly before his death in 1546, Martin Luther went to the Lord in prayer. He prayed, *"O my heavenly Father, one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, God of all comfort, I thank you that you have revealed to me your dear Son, Jesus Christ, in whom I believe, whom I have preached and confessed, whom I have loved and praised, whom the loathsome pope and all the godless revile, persecute, and blaspheme. I implore you, my Lord Jesus Christ, let my little soul be commended to you. O heavenly Father, although I must leave this body and be snatched away from this life, I am, nevertheless, certain that I will remain with you eternally and that no one can tear me out of your hands. Into your hands I commend my spirit. You have redeemed me, my faithful God."*

We are in the hands of our faithful God. Therefore, we boldly proclaim the everlasting gospel. Amen.