

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity, October 11, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)
Hymns: 428, 437:1 353:1-4, 524:1-5, 518:7.
Lessons: 2 Samuel 7:22-29, Acts 9:1-18, Luke 18:9-14.
Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 1:15-17
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Who can you trust? What can you trust?

You are living in a world in which you have probably learned that you should have some questions about whom you can trust and what you can trust. Among people in the world today there is often very little trust. People don't trust what others say. People don't trust everything they read or hear. There are so many lies being told, so many half-truths being shared, and of course, half-truths are really lies, that sometimes people don't know who or what to believe.

But today you will hear about

A STATEMENT YOU CAN TRUST

1. ***“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”***
2. **Paul needed Christ's salvation, because he knew what kind of person he was.**
3. **Because of what Jesus did for him, he wants to give eternal honor and glory to God.**

Our text is one of several places where Paul uses the word ***“trustworthy”***. This is a statement that can be trusted, it is faithful, and it is worthy of believing, it deserves full acceptance.

So who is telling you this? God is telling this to you, and God doesn't lie. You can trust God. He has kept his promises, he keeps his promises, and he will keep them until the end of time when he takes all believers in Jesus Christ to eternal life.

Because you know who says it, it is trustworthy. You heard from David's prayer in our Old Testament lesson: ***“O Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.”*** 2 Samuel 7:28 (NIV)

We read in Psalm 19 these beautiful words about what God tells and teaches us: ***“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.”*** Psalm 19:7-10 (NIV)

And to summarize what the Old Testament says about God's faithfulness and trustworthiness, we quote one more Psalm: ***“The LORD is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.”*** Psalm 145:13 (NIV2011)

God keeps his promises, he is worthy of trust and can be relied on. God's Word, what he has caused to be written in the Holy Scriptures is true and trustworthy. Therefore, it can be trusted.

This ***“trustworthy saying”*** deserves ***“full acceptance”***. That means ‘Accept it.’ ‘Receive it’. ‘Believe it.’ You can trust what God says,

What is the statement that can be trusted? What is that message? ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*** Let me repeat that because it is so important: ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”***

That is why God sent his only-begotten Son, true God, to become a true man, to save sinners. Jesus did this by living a perfect life – without sin – and then dying on the cross to pay the price for sin – for all the sins of all men that ever lived. Scripture is clear that ***“the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”*** Luke 19:10 (NIV) Paul also writes in his second letter to Timothy that God ***“has saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”*** 2 Timothy 1:8-10 (NIV)

Paul isn’t the only one who writes so clearly about this. All of Scripture teaches this. John writes in his first letter: ***“we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”*** 1 John 2:1 (NIV)

Sinners were the object of Jesus’ mission. He makes the same offer, and promises to do the same thing, for every one of us – that thing being to save us. Christ saved us by living the sinless life we cannot and then dying to atone for sin.

Paul then speaks of sin, and sinners, writing about the sinner whom he knows the best. People who knew him could have been pointed to him as a good person, in the first part of his life as a good Jew who obeyed the Law of God, and then later as a strong and good believer in Jesus, as one who was appointed by Jesus Christ himself to tell others about eternal salvation. But he doesn’t speak of himself as a good person.

Paul bluntly says ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”***

In the words just before our text, Paul wrote by the inspiration of God: ***“I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*** 1 Timothy 1:12-14 (NIV)

He speaks of the ***“grace”*** of God. In our text he speaks of ***“mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.”***

Why did St Paul call himself the chief of sinners? What did he really mean? One writer wrote “The truth is that St Paul had a very rare and exceptional insight into his own heart, and also into the nature of sin. He knew how terrible were the passions that [ruled] in his own heart.”

Christ saved Paul, the man who of all men in the world seemed the least likely, and the most difficult, to be saved. He had blasphemed and persecuted Christ and his followers and he did this violently!

This is no false modesty on the part of Paul, but it is an example of true knowledge of sin. When a sinner, through the application of the Law of God, becomes conscious of his sin, he sees in himself nothing but guilt and damnation. He no longer makes any excuses, he no longer makes any comparisons to people who might be considered worse than himself. He knows that in the long list of sinners he stands at the head, because he is best acquainted with his own guilt.

We must marvel at Paul’s remarkable public confession of his sinfulness.

We don’t even want to – by nature – admit our sinfulness and specific sins. We always want to make excuses. When we publicly confess our sins together in our worship services, aren’t we relieved that no one can see our every sin? The human mind has an infinite capacity to justify itself. But Paul plainly says ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”***

He says he’s the worst. OK, so how should we feel about that? Should we say to ourselves: ‘Well, he’s a worse sinner than me.’ ‘And after all, I’m a pretty good person compared to all the wicked people in the world.

In fact, right now, I could instantly count off in my head five or ten people whom I know are more wicked than me.' Isn't it great that you aren't as wicked as Paul? He was the worst of sinners!

So couldn't we start feeling pretty good about ourselves? Maybe we have attended church all our lives and don't skip many services. Maybe we have given much to the church of our treasures and of our time and of our talents. Maybe we have volunteered for all sorts of things for the church. And what about all the good things I do for others? Maybe in the community I am recognized as a pretty good person!

Wait a minute! Aren't we sounding like the Pharisee in our Gospel lesson? (Pause for a moment.)

Paul talks about why God showed his mercy. He goes on and talks about the boundless, infinite love of God: ***"But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."***

Mercy. Grace. Unlimited patience. Such words show the great love of God for mankind, for sinners, and for me! Paul uses himself as an example. Because he knows what is in his heart, even after what terrible things he did in his life, he says ***"for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life."***

Notice that he says ***"receive eternal life,"*** not work for it, not earn it, not deserve it, not merit it!

The frankness of the apostle in humbling himself as the worst of sinners brings out more beautifully the merciful love of Christ Jesus, the Savior.

Paul here is a pattern to all those who would believe on Jesus Christ unto eternal life. Paul is here an example for people of all times who would be brought to faith. Just as Paul at one time belonged to the fierce enemies of Christ, to those who opposed the preaching of the Cross, so he now, through the immeasurable grace of Christ, has been saved and believes in his Redeemer. In his case we see that no sin is too great for the merciful love of the Savior. All men, no matter what their transgression, who believe this doctrine that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, will, by this faith, obtain eternal life. In the presence of their Savior, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light, they will enjoy the life for which they were fully intended in a heaven without end. Let every Christian apply these words to himself with a firm trust in the mercy and grace revealed in the Gospel.

Then Paul writes: ***"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen."***

He lifts up his voice in grateful praise to the King of the Ages, immortal, that cannot be seen, the only God, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever! The apostle praises God as the eternal Ruler, who lives and rules from everlasting to everlasting. This great King is immortal, deathless, beyond the power of destruction, in contrast to the temporal, transitory world. Nothing in this world influences the everlasting Ruler. He dwells in heaven beyond the view of mortal men. No man has seen nor can see Him.

God sent his son Jesus Christ to live among us and ***"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."*** Colossians 1:15 (NIV)

He is the only God, the blessed and highest of kings. There is none beside Him. He will not share His glory with another. He tells us in Isaiah: ***"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols."*** Isaiah 42:8 (NIV)

And so, to Him, the apostle and with him all Christians give glory and honor forever and ever. This is most certainly true.

You can trust this. God's words are trustworthy and valuable, ***"more precious than gold, than much pure gold."*** Psalm 19:10 (NIV)

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Paul ends our text with the word ***"Amen"***, that is, 'so shall it be'! Amen.