

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany – January 30, 2022

“I must preach the good news...for I was sent for this purpose.” (Luke 4:42)

What do you expect from a sermon? What would you like to happen to you when you are listening to a sermon?

Here are some possible responses: “A sermon ought to help me think about the Bible in a new way” ... “A sermon should show me ways I have gone wrong and give me ways I can get back on track.” ... “It should inspire me.” ... “I want a special feeling from the sermon.” ... “I want something easy to remember and easy to take home.”

Last Sunday Jesus preached his first sermon in his hometown synagogue. He said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Now Jesus tells us his purpose was to preach. What do you think Jesus hoped his sermons would accomplish?

As Lutherans, we believe that a Christian sermon is to bring us closer to the true and living God. This happens because the Holy Spirit is present in the “words” of the sermon that strike your ear, mind, and heart. Sometimes you get helpful hints for better living, but they are not the main point. Sometimes you receive answers to your questions, but not every time. One of the main things you get is the gift of being with God who, in Jesus Christ, has chosen to be with you. The foremost thing in the sermon is you get to hear, in your ear, today, that God loves you, cares for you, and went to the cross to give you his forgiveness and kingdom for free!

Sometimes that closeness with God feels good, and sometimes it doesn't because you feel convicted of your sin. Lutherans call this type of preaching “Law and Gospel.” Whether you feel bad or good is not the point. The point is that you are hearing from God in his two words of Law and Gospel.

As a famous Rabbi once said, “Remember, there is a God, and you are not it.” The preacher shows up with nothing but Scripture, and preaches about who God is and what God is up to in your life.

We are always in danger of attempting to cut the Creator of the universe down to our size, to substitute other gods for the true and living God. That's when we ought to pray that we're about to hear a sermon that reminds us God is bigger than our inadequate concepts and our vain desires.

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