

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 27, 2009**

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Hymns: 358, 392: 1-2, 342, 356, 353: 4-7.

Lessons: Exodus 32:7-14, Romans 5: 1-10, Luke 15:1-10.

Text: 1 Timothy 1: 12-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Whom can you trust? What can you trust?

On August 1, 2007, an interstate highway bridge in Minneapolis that people had trusted for decades collapsed. We know we can't always trust what men make. Events of the last year show that we can't trust money and financial institutions to always look out for our best interests. Those events show that our earthly investments won't necessarily continue to grow and provide us a comfortable living as we grow older. It was just about one year ago that an earthly financial meltdown – to use one term the media use frequently – occurred which shook many people's trust in earthly wealth and institutions which hold our money for us. But today, I want to emphasize that

**HERE'S SOMETHING YOU CAN REALLY TRUST**

1. ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”***
2. **Every Christian really recognizes himself as “the worst sinner” along with Saint Paul.**
3. **For this trustworthy statement we thank Christ Jesus our Lord!**

The saving of sinners, the eternal salvation of lost and condemned mankind, was the object and goal of Christ's coming into the world, as we read in that other Gospel summary: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”* John 3:16-17.

In this simple sentence – *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”* every word is loaded with meaning and contains a sermon. *“Christ”* – the eternal son of God promised as the Messiah, the Anointed one; *“Jesus”* – true man, the son of Mary, so named *“because he will save his people from their sins.”* Matthew 1:21; *“Came”* – sent by the Father, willingly leaving the glory that was his from eternity; *“into the world”* -- humbly placing himself under the law and being tempted as we are (but without sin), obedient even to the humiliating death on the cross; *“to save”* -- His one great goal and accomplishment; *“Sinners”* – those who deserved only damnation. *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Romans 5:8. What a “glorious gospel” that calls for full acceptance!

*“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”* 2 Peter 3:9. What an example Paul was of the patient grace and mercy of God!! When we contemplate and recognize our own sins, what patience God has shown also toward us! And what patience we must show as we tell of Christ to even those we may think of as the worst of sinners.

The man we call St. Paul *“was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.”* He stood by and held the clothes of those who stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr, to death. He persecuted believers in

Christ. He went to Damascus to take believers prisoner and take them back to Jerusalem. That was his intention, at least, on the very trip Jesus converted him through a marvelous appearance.

He tells us that he ***“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.”*** He certainly didn’t deserve God’s goodness, his grace.

In our Old Testament lesson Moses prayed for the people as a shepherd, as a pastor and as God’s prophet. He had been up on Mount Sinai for forty days where God had given him all the laws for God’s people, and he came back down to find them worshipping a golden calf. In our Gospel lesson Jesus shows concern for lost and straying souls. In our sermon text, St. Paul is expressing his gratitude to the Lord for His forgiving kindness and His confidence. He says ‘I give thanks to Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me what I have today. He even considered me faithful in placing me into the ministry.’

The apostle’s own experience with regard to the grace of God now prompts him to give us a brief summary of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. He speaks of ***“The grace of our Lord [that] was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”*** Then he tells us that God is trustworthy. ***“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”*** Trustworthy is the word, and worthy of full acceptance, is the idea that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom St. Paul confesses ***“I am the worst”***. This sentence – ***“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”*** is a beautiful simple summary of Gospel truth. We read in Matthew 18:11 from the King James Version: ***“For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”*** That sentence is missing for some reason in the New International Version, but it is found in Luke 19:10 in the New International Version: ***“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”***

As Paul speaks of sinners, he has to think of himself: ***“sinners--of whom I am the worst.*** Literally, of whom I am the first. But isn’t he exaggerating? We think of Barabbas, for example, a notorious criminal who had committed murder and was guilty of rebellion. By contrast, Paul had been a Pharisee, who patterned his life most carefully after God’s law. Paul, however, never forgot that he had been a blasphemer and persecutor of Christianity. Barabbas had rebelled against earthly rule. As a murderer he had destroyed human life on earth. Paul, however, as a blasphemer, had rebelled against the true God, sought to destroy Jesus’ saving name, had subverted faith and the gospel, and robbed sinners of all heavenly treasure. No wonder Paul saw himself as the “first” of sinners.

God however, had turned what was “worst” in Paul to a useful purpose. ***“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.”*** What happened in the case of this ***“worst of sinners”*** was an example for future believers. It was not an example of God’s immediate and deserved judgment upon the sinner, but an example to show God’s boundless mercy, to display his unlimited patience. But God does not in this way condone what is worst or bad in us. He does not nullify his judgment upon sin. His mercy and patience have the goal of creating saving faith and eternal life through Christ.

When Paul calls himself ***“the worst of sinners,”*** this is not an example of false modesty, but an example of true knowledge of sin. When a sinner, through the application of the Word, 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 that might make him think ‘I’m not as bad as that person’. He knows that in the long list of sinners – every human since Adam – he stands at the head of the list, because he is the one who is best acquainted with his own guilt.

The frankness of the apostle in humbling himself beneath the lowest of sinners now brings out more beautifully the merciful love of Christ Jesus, the Savior: 'But on this account I received mercy, in order that in me, as the worst one, Jesus Christ would show all grace and love, as an example for all who would believe on Him unto eternal life.' Just as Paul at one time belonged to the enemies of Christ, to those who opposed the preaching of the Cross, so he now, through the immeasurable grace of Christ, is saved and believes in his Redeemer. In his case we see that no sin is too great for the merciful love of the Savior.

St. Paul emphasizes this message as totally trustworthy and absolutely reliable, as opposed to the false doctrines of the Judaizing false teachers. How can we trust men speaking their own ideas, because men lie? How can we trust men speaking their own opinions because what men think of as "truth" changes from time to time? Because God and his message are totally trustworthy, it follows that it may and should be accepted by men with all readiness of heart and mind. Men can trust this message because it is the eternal God speaking. The unbreakable Holy Scriptures assure us "*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?*" Numbers 23:19.

Trustworthy is the word. You can absolutely rely on it, and so it "*deserves full acceptance.*" Paul writes with the kind of conviction only the Holy Spirit can work and he looks to the Holy Spirit to work the same acceptance and conviction in his readers. You can count on God to keep his words and promise.

This is the trustworthy saying: "*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*"

As Paul considers the boundless mercy he experienced in Jesus and the patient love future believers also can expect, he bursts out into a doxology. He praises God with these words: "*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*" By directing people to do works of the law as a means of gaining salvation, the false teachers robbed Jesus Christ of the glory that was his and his alone. Faith that leans alone on Christ, faith that trusts absolutely and completely in him for salvation, faith that says "nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling," such a faith honors and glorifies the "*king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God*". We look forward to the eternal joy of praising, honoring and glorifying our eternal King, the only God Forever and ever. Amen.