**How Comes Faith?**

**John 20:19-31**

***Quasimodogeniti – Easter 2***

***April 16, 2023***

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

After Thomas sees Jesus, he confesses that He is God. To this, Jesus replies, “Have you believed because you have seen Me? Blessed are those who have not see and yet have believed.”

Inspired by God to write His Word, John continues: *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.*

You may know the passage from Romans, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing through the word of God?” Someone has probably told you, this means that people come to faith by picking up a Bible and reading it. That's why the Gideons put all those Bibles in hotel rooms correct? If someone finds it, starts reading it, they will come to faith.

If faith comes by reading, how come that passage says it comes by hearing? What is more, the Greek word for word is λογός, and the Greek word for God is ϴεόυ. If it truly is translated, ‘the word of God’, then you should hear it plainly in the Greek. That phrase so translated read, ῥήματος Χριστοῦ.

Even those of you who do not know Greek, heard the word Christou and immediately you thought – Christ. You are right! How could this passage be so mistakenly thought of as picking up and reading the Bible? Because people have taken an English word and imposed a meaning to it.

The English translation at the end of our gospel lesson seems to indicate a similar thought: *Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.* (vv. 30-31)

When we hear the phrase, “these things are written that you may believe,” we quickly jump to the conclusion that they are meant to be read. That is a logical conclusion for this day and age!

But John wrote this gospel and Paul wrote his letter to the Romans about two thousand years ago. Things were written so that they might be read in the context of many hearers. For example, why did I write this sermon? How many of you are reading it? I wrote it to be read, so that you might hear it.

Two thousand years ago, paper was not mass produced. The most common writing material was papyrus – plants from the Nile River. Stems were cut into thin strips, pounded together, and dried. Yes, it was expensive and not easy to produce. Next, there were no printing presses or copiers, everything written had to be done by hand. A copy of a book was hand copied by a scribe. Many scribes might work together in a scriptorium where someone read, and a number of those capable of writing wrote exactly what they heard. For that reason, books were very expensive.

Imagine a Bible costing $300, would you pay it? Better be leather-bound, real gold gilding on the edges of the pages, some color picture plates depicting certain biblical events, a plethora of maps, an exhaustive concordance, a decent commentary, with free delivery to your door with a singing telegram. Actually, you can get a leather-bound copy of The Lutheran Study Bible for about $100.

At the time of John's writing, a copy of the book of Genesis would, at today's equivalency in US currency, cost about $20,000. Unless you were wealthy, you didn’t have scrolls, or books. When we find Jesus reading in the synagogue, those gathered would hear. After hearing what was read, He would teach concerning the passages they had heard.

People gathered to hear the Scriptures. And as the gospels were first sent out, and then copied (paid for by wealthy believers), they were taken to different places and read in the assembly of those who had gathered for ‘The Breaking of the Bread.” According to the evidence we have, they were read in their entirety.

Maybe we should get our noses out of our bulletins when the Scripture lessons are read, quit following along, and just listen. Or better yet, list the readings and do not even print them in the bulletin – allowing a larger font to be used for other information.

As John nears the end of our Gospel, he informs us that the work of Christ had been recorded that people could hear of what God in Christ Jesus had done for them. It was always a proclamation that this work of Christ is for you. It was applied to them! That is, so that faith might come. That is what “word of Christ” RAMATA TOU CHRISTOU means..

This is nothing new. This is exactly what God was teaching Ezekiel. You already know this because you have heard in our lesson from Ezekiel. You all know the story of the dry bones. You probably know the song which goes along with it. Did you pay attention to what God tells Ezekiel to do?

Ezekiel is to prophesy over the bones, he is to say to them the things that God tells him to say. And, as Ezekiel says what he is told to say, God works a miracle. Through the word from the mouth of Ezekiel, new flesh and life come to dry bones.

Dear friends, how comes faith to you?

There were these disciples who walked with Jesus. They saw Him do incredible things: feeding 5,000; feedings 4000; healing the blind; the lame, the deaf, the mute; and even raising the dead. He raised people from death to life; Jairus's daughter, the son of the widow of Nain, and Lazarus. Each time doing so by speaking life to them.

Mary became pregnant with the very Son of God when the angel spoke to her. Through the Word come into her ears, the Holy Spirit worked faith in her heart and pregnancy in her womb.

The miracle of faith coming to you is no different. As the Word of Christ comes to you, the Spirit moves in you to become pregnant with faith.

What is baptism? Is it simply water? Should I come over and pour water over some person's head? Is that all that needs to happen for them to be baptized, and by it, come to faith? Of course not! What needs to be present with the water? The word of Christ! Without the Word of Christ it is no baptism.

On this altar before you are Bread and wine. Is that what you will eat and drink? Yes! But also, so much more! You will eat the very body of Him who died for you, and drink of His very blood shed for you. How will such a miracle take place? It is not because I make the sign of the cross over the elements. If I did only that, it would look like I'm just chasing flies away. I speak the word Christ commanded. In that Word, a miracle takes place! By the Word of Christ, sacramentally united to the bread is the very flesh of Christ – by the Word of Christ, sacramentally united to the wine is the very blood of Christ. By the Word of Christ, you eat and drink of forgiveness, eternal life, salvation and unto the strengthening of faith.

On that Friday a week ago, events of the passion of our Christ culminated in His suffering and death on the cross. The very Word of God enfleshed gave His holy life unto innocent suffering and death for you. Those two words, ‘for you’ make this proclamation the ῥήματος Χριστοῦ – the Word of Christ – for you.

Christ is God himself, the Suffering Servant for you.

Christ is a very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Who takes away your sin.

Peter confessed Jesus is the Christ. And the Jesus explained exactly what that means. Who the Christ is, is defined by what the Christ does.

Christ is the Son of Man and, as Peter confessed, the Son of God, the very Lamb of sacrifice who must suffer many things at the hands the chief priests and scribes, He must die, and on the third day rise.

By his stripes you are healed!

His suffering of your death purchased your forgiveness.

So, as John records in our Gospel lesson, Christ commands His servants, that by His blood bought authority, purchased with His innocent suffering and death, they speak to you words of forgiveness.

By His Word from the mouth of His ministers your sins are removed.

By that ῥήματος Χριστοῦ, that Word of Christ, the gates of heaven are opened, and you are granted eternal life – in the forgiveness of sins.

Faith comes to you as The Spirit works in you through this Word of Christ you hear. These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Faith comes by the wet word – you are baptized into Christ!

Faith comes by the ear word – Christ preached to you, and Himself the absolution you hear!

Faith comes by the word you eat – the very flesh and blood of Christ!

You may not see, but you hear! And blessed are you who believe the One whom you have heard – Jesus, God's Christ! His Son, your Savior – and your Life! Amen.