

October 20, 2019

II Timothy 3:14-4:5

Still Guides, O Christ, to You!

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The hymn that we just sang was *O Word of God Incarnate*. Another way of saying it would be “word in flesh.” When we look at Jesus of Nazareth he is the embodiment (or fleshing) of the Word of the Father. As Luther correctly observes (and I paraphrase and add the words of the Nicene Creed) - in the Father there is a Word which forever occupies the Father. The Father has an eternal conversation with himself. This Word is “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made . . . who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man . . .” The Holy Spirit, who is the eternal breath of the forever conversation and also true God, reveals to us this Word of the Father as the one to behold that we may know who God is and his will for us.

Heavy as this stuff is and being limited in our understanding, we are at least able to say that Jesus is the revelation of the eternal Father - his very heart. For the people of the past and for us words were spoken and written about him by the prophets of the Old Testament times. The Word became flesh and tented among our forefathers for a short while. When he gained for us the victory over sin, death, and the devil, that we might know the full extent of God’s love for us through the cross, he bodily ascended into heaven so that one of us now reigns over all for our salvation. But, before he left, he chose apostles and breathed on them the Holy Spirit that his breath would be in them, even giving them words for us about the person and work of the Word made flesh in order that we might know the truth and be set free.

God breathed into the nostrils of the very first man who was made from the dust of the earth. Man became a living being, and that breath was passed on to the woman who was made from man. But when humanity reached out and ate an evil meal, they lost their breath. Consequently, their connection to God was lost and they were doomed to also lose their physical breath when they would eventually stop breathing and become dust again. Still, in the mercy of God, words were spoken to them before they were banished from the garden that pointed to the coming of the Word made flesh - the offspring of the woman. Through those words, the breath of forgiveness and salvation was given to them and reconnected them with God. Through the curses and promises of Genesis 3 - through words they were pointed to the Word (the Son of God) who would come in the flesh and crush the head of sin, death, and the devil. It was through these words that they were brought to faith in the Word that they might have the hope of living forever in the eternal conversation of the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus has become the light of our dark sky, or as it says in the Gospel of John: “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness . . . (John 1:4-5).” With these words we are brought into the presence of the Living Word who is Jesus of Nazareth, as Peter so powerfully writes: “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (2 Peter 1:3-4).” This is what the church has received. It is a gift divine, for the Light of Light (Jesus) continues to shine in words of light that have been entrusted to the church. As our sermon hymn states: “The Church from You, dear master, Received the

gift divine; And still that light is lifted O'er all the earth to shine. It is the chart and compass That, all life's voyage through, Mid mists and rocks and quicksands Still guides, O Christ, to You."

Indeed! **Still Guides, O Christ, To You!** The words of light, the words that are God-breathed, all takes us to the Word made Flesh. They are words that take us to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Man and the Son of God our only Savior from sin, death, and the devil. In him is life. He is the life of all the living. It is a simple but so very important truth. Jesus Christ is the heart and center of Scripture. The breath of God that we call the Bible takes us into the eternal conversation, which is an never-ending conversation of love. In speaking of the Old Testament Scriptures Jesus says, "they bear witness about Me." And concerning the apostolic words of the New Testament we hear these words of Christ to his holy apostles: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth . . . he will take what is mine and declare it to you (John 16:12-15)." So, the New Testament is to be considered as the words of Christ. Through words, the Word made flesh is with us always to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20).

Again, **Still Guides, O Christ, To You!** Please listen very carefully to these words of Kurt Marquart in his book, *The Saving Truth*, as he draws upon the things I have said so far and connects them with a portion of our epistle lesson for this morning. He writes:

Jesus therefore is not simply one topic among others in the Bible. As the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6), He is in fact the Theme and Content of this holy book from beginning to end. "All the prophets testify about him" (Acts 10:43). The Holy Scriptures testify to Jesus (John 5:39), and are therefore able to make us "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). This is why St. Paul "resolved to know nothing" in his missionary labour "except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). Paul's faithful pupil Martin Luther echoed this sentiment fifteen hundred years later: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what will you find left in them?"

The words of our epistle lesson that really motivated me to write this sermon are the words of verses fourteen through fifteen where Paul writes: "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the *sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Tim. 3:14-15)." One thought led to another until I was once again mindful of the fact that in the Scriptures we have "the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)." I really want you to see this and understand the magnitude of what has been so graciously given.

I want you to understand some things on two levels. First, consider what has been given to you. Secondly, consider what you should be giving to others. Christ comes to us in the Scriptures. And yet, we often treat the gospel as if it were nothing but another book - even a book that we might label as being not much of a page turner. We take it for granted. We take the church and the public preaching and teaching of the Scriptures for granted. What exactly does that say of us in terms of the way in which we view Christ? If the Bible contains words that take us to the very Word made flesh - to Jesus - and we grouse

around when it comes to reading, hearing and studying it, what does that say about us? The old Lutheran theologians would say that the way in which you treat the Bible and church is an accurate description of the way in which you would treat the Word made flesh - Jesus - if he were physically present. And if this is the way in which we treat him, do we even bother to share Christ with others?

In Proverbs 4:13 we read these strong words, "Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life." We sure know how to keep hold of our cell-phones don't we? We sure know how to guard our schedules so we can get to all of the fun stuff wouldn't you admit? How many hours do we mindlessly spend surfing the net or watching the TV screen? I think you get the drift. In the words of Scripture we are brought to the Word made flesh who died and rose so that we might have eternal life. We meet Jesus. Apart from him we are lost. Apart from Jesus the people we care about are lost.

Luther says in one of his sermons, "The Devil held a great anniversary at which his emissaries were convened to report the results of their several missions. 'I let loose the wild beasts of the desert,' said one, 'on a caravan of Christians, and their bones are now bleaching on the sands.' 'What of that?' said the Devil. 'Their souls were all saved.' 'I drove the east wind,' said another, 'against a ship freighted with Christians, and they were all drowned.' 'What of that?' said the Devil. 'Their souls were all saved.' 'For ten years I tried to get a single Christian asleep,' said a third, 'and I succeeded, and left him so.' Then the Devil shouted, continues Luther, "and the night stars of hell sang for joy."

The Scriptures **Still Guide, O Christ, To You!** Forgive us for taking you for granted. Forgive us for not guiding others to you whether they believe or reject you. Help us dear Lord to keep hold of you, to guard you, for in you there is life and salvation.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott