

Pako Evening Service: 10/04/2016

Scripture Reading: Jn 12:20-36; Acts 8:26-40; Sermon: "We want to see Jesus!"

Congregation, one of the Synodical guidelines for sermon evaluation is to ask whether the sermon is basically Christ centred. Now one of the reasons why this criterion is central to sermon evaluation is because we want to ensure that when that the listeners are left in no doubt about the necessity of having Jesus as Saviour. As Christians, saved by Jesus Christ, we want to make Jesus known. It is a most vital part of our calling. In some ways we should be wearing Jesus on our sleeves.

It would be neat if we could say to someone, "There he is," or "go into that room and you will find him". Unfortunately, that isn't possible for we know Jesus dwells in heaven. Yet, I put it to you that the desire to see Jesus should be at the forefront of our thinking, not only when we come to this place of worship, but in all that we do.

It should be in the forefront of anyone who leads in worship, or speaks at a Christian conference, or leads a Bible Study, or teaches Sunday School or Catechism or does Gems and Cadets or prays before a congregation. I would further suggest that one of the best ways to do this is to saturate your presentations with Scripture. For it is in Scripture, the true word of God, where we find Jesus the Saviour of sinners explained.

So if you are asked to prepare a devotion or write a sermon or meditation, then make sure people will be able to see Jesus by the way you quote Scripture! Jesus said to the two disciples walking to Emmaus that all the Scriptures about him! [Lk 24:44]. Yes, granted, the Bible contains instruction on Christian morals and ethics, yet its central theme is Jesus and the way of salvation.

Yes, the Scriptures contains wisdom on how to be content when you are poor or the dangers of riches, yet it's primarily about Jesus and the way of salvation. Yes, from Scripture we may learn how to live exemplary lives like Abraham, and Joseph and Moses and King David.

We may even dare to be a Daniel or Paul. Yes, the Bible even gives us laws for our guidance, but primarily it's about Jesus and the way of salvation. Therefore, every time we hear a sermon or devotion or any Christian speaker, we should ask ourselves, "Can we see Jesus, the Saviour God provided?" Our heart's desire is to meet Jesus when we read or hear the Scriptures for all of Scripture is the gospel, not just the bits where we read Jesus' name.

Paul writes in 1 Cor 15:3; "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures..." And again, when writing to Timothy, Paul says, "the Scriptures are able to make us wise to salvation." From the Garden of Eden to the Garden in Paradise, the Bible is about Jesus. From beginning to end the Bible, the gospel if you will, directs our attention to Jesus Christ.

From beginning to end there is nothing secretive, mysterious, or hidden in the Bible. It is all about God's plan to reveal Jesus and that is all good news. You will not be able to find out about Jesus by looking at the stars, or the tea leaves in a cup. You won't find Jesus by looking inward and going into some trance for hours on end! The only way sinners will come to know that Jesus Christ is the Saviour that God has provided is through the holy gospel, from Genesis to Revelation.

Oh, we may have an idea that there is a God from creation, or from the events in history, or even from our conscience, but it is primarily the Word of God that tells me about Jesus Christ, the gospel. Apart from the Scriptures we cannot know fully about God's grace and mercy to us in Christ. We cannot know about Jesus' birth, life, death, or resurrection apart from the Bible.

The story of the Ethiopian we find in Acts, reveals he had no idea that Isaiah was telling the story of Jesus until Philip explained it to him. It was only when the Ethiopian knew the story about Jesus that he was able to see Jesus in the book of "Isaiah the prophet." So whether we read the book of Genesis, or Exodus or the Psalms, or the Proverbs or Isaiah we should be asking, "How does this teach us about Jesus, the good news?"

Congregation, this is basic biblical theology. When we understand Scripture in this way, it will ensure that God receives the glory and not some mortal sinful human being. It will also ensure that God receives the glory and not Abraham or Joseph or Daniel or Paul or for that matter Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Cranmer, or Edwards, or Spurgeon or whoever else you may wish to mention.

I mention this for sinful man has this tendency to place himself on the pedestal rather than Jesus! But we should never do that. It wasn't Abraham or Joseph or Daniel or Paul or Luther or Calvin or Spurgeon who saved sinners like us. It was Jesus and the Bible tells me so and that is why we want to see him! Immediately after the fall into sin, God promised to send a Saviour. Joseph after being sold into slavery, falsely accused of rape, imprisoned, and then becoming second in command of Egypt, knew it was part of God's plan to save a remnant from which the Saviour would come as promised.

All the OT sacrifices repeated annually were pointers to the ultimate, once and for all sacrifice, Jesus Christ. The Book of Psalms contains many messianic Psalms of which Psalm 22 is most for it foreshadows what happened to Jesus upon the cross.

(Ps 22:1, 6-8, 17-18) "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:They [will] divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

Isaiah 7:14, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." Isa 9:6 "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Or if you will consider Isa 53:3-7, "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Despised, he took up our infirmities, carried our sorrows, smitten, afflicted, pierced, crushed, wounded, yet he did not open his mouth."

Isaiah was talking about the 'what' and 'why' of Christ's crucifixion. I put it to you that all of Scripture is about Jesus Christ.

We need to make the same request as the Greeks made who came to Philip as John records for us in Ch 12:21; "Sir, we would like to see Jesus." And what does Jesus do after being told by Philip and Andrew about this request? He starts to speak about his death. He doesn't start speaking about his great miracles, not least being that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! He speaks about his death for it is through his death that many will be saved!

Jesus speaks about how his death and resurrection will glorify His Father in heaven. He speaks about how his death and resurrection will cause many men to be drawn to him. Let me say it again - the Bible is first and foremost a history of God's redemption for sinful man in and through Jesus. That's behind every narrative, every Psalm, every proverb, every prophetic word. That is how God explains His own words and deeds.

Sadly, we live in a world where people are more interested in what they do and have done, rather than in what God has done for them in Christ. I put it to you when people speak more of their accomplishments than what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ then it robs God of his glory and possibly shows a complete lack of trust in God's word.

Heb 1:1-2 makes the point that in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son. How do we come to know Jesus Christ? Through the word which is the gospel, applied by the Holy Spirit! After His resurrection, Jesus when walking with two of His followers, opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures (Lk 24:45).

That's my role and your role. How do we know about Jesus Christ? God's word was written over a span of 1600 years by 36 different human authors. The authors did not sit down as a committee to decide what to write. They were separated by great time and distance. Yet, there is an underlying unity. The OT points forward to the coming of Jesus. The NT tells us He has come.

The underlying theme of the Bible is Jesus whose birth we celebrate and whose death and resurrection we remember every day. What the OT saints could only see dimly, we can now see clearly and rejoice! Since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus and the outpouring of His Spirit, we are now privileged to be able to read the Scriptures with new insight. We can read them with 'Christ coloured' glasses on.

When we do that, aided by the Holy Spirit we find references to God's salvation in Christ, even in the OT. In fact, if you don't meet Christ you are not reading the Bible properly. If you don't meet Christ you, then like the Ethiopian, you will not understand what you are reading. If you don't meet Christ, you are wasting your time. Make no mistake. God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise. He proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets. The sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law point to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Finally, He reveals it in full through His own dear Son.

I love what the Apostle Peter says in 1 Pet 1:12, "It was revealed to them [the prophets of old] that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things."

That last phrase in the Greek indicates that the angels are straining their necks to just receive a glimpse of how God's marvelous salvation in Christ for mankind was worked out. How privileged we are for what the prophets of old couldn't fully see and what the angels cannot fully experience has been revealed and experienced by us.

Jesus said of John the Baptist in Mat 11:11, that he was the greatest of all the OT prophets. Why, because he had seen the Christ! He was the last who could point forward to Christ. But then notice, Jesus goes on and says, "That the least in the kingdom is greater than John." Jesus says this because those who know Jesus and His atoning death know more than John the Baptist. We are closer to the heart of God because we know the necessity of the cross and the glory of the grave.

Now some people today suggest that the OT is outdated. Now there are many things that become outdated. B&W TVs, Analogue phones, Video players, clothes, cars, CD's you name it. But we can never say that of the OT, because all of God's word tells us about our beloved Saviour Jesus Christ, and may we never forget it!

In the Bible the OT is not replaced by the NT, rather, the new is concealed in the old and the old is fulfilled in the New. The OT is Gospel and, in the light of the New Testament, it can and should be used to teach us about Jesus. So if someone were to ask you, "How can I come to know salvation?" Tell them, "The holy gospel tells me." Read the Scriptures to them. From the first garden to the last garden, we hear the good news of Jesus Christ who came in the flesh to suffer and die for our sins.

And that dear friend is what we celebrate every day! Jesus coming in the flesh to suffer and die for sinners like you and I so that we have eternal life! I don't care how you say it, but say it, read it, for it is the best news that any sinner needs to hear! Don't leave it on the shelf. Become familiar with it. Prayerfully read it. Remember some key books and verses.

There is a saying – "use it or loose it!" The same is true with Scripture. If you only read it on Sundays, you will be under-nourished! Oh may our family and friends and neighbours see Jesus, not just by the way we live, but also by the way we know his Word. To God be the glory for He has given us his holy word, the good news for sinners. Amen.