

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our heavenly Father, through the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11 (EHV)

¹ Brothers, I am going to call your attention to the gospel that I preached to you. You received it, and you took your stand on it. ² You are also being saved by that gospel that was expressed in the words I preached to you, if you keep your hold on it—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

⁴ that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve.

⁶ After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, but some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles. ⁸ Last of all, he appeared also to me, the stillborn child, so to speak. ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not ineffective. On the contrary, I worked more than all of them (and yet it wasn't my doing, but it was the grace of God, which was with me, that did it). ¹¹ So whether it is I or they, that is what we preach, and that is what you believed.



Dear heavenly Father, send your Holy Spirit on us so we may believe in the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Did you know Lutherans haven't always agreed with each other about how to define what the word 'gospel' means?

It's an essential word for us as Christians. It's often taught, preached, and explained, but not always clearly understood and applied. Yet it's also the word which, when properly understood, leads to true peace and hope and joy in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Basically, the word 'gospel' can often be translated to mean 'good news', but not any old good news, such as the good news tomorrow's weather will be fine. The word 'gospel' would often refer to the good news a war has been won, and our enemy has been defeated.

The problem why we haven't always agreed on what the word 'gospel' means is that it isn't always used the same way in Scripture.

For example, the first verse of the Gospel according to St Mark reads: 'The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' Mark then proceeds to tell us of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

In this way, the whole ministry of Jesus, including his calls of repentance and tough teachings, would be the 'gospel.'

Therefore, we Lutherans 'believe, teach, and confess that when the word "gospel" is used for the entire teaching of Christ, which he presented in his teaching ministry... (then) it is correct to say or to write that the gospel is a proclamation of both repentance and the forgiveness of sins.'¹

However, St Paul uses the word 'gospel' in his letter to the Corinthians in a more specific way.

When he reminds the people about the gospel, he doesn't mention anything about the whole teaching of Jesus Christ or summarise the story of Jesus. He doesn't remind us of his parables, his fishing stories, his

¹ Formula of Concord, Epitome, Article V: Law and Gospel, 6

miracles, or urge us to repent or change our ways.

Instead, he refers to two specific events in Jesus' ministry as the 'gospel' which lead to our comfort, peace, and hope:

Firstly, he brings our attention to the fact Jesus died for the forgiveness of all our sins.

How do we know he died?

Because he was buried.

How do we know he died to forgive our sins?

Because this is what Scripture says the Son of Man would die for! This is the reason Jesus came in human flesh. This was his mission on earth for our sake.

Secondly, Jesus rose from the dead.

How do we know he rose from the dead?

Because after three days of death, he rose again as Scripture said he would, and he appeared to Cephas (better known as Peter), to the twelve apostles, and to over 500 people at the one time. He also later appeared to Paul, even though he wasn't worthy of this honour.

The death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of Jesus which promises the resurrection of the body for all who believe. This is the 'gospel' in its strictest, most simple sense. This is the gospel which is to be believed, taught, and confessed in order to comfort troubled consciences, and delight you with the grace and undeserved mercy of God. This is the gospel you listen for in your worship services to reassure you that your greatest enemies, the enemies of sin and death which want to separate you from God forever, have been defeated by Jesus' death and resurrection. This is the gospel you receive in baptism and the Lord's Supper. This is the gospel you're to share with each other.

Of course, you may not always be aware of your own sin or be worried about death when you come to worship. Sin will often deceive you and seek to justify its words and actions as justified and righteous. Sin will always try to make you doubt what Jesus has done for you or seek to drive you away from Christ and his saving work. This is why you also need God's Word explained to you so that you come to realise your faults and failures and also help you see your need for Christ. Once your need for Christ and his forgiveness and resurrection is exposed, the precious gospel will comfort you, drive away your guilt and shame, enlighten you with insight and understanding, and strengthen you in faith.

We have a sense of the comfort and joy of God's forgiveness, even before the incarnation of Jesus, in the Old Testament reading from Isaiah.

Here the prophet is living in exile away from the Promised Land. He has a vision of the Lord sitting on a high throne in the temple. Above the Lord flew creatures with six wings. They were speaking the same words we often recite before receiving Holy Communion:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory!"

What a majestic and holy scene to behold! But what was Isaiah's reaction?

He thought he was doomed because he was unworthy of being in God's holy presence!

Why was he destined to be destroyed?

Because in the presence of a holy God, he recognised how sinful and unclean he was. He realised he was like a person who had been working in the garden all day, covered with sweat and mud and oil, coming into contact with clean linen or the most precious family heirloom cutlery reserved for special guests.

Not only was he unclean, but he was guilty. He may have spoken Hebrew swear words or spread lies and other unholy words. He also lived among people who spoke with unclean lips. He had fallen short of God's expectations and deserved death.

But what happened next?

One of the flying creatures grabbed a burning coal and touched Isaiah's lips with it. As the coal touched his lips, he said his guilt has been taken away. His sin is forgiven!

Comforted and inspired by his forgiveness, he eagerly volunteered to go to speak God's word to his people, even though they'd listen and not understand, and their hearts would remain calloused and unrepentant.

The reason you speak those same words before receiving Holy Communion is because your lips have also become unclean. You've spoken words which weren't always true or have hurt those around you. You're also unworthy and destined for destruction because of your sins.

Yet you also receive onto your unclean lips the holy body and blood of your Lord Jesus Christ who died to forgive you all your sins. As you receive his body and blood through faith, believing in the gospel, your guilt is taken away and your sins are forgiven. Your lips and body are made holy so you may eagerly share the good news of God's forgiveness and mercy for your sins, even if people will remain deaf and unresponsive to your words of grace.

In Christian worship you're encouraged to believe the good news of the gospel that Jesus died for your sins. His death is all-sufficient. There's nothing more you or I need to pay for our guilt. Your sins have been atoned for, they've been absolved, and they're no longer remembered by God. He's not going to hold your sins against you, or dwell on what you've done, or hinder your relationship with him because of your sins. You're at peace with your holy God because Jesus has paid the full death penalty for your sins and there's nothing more for you to pay!

Your trust in this good news of Jesus Christ dying the death you deserve for all your sins you did with your mouth, or hand, or heart, or mind, gives you peace. You can't make up for your guilt or sin, and you don't have to. There's nothing more for you to do except receive this good news, believe this good news, and stand in this good news as the immovable and trustworthy foundation for your faith and life and peace and joy.

You can even live in peace with others knowing just as Jesus has forgiven all your sins, he's also forgiven the sins of those around you. Because Jesus has died for all sins, this means sin should never be the barrier between you and God or between you and those around you. You're all forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ who died for the sins of the whole world!

But you're also to believe death isn't the worst thing that can happen to you.

After all, Jesus couldn't be defeated by death, which means all those who trust in Jesus, who have been baptised into Jesus, and who have received the righteousness of Jesus through faith, are also not defeated by death.

Since Jesus has died and risen again, and you're joined to Jesus through faith, then you've also already crossed over death and have already started living your eternal life.

You're to believe this now while you're still living in a body which you know will one day die and decay. But just as Jesus has risen from the dead to live eternally, you also believe you'll be raised from your own death in new bodies which are made to last forever in God's kingdom where sin and sickness and death and evil don't exist. Death therefore isn't the end; it's only the doorway to a new reality which already began when Jesus rose again.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, St Paul reminds you of the gospel, that Jesus Christ did indeed die for the forgiveness of all your sins as Scripture has told you, and that he has indeed risen from the dead to live and rule eternally as Scripture has also told you.

What you've been told in Scripture has been confirmed by the good news of this gospel. Your trust in this gospel, this good news of what Jesus has done for you, gives you peace and hope and life and joy.

Therefore, keep on listening to it, receiving it, believing it, standing on it, passing it on, and being saved by it so that...

...the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus who died and rose again for you. Amen.

Pastor Stuart Kleinig
South Burnett Lutheran Parish
5th Sunday after Epiphany
9th February 2025