

"Now Is The Time"

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

June 21, 2015

4th Sunday After Pentecost

Most people, when they want something, want it right away. We are all a bit impatient. **It used to be that you had to wait** in order to get what you wanted. Now, **technology allows us to have what we want NOW.** No longer do you have to be seated in front of the TV at a specific time to see an episode of your favorite program. You can watch it “on demand” through a DVR or the network website. You used to have to go to a theater to watch a movie. You used to be able to watch “The Wizard of Oz” only on one magical Sunday night a year. Now, you can watch any movie any time you want – “on demand”. You don’t have to wait days to exchange letters in order to get information. Instead, you can exchange texts and instant messages to get information NOW. You don’t have to rely on pictures taken with film that needs developing or on annual visits to see your grandchildren. You can post digital pictures on Facebook or use Skype to see those loved ones immediately.

You would think that, since we are so eager to get the joys and benefits of this life immediately, we would be just as eager, if not more so, to seek out and receive the joys and benefits of the life to come just as immediately. Yet it seems that **the things which impact us the most and for the longest amount of time are the things we are in no hurry to get or have.**

All of God's blessings are offered to us in and through His Word. This includes not only **the Word of God on the printed page** of the Holy Bible, but also **the Word of God read, preached, and shared** with each other; the Word of God splashed on our heads in **Holy Baptism**; and the Word of God placed on our tongues and lips in and with bread and wine in **Holy Communion**. These Means of Grace tie us firmly to God and His blessings and unite us with each other in a common bond. With the way things are going in our world and in our individual lives, should we not want them immediately and frequently?

Yet it is here where **many Christians seem to be in no hurry to receive God's offer. We are willing to wait for a more opportune time** to receive the grace that God offers us. New **confirmands** want to wait until the busy time of high school is over. **College students** want to wait until they graduate from college. Young **newlywed couples** want to wait until they've adjusted to married life. **Parents** want to wait until they are through with the busy schedules of their children. **Career oriented people** want to wait until they've retired. **Retired people** want to wait until they've had time to enjoy their retirement. **People who are dead** – well, it's too late for them to wait.

We always think there is plenty of time for this. But there's great danger in gambling with our future in this way. **First of all, there is the danger that we might receive the grace of God in vain**, something Paul pleads for the Corinthians not to do. Paul talks about the things he had endured in service to the Lord: afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger, and so on. It was only by the richness of God's grace that He was able to do so. **When it comes time for our faith to be tested, what will we find? We may find**

that our acceptance of God's grace was only superficial and our faith insufficient for enduring testing.

Secondly, there is the danger that there may be no grace or, at least, no means of grace to be received at a later time. Luther compared it to a rain shower that dispenses life giving moisture but, when it moves on, the water is gone. Luther wrote,

“For you should know that God's word and grace is like a passing shower of rain which does not return where it has once been. It has been with the Jews, but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have nothing. Paul brought it to the Greeks; but again when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the Turk. Rome and the Latins also had it; but when it's gone it's gone, and now they have the pope. And you Germans need not think that you will have it forever, for ingratitude and contempt will not make it stay. Therefore, seize it and hold it fast, whoever can; for lazy hands are bound to have a lean year.”

We know what has happened to Christianity in Germany and the rest of Europe. It is beginning to happen in America. **God is not withdrawing His grace, but many are neglecting it to the point of driving it out.**

Paul speaks with a sense of urgency in our text. He quotes a prophecy of Isaiah to make his point, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” **Isaiah speaks of a past day of God's attention** to His people's need. God had heard the

prayers of people for deliverance from sin, death, and hell practically from the time of the first sin by Adam and Eve.

God had rescued His people from slavery in **Egypt**. God had rescued His people from exile to **Assyria and Babylon**.

Ultimately, **God rescued His people from the greatest form of slavery – to sin – and from the greatest kind of exile – to death and hell – on that Friday we call “Good”**. For there, on the cross, Jesus bore the weight of your sin and my sin, the burden of your guilt and my guilt, and the devastation of the punishment due you and me – physical death on earth and eternal death in hell.

This is a rescue so great, so wonderful, and so far reaching that it really requires **two days to complete it**. To call that Sunday merely “Easter” is to bring to mind only bunnies, eggs, and chocolates. To refer to it as **the Day of Resurrection** is to give it its true meaning. Jesus was no mere martyr dying for a noble cause. He who died did not stay dead. He rose from death and left His tomb alive – **free from death, free from guilt, and free from sin – all things which He is able to give to us by faith in His grace and mercy**.

This all happened in the past. However, **the bestowal of these gifts is very much a present day ongoing event.** That's why Paul wrote, "Behold, *now* is the favorable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation." **You have received in the present the benefits of Jesus' saving work from two thousand years ago.** You have received salvation in your **baptism.** You continue to receive the ongoing blessing of forgiveness and renewal through **the Word of God and His Means of Grace** – a daily return to baptism, the words of absolution, the body and blood of our Lord in the bread and the wine. You have a **sanctuary** where these gifts may be freely and frequently given and received.

There is great danger that these may all be gone due to neglect and indifference on the part of Christians. Paul is sounding a wake up call to the Corinthians which also for us in these latter days. **NOW** is the time! **Now is the time to hear the Word of God.** Do not ignore it as if you know it all already. You don't. Neither do I. **Do not postpone hearing the Word of God** as if you will have all the time in the world to get back to it. You may not be able to get back to it or it may, one day, be taken from you.

Now is the time to receive the gifts of God's grace: His mercy, His forgiveness, His hope, His strength and many more which are bountifully available to all of us, not only in His spoken Word but in His Word attached to water, bread, and wine. **Make full and frequent use of these gifts here, now, in this place among the people of God in a shared confession of the faith.**

Now is the time to be strong through these means and through these gifts, as St. Paul was strong, for the dark days ahead. For, as fellow servants of God with Paul, we may face the same things in pagan America which Paul faced in the pagan Greek and Roman world. His words may be ours as well:

as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

To those who ignore God's grace and His means of distributing it, Paul's words are a **stern warning**. To those whom God has claimed by grace for Jesus' sake and who delight in receiving grace upon grace through God's appointed means of grace, this is a **glorious promise**. To those who are somewhere in between, "behold now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation." What will you do? Amen.