

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Pentecost June 14, 2026 jj  
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Jesus could have taught the message of His kingdom in so many other ways. What if He sent out legions of angels to declare it to multitudes? He could've used a loudspeaker from heaven for all to hear at the same time. He could just sit in the temple and summon all nations to come to Himself. He could have done whatever He wanted: He's the Son of God. But instead, we see Him picking twelve men to go and tell.

They go, and they know two things at this early time in their education: they've been given a Word, and they've been sent. There's no making up the message as they go along, but they proclaim the message that has been generously given to them. They don't perform wonders and healings out of their own magic hat of powers. Instead, they're going to work wonders because Jesus has given them the power to do so. They're not even going out on their own, but they're going because they've been sent. Freely all this has been given to them. Now they may go and give the Gospel for free.

Imagine the crowds that gather around them. They gather in order to see the Savior, but here they get the understudies instead. Perhaps some would leave disappointed or disgusted before the disciples open their mouths. Perhaps they feel like Jesus has let them down by not coming personally, or because the student is never better than the master. Those are typical human reactions, but humans are typically wrong with God's things. The Lord is not unfaithful. This is His way. This is His order. Jews first, Gentiles soon to come. When the disciples heal the sick, the sick are healed. When they

cleanse the lepers, the lepers are cleansed. They raise the dead; the dead are raised. They cast out demons; demons flee.

Why? Because it's not them doing it. Thaddaeus isn't saying to the sick, "In the name of Thaddaeus, be healed." Bartholomew isn't saying, "In the name of Bart, come out of them." Demons aren't afraid of Bartholomew. But they are afraid of Jesus, and the disciples speak in Jesus' name. He's sent them; and by His Word, He is there with them. When they preach, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand," it's true because the King is there by His authority and Word. And, when the disciples tell the people that their sins are forgiven, their sins are forgiven. Not because the disciples are forgiving them, but because really, Jesus is. That's what He sent them to do. That's what He gave them to do. Freely they have received. Now they freely give.

One of the favorite Sunday School and Vacation Bible School stories to tell is the one about the prophet Balaam in Numbers 22. According to the story, the unbelieving King Balak sent the prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel while they're still wandering around in the wilderness. However, as Balaam rides his donkey toward the people, God opens the mouth of his donkey and the donkey talks. The donkey rebukes the prophet Balaam, and Balaam blesses God's people instead of cursing them. Pastors like to say this:

"If God can speak through Balaam's donkey, then He can speak through me, too."

Beyond the laugh, there's an important point. In His wisdom, with a world full of lost and wandering sheep, God has chosen to spread His kingdom in a most curious way: He wants sinful human beings to speak His Word. He calls pastors in the Holy Ministry to preach that Word publicly, on behalf of His Church; and pastors can be quite a strange bunch. Despite the quirks and personality failings, however, the Lord still uses them as His instruments. Not just them, though: every Christian, tempted though they may be by sin and weakness, every believer has the privilege of telling that Word about Jesus to others. That is how the kingdom of God spreads.

Why is that? It is not the people. It's the Word. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is present by His Word: the kingdom of heaven is at hand because our King is at hand. The same Savior who went to the cross to die for the sins of the world, now comes in His Word to give that forgiveness to individual people—to you and me and all who will hear. Jesus is present where His Word is. Add that Word to water, and He's there in Baptism. Add that Word to bread and wine, and He's present in His Supper.

It's the Word that's powerful—not the person speaking it. It's the same Word with the same power that heals the sick, cleanses the leper and casts out demons in the Lord's time. By that Word, Jesus comes to give forgiveness and faith and life, to turn wandering sinners into the people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand. It's that simple.

Can the people who are sent get into trouble and stand in the way of God's Word? Of course, they can; even though the Lord is

faithful, sinners are sometimes not. Sometimes though, people place their hope in the preacher's great charisma. If his style is engaging and holds interest, then that must make the Word powerful. If he is less interesting or has a bad day, then the Word maybe isn't so powerful. If this is true, that means that God is only as faithful and powerful as the sinful man who is preaching the sermon. It means that God's power varies based upon how much sleep the pastor got the night before. This is an extremely seductive temptation in our culture and society, because image is emphasized so much. People judge books by covers, and companies spend millions of dollars to make sure that their products have the right packaging and an exciting ad campaign.

We are easily tempted to judge the quality of anything by how well it holds our attention. Old Adam inside you and me makes sure that we judge the power of God's Word on the same criteria. Pastors suffer this temptation, too; they can believe that their personality or style make the Word more effective. It's simply not true. However, repent and rejoice! The Word's power is not bound by the personality of the speaker. Where the Word is, Jesus is. Where Jesus is, there is forgiveness and life. You can depend on Him.

Some may fall for the opinion that only pastors have the ability to share God's Word. Sure, only a pastor is given God's holy orders to preach in a setting like this, for the benefit of God's congregation in the Divine Service, but the misconception is that if a layman shares the Word with someone in their daily life, it's just information but nothing more, like a recipe or a news broadcast. It tells about salvation, but it

doesn't save the person hearing the good news. If this is true, then God would have made a mistake when He told us to forgive those who trespass against us! No, you give forgiveness with the same power that the Lord gave to the pastor.

In fact, Christians meet and spend time daily with all sorts of people whom the pastor will never meet, and each believer has the joy of telling of the hope they have in Christ.

Sadly, many believers balk at the thought of doing so. "I don't know what to say," is one excuse, well, why not? With Bibles to read and sermons to hear and classes to attend, what prevents you from not knowing?

Simply tell other people about Jesus—about His ministry and miracles, His death on the cross and resurrection; about forgiveness and the hope of eternal life. "Oh, but I'm not a very good speaker." Neither were Moses or Paul, and I suspect that Balaam's donkey wasn't usually eloquent either; yet God used each of them. "People won't listen to me." Careful, now; because that's like saying that the power of the Word depends on you, not on Christ. I can assure you that people don't always listen to pastors more than anyone else. Once again, it's the Word—not the person who speaks it. "I don't like talking to strangers." That's okay. Talk about Jesus to each other. To your kids. Your grandkids and other family members. A good friend who's curious about your faith. The Lord will provide opportunities.

That's how the Lord spreads His kingdom on earth: He sends out His Word. He gives His people, you and me, the privilege of telling it to others. He gives us the honor, despite our sins and weaknesses, of being His instruments to tell others of Jesus; and He promises that His Word will not return to Him void, but will accomplish what He

sends it forth to do, whether or not there's a huge crowd coming to hear it. Where people do listen to us and rejoice with us, that's when we give thanks and glory to God. Where people reject the Gospel we proclaim, we remember that people rejected Jesus, too, and we give thanks that He counts us worthy to suffer for His name's sake.

But as you speak His Word, rejoice most of all in this: Jesus first speaks that Word to you. Freely you have received; only then do you freely give. Your salvation this day is not based upon how well you evangelize, how many people you tell about Jesus, or how well you tell this great story. God's gifts are already yours because Jesus has already died on the cross to save you. By the mouths of people in your life—parents, pastors, friends, and others—the Lord has told you of forgiveness; and whenever you've heard that Word, He has given it to you. He could have done it any way He wanted; this is what He wants.

So it is this day, as we gather here. It has all been about God's saving Word. As the Gospel is spoken, it speaks and delivers forgiveness. So on this day you rejoice: you have not just heard about forgiveness today. You have not just been told you have to go and spread the kingdom by telling others. But most importantly, by that Word that you have heard today, you have been made a part of that kingdom, you have been healed by Jesus the merciful Savior, you have been forgiven of all of your sins...

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