

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. ✠

This Feast of Saint Titus, which we celebrate this evening, gives us the sending of the 72 apostles, those not the 12 Apostles, but those 72 chosen by Christ to go out into the surrounding towns, to cast out demons, to heal the sick and, most importantly, to preach the gospel.

This account gives us the beginning of the spread of the early church Christ's gospel being preached to men by men. And Titus, a young Greek man, according to church tradition, is one of these 72 men, one sent out to preach the gospel, who will later be picked up by Saint Paul to travel with him on his missionary journeys, even accompanying him to the council in Jerusalem to defend true, Orthodox Christianity.

And for this reason, the church has set before us this passage from Saint Luke's Gospel for our consideration this morning, it is quite easy to gloss over it as history. A lot of it is, this person went here and did that. This person went here and preached there.

And it seems to us to just be that history, facts to be regurgitated as trivia, to show how smart we are, to be an account of what happened and not much else.

They went out into the towns. They called for repentance, they healed the sick, they cast out demons, and then later on, we'll hear another group get sent out again. It's easy not to care, to rush past these portions of Scripture.

The reality is this is not just mere history. It is our history. By nature of your baptism into the church, you have been grafted into the new Israel, into Christ, and so this is your history. What happened to the early church happened to your ancestors, to those who have gone before you in the faith. It shapes our understanding of the world. It is the history of our church, the history of Risen Savior Lutheran Church here in Basehor. It is the history of our people. It is the history of our life. It is not meaningless, but it is rich and full of wisdom.

These readings are appointed for this, the feast of St Titus, so we might look at the history of our church, learn from it and glorify God through it. For the same reason, you may ask, why do we even remember St Titus at all? Why remember the saints of old? Because their history is our history.

They are our fathers in the faith who are handing down to us salvation and life itself. They're handing down their peace that they found in Christ to us today.

This is the content of the common faith. It is rooted in history. Christianity did not happen in abstract, but really, truly and actually, in history Christ died. For this reason we mention in our creeds that he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. To root it in history, it is not, as some may suggest, a mere myth, a story to be believed in. But it doesn't really matter if it's true. But it is a real historical event that was necessary for your salvation.

Just as this happened, just as Christ was crucified for your sins, so too were the 72 men sent out to preach. So too, was Saint Titus sent by Christ, and then later by Paul again, to preach and teach sound doctrine.

I want to hone in then on one of the points of your history found in Luke's Gospel. That Christianity, Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins is not something that we kept silent. It is in the very nature of the thing that it is shared. During Christ's time, he enlisted men, he sent out emissaries to preach and teach what he was going to do. To bring and draw all men unto himself.

He sent out his own apostles with miraculous works to preach, teach, and heal.

When he, God Himself could have done it. He enlisted men, men, not God, were given the task of sharing the good news of what was happening there in that place. They were given the task of sharing who Christ is, the forgiveness he offers, and the shedding of His blood.

And he continues this wonderful task here among us today, the Office of the holy ministry is established by Christ in the upper room before his death, where he brings forth men to preach and proclaim His gospel into the ages, to lead his church to stewards of the mysteries of God.

Sure, the miraculous signs, the fancy healings, the casting out of demons, pass away. But what is truly miraculous, the forgiveness of sins does not. It continues on in the preaching of men, and it will not end until Christ, our Lord, returns. But even then, men will sing his praises for all eternity.

The word of the Lord endures forever. He will supply men to preach this gospel forever. So that we might walk in a newness of life.

And that's all well and good. We like that part. All that is something that sits well with us. But the difficult thing comes in that last little bit, walking in the newness of life. Even Saint Paul says to Titus to rebuke those who teach falsely, who live contrary to God's will and God's law.

We like the first part about our sins being forgiven, but we don't like hearing the second part. Our sinful flesh does not and it cannot live in newness of life. If it was up to us, we would gladly continue as we are. We would take the forgiveness of sins in one hand, all the while grabbing more and more sins, amassing more and more pleasures and vanities unto ourselves with our other hand.

Lost to sin, drowning in self gratification, we would cling to this world for we often claim the name of Christian but refuse to act like it. Who here can say that their attendance at the divine service is flawless? Who here can say knowing our great need for life and salvation, for the constant reminder of God's preached word, for the forgiveness offered in his body and blood here upon the table, has not scorned it, in favor of sleeping in going on vacation, or whatever excuse we may drum up in our minds as more important.

Who here has not desired something else more and above the Lord's blessed sacrifice given to us here in The Divine service where heaven comes down to meet Earth. Maybe you can claim perfect attendance and divine service. But what about Bible study? What about home devotions? How faithful are you truly in your own personal life?

We're very willing to accept what Christ has done, but we don't really like it impacting our lives or our Sunday brunches. This is where Saint Titus comes into play.

This is why we rejoice in the sending of Saint Titus. This is why we rejoice that Saint Paul instructs him, and he gives this instruction not just to Saint Titus, but to all pastors throughout the world.

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he might be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

It is part of the role of the church for pastors to call you to repentance, to call you back from your sin, to be faithful, to walk in the newness of life. This is what St Titus does. This is what he models for us today. He calls sinners to repentance, reminds them of what Christ has done for them, and brings them back to the waters of their holy baptism so that they might take hold of what was theirs and walk again in newness of life.

For we cannot do it ourselves. We need men to preach and to teach, to be faithful, even unto death, to be persecuted and struck down on our behalf, and to model what it means to be a Christian. But we also need men to strike us down when we are foolish, arrogant, and prideful, so that old Adam in us might be killed once again and drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism, that the new man Christ might live in us, enable us by His gift, through the Word, through the church, through the encouragement of other faithful men, and through his most holy, blessed supper, to rejoice in his ways, to love his law and to live a godly and peaceable life.

This is our hope. Our hope is not found in ourselves, but in Christ, Christ who has promised to send a faithful man into his harvest, in Christ who has promised to send men to call us back from our sin, to call us to repentance, to cause us to live once again in the reality of our baptism, to rejoice in what Christ has done for us.

So as we celebrate and remember Saint Titus this evening, let us give thanks to God for all the faithful pastors who have done just this for us, who have pointed us not to themselves but to Christ, who have brought us back from the brink of death and encouraged us to walk as We ought, as Christians bought and redeemed by Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, as Christians who have been

washed in the body and blood of God that was spilled forth for us upon the cross. For there is no sin too large for Christ's sacrifice. There is no mistake too grave, no sinner too far gone. The blood of God spilled upon the cross covers all of us. Is in this truth that we live as Christians. It is this truth that we proclaim to the world. Is in this truth that we constantly must be called back the blood of God shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, there is not life apart from it.

So pray for the church. Dear Christians, pray for the Church throughout the world that faithful men would preach and teach rightly. They would hold fast to sound doctrine and not go out after fleeting this and the whims and fancy of men, they would not preach what itching ears desire to hear, what sinful ears need to hear. The Christ has died for you. He has shed His blood. He has taken up human flesh. He has taken up the image of man that he might save you from death, and he has sent men to preach and proclaim this to you and to the whole world

✠ In Jesus name, Amen. ✠