

Every generation has its challenges. The most common temptation of the Church is that for every new challenge, we need to create or come up with something new that cleverly addresses it. So, for example, over the last couple generations there has been the common complaint that the Church, broadly speaking, has to be more open and inviting, and less formal. As a result, most church bodies began practicing open communion. Pastors stopped wearing their uniforms and vestments. People started gathering to worship in coffee shops instead of churches. The music they sung went from those which confessed the eternal Gospel clearly like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”, “Thy Strong Word”, “Salvation Unto Us Has Come”, etc., to music that merely plucked at their heart strings. People stopped wearing their “Sunday best” to Church and now wear their comfy pants and favorite sports’ team apparel. The Church doesn’t need to conform to the world; we teach that the world when converted to faith will be conformed to Christ. **Romans 8:28, “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”**

One comment I received in the debate with the other pastors was that the [quote] “model of Lutheranism of the 40s, 50s, and 60s doesn’t work anymore” [close quote]. I 100% agree. Thank God for that, too! Any “model” of a particular decade or generation is a model of man.

In the spirit of the Reformation, which was a cry to go back to the Scriptures being the norm and source of all Christian doctrine and practice, I say get rid of every “model of Lutheranism” – whatever that even means. Let’s just be confident to do what Jesus did, to follow what Jesus commanded, and implement what Jesus instituted: *Word and Sacrament*. And then we, pastors, must like the angel flying overhead in Revelation 14, fervently proclaim that it is not merely showing up to Church and hearing the sermon and eating and drinking Jesus’ body and blood under the bread and wine, but actually believing that God’s grace is sufficient for us, too. It is not merely the act of doing anything that God commands, hence David saying in **Psalm 51:16, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it... The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”**

The sustainable Church is the true Church which gathers in the humility of repentance, and faith which trusts that the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation that God gives in Word and Sacrament are everything we need. Do you remember what Jesus said to Satan when being tempted? **“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mt 4:4)**. This Word of God is everything we need that enables us to go out and do the works God has given us to do, which done out of love for our neighbor will make them think, “Man, I want what they’re having.” And then through our prayers for those who don’t yet know Christ, God will answer those prayers in His way and in His time that they may hear the eternal Gospel and come to faith. We must trust God’s Word and stop being ashamed of it as if it weren’t enough. Paul writes in **Romans 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”**

When we are not ashamed of the Gospel we also will not be afraid of it. The angel in our text said with a loud voice, **“Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14:7)**. Fearing God is fearing God’s wrath towards sin. But the Christian, whose conscience is clear because he or she lives in daily repentance and faith, trusts God’s consoling word of forgiveness. When the hour of judgment comes, we will welcome and worship Him with joy and gladness! While the unbelieving world will melt in fear; the Christian will lift up their eyes to Jesus in certain hope! The resurrection of the body and life everlasting is but a trumpet sound away!

Jesus teaches in our Gospel reading today, **“If you abide in my Word, you are truly my disciples” (Jn 8:31a)**. Brothers and sisters in Christ, remain steadfast in His Word! You were made His students through the waters of Baptism. His Word is the eternal Gospel – it’s not going away. It’s not going to change. It has much to teach you. It has much with which to comfort you. That “changing business” is the way of the world, not Christ. He remains our Mighty Fortress. His Word does not need to adapt or swing like a pendulum. It is a trusty shield and weapon. The Word of God like God Himself is not only our sure defense against the onslaughts of the spirit of this age, but also strong to save on the offensive. God’s Word does not go out in vain! It does not return to Him empty (**Isa 55:11**)! It sets you free from a tormented conscience because it forgives your sins for Jesus’ sake! That’s the eternal Gospel the Church must proclaim. In Jesus’ name, Amen.