

*Texts: Heb. 1:1-4; Mark 10:13-16*

*Subject: God Has Spoken Through the Son*

*Theme: Word of Glory: Jesus is Greater*

*Fifth Sunday after Pentecost; July 14, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven through our risen and living Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I went to church with my grandparents when I was little. I remember the sanctuary, with the built in pews, and the organ and large choir. In the center of the aisle was the great marble font with a great brass lid that looked like a treasure chest to me at such a young age. It's easily 5 feet off the floor, but seemed as tall as a mountain to me as a boy.

There next to it, hanging engraved on a metal plaque, were the names of all the baptized members of the church, and mine was there too. I looked for it every week. My brother and I sat in worship, drawing on a note pad, or rummaging through my grandmother's purse for lifesavers candies. After the hymn of the day and the prayers, the people would come and kneel around the altar, where the pastor and assisting minister would distribute Holy Communion. When they reached the children, they'd place a hand on our heads and give a blessing. There, with my family by my side, I remember hearing the promises of Jesus' love for me. Later in life, as Ivy and I brought our own little ones forward during communion, I remember the smiling face of Pastor Stan Juergens, who would always welcome them with Jesus' own words, "suffer not the children of the world, but bid them come unto me, for such is the kingdom of heaven."

As a child, the experience was comforting, even if I didn't understand everything that we said or what it meant that Jesus gave these deep and lasting promises to his friends, and spoke about giving his body and blood. I can still picture the light beaming through the stained glass, the gold decorating the wall behind the table, and the words of

Galatians 3:26 hanging over the chancel, “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.” I was welcomed there. I was taught there. I met Jesus there.

Can you remember? Where did you meet Jesus? Where did you first hear the story of God coming to be with us? Who was the one who shared God’s love with you in your life?

Through all those teachers, parents, pastors, grandparents, and friends, God was speaking. God spoke directly Abraham, to Noah, to Moses and through Aaron, through silence, and even a donkey, through prophets like Jonah, Jeremiah, Micah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and others. God is still speaking, and like so many before us, we fail to listen. We can get discouraged and shut our ears and our hearts. We struggle to focus on anything but our own feelings, the pain we see in the world, or the hatred and division in our communities. We distract ourselves by any means necessary in order to survive. We can’t see Jesus.

Here in this place, we get to meet Him every week.

Jesus is here in and among us. The Word is read from scripture. The Word is proclaimed by pastors, the promises reinforced through our singing. The Word in bread and wine is given and taken into each of us. Jesus *is* here, and *Jesus is greater* than all of our worries, works, fears, and failings. Jesus is here for us.

The author of Hebrews - it’s not Paul - was likely writing to an actual community in the early church. They were people who were Jewish by birth and by tradition. They knew the books of the Torah, they knew the Psalms, the Word given through the prophets. They knew all about Jesus and at first were excited and faithful - they had started on a high point! Jesus had died, and risen, and they had expected him to come

again soon - but the clock was ticking, and still they didn't see him. They were discouraged. Some had abandoned the church and their faith along with it. They needed to be reminded, refreshed, and renewed in their faith. This author writes to uplift them along the way, to bring help to those who were struggling to see how God would still be present with them in the time to come.

Maybe you can relate - when you look around at the world, the things happening in our own nation - not just in politics, but a widening income gap, exploitation of the powerless, the suffering of our neighbors, children abused and neglected, the state of healthcare, climate change, racism, violence, addiction. It's not hard to become despondent, to be overwhelmed, or to wonder, where is God in all of this?

People are in pain and need to be comforted. People are sick and need to find healing. People are grieving, anxious, and afraid, and need to be held, uplifted, and loved.

Maybe we thought things would be better by now. Certainly suffering is not new. If you lived through the depression, World War II, the Jim Crow South, gas rationing, stock market crashes - you've seen pain; you've seen suffering; you've seen death. At times, you might have been discouraged, you might even have been angry enough to do something like protest the war, fight racism, provide help for a neighbor in need. Relatively, I would say that the world is better of than it was 100 years ago in many ways. Human beings have prevented diseases, extended lifespans, increased acceptance for people of different races, provided ways out of poverty and hunger in many places. We haven't solved all of the problems of the world. Yet, in our recent past,

followers of Jesus helped end slavery as an industry, worked to bring awareness to the tragedies done to Native Americans, and cared for patients suffering from HIV/AIDS.

As we look ahead, we have to remember where we've been. For someone who is battling depression, it can be helpful to remember when they had felt this in the past, and then to remember that things got better. For communities, to recall the ways people struggled in the past can become a source of strength and inspiration for the future. For each of us as followers of Jesus, I think we have to remember how we first heard of the love of Jesus, and what it meant to us, to know how to share it with others.

The first verses in the proclamation of the Gospel that is the book of Hebrews proclaim the glory of God the Father passed on to the Son - who is on the throne, who is the one through whom God has created the cosmos, who is the exact imprint of God, who has saved us from sin, who is above even angels, and who is still sustaining all things. Jesus is greater than our worries, greater than our failings, greater than our greatest accomplishments, greater than our egos, greater than what we do, greater than evil, and greater the death itself.

And if Jesus is greater, than in what *e/se* can we ever place our trust?

The author writes to share the good news that Jesus is greater - greater than any other god, any empire, or any power that would persecute God's people. In the midst of suffering the people should hold fast, keep the faith, keep working to care for one another, keep serving, keep worshipping, keep believing that in Jesus God had brought new life for them and for all.

God has spoken to us through the Son.

Jesus *is* the living Word of God. That Word goes to the margins of the community, heals people, welcomes them back into relationships, speaks out against oppression and corruption, feeds people without expectation, prays for enemies, uplifts those who have little to offer, and dies on the cross. This Word is truth and life for all. Jesus *is* God - the exact image and imprint - what the Father has the Son has too! So that when Jesus is raised from the dead, He is higher than angels. He is with the Father in heaven, and He continues to feed, heal, and welcome us, His children.

So we are not discouraged. We are not weighed down by the pain that surrounds us. Jesus is greater. We are able to welcome others into the kingdom without fear, we are able to cross borders and boundaries for the sake of God's Word of glory - Jesus is greater. We are not afraid to try new things, to engage in this life together, to get a little messy in the process. We have been freed to serve. Jesus is alive!

The Holy Spirit is still with us here in the heart of the city! God is still at work in us, and that means we have hope, we have a purpose, we have a sacred calling to go and *be* the church. We will continue to build relationships with our neighbors, to listen and hear the issues they face with NCG, to feed hungry people with LSSN and our Senior Meal program, to worship and sing, and play music, and teach children, and grow this church together. We will reach out to new partners like the Center, the Las Vegas Rescue Mission, and more. We will send kids to camp and Leadership Lab, and VBS. We will share our stories and the story of God's grace in Jesus and build on the legacy of Reformation Lutheran Church for decades to come..

In sending the Son, God came to be with us - God entered into space and time, to real places, and to a specific culture, a came to live and work and walk with the good

creation, the people, and many animals too. God chose to be with us, to need us, to save us, through the Son, so that no matter what we face, and the struggles will be great at times - we can know that Jesus is greater.

Amen.