

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday after Trinity, June 20, 2010

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Hymns: 427, 453:1, 370, 336, 50.

Lessons: Psalm 86, 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:7, Luke 10:21-24.

Text: 2 Corinthians 1: 21-22.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

God has made great promises to us and he has kept those promises. Last week we emphasized that all the promises of Holy Scripture have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, except of course, for the promises relating to judgment day and heaven. They are yet to be fulfilled.

Now St. Paul makes those promises even more personal, telling us what God has done for us. We think of what Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians: *"for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."* Philippians 2:13. Today we hear how

GOD WORKS IN US AND FOR US

- 1. God makes us stand firm.**
- 2. God anointed us to be his and to serve him.**
- 3. God set his seal of ownership on us.**
- 4. Got put his Spirit into our hearts like "earnest money".**

St. Paul has just told us that all of the promises God has made to us are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Now he gives God credit for something else – actually for four things.

First, God makes us stand firm, not by ourselves but in Christ. In the original Greek this is in the present tense and has the idea of ongoing action. God keeps on establishing us, keeps on making us stand firm in Christ. But please notice that this happens only if we do not separate ourselves from Christ. When we separate ourselves from Christ and his Word we are putting ourselves in mortal, eternal danger. Everything is really all in God's hands, and Paul is not the one who is controlling things. The same God who had enabled them to say "amen" to Paul's message would keep on strengthening them in their faith.

Without God we cannot stand firm in Christ. God makes all of us – Paul and ministers of God – and also all believers stand firm. When we think of standing firm we might think of a football player's stance when he is ready for a play. Some of you know from experience that a football lineman must set himself for every play so he isn't knocked down when the play starts. If he doesn't stand firm again and again he gets knocked down again and again. But if that happens, like the resilient Christian, he gets up, dusts himself off, and goes at it again, even if he doesn't get any of the credit and glory. After all, God and specifically his Son Jesus Christ is the quarterback and directs all the plays and gets and should get all the glory.

What is it that we stand firm in? We stand in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We stand, as we just sang, on the gospel of Jesus Christ. If it were not for what Jesus Christ has done for us, dying so that we might live, suffering the punishment demanded for our sins, we would have no hope. We stand on Jesus Christ and the Word of God.

With the next three verbs, where we read in the King James Version that he has “*anointed us*” and has “*also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our heart.*” Paul uses a form of the Greek verb that, rather than emphasizing ongoing action, describes something that has already happened.

Secondly, he anointed us. This is how and why we can stand firm. The God who makes us stand firm is the same God who anointed us. In Old Testament times prophets and priests and kings were often anointed as they began their office, symbolizing a separation for service unto God. So it was with Paul, and with the Corinthians who believed, and so it is with all believers. We could speak of baptism as our anointing, as the act of making us his own, of dedicating us for himself.

For the third and fourth verbs – and third and fourth parts of our sermon outline – the New International Version is much clearer but uses more words to explain that God “*set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*”

Third, he put his seal of ownership on us. A seal identifies and it protects. We could think of the seal of Pontius Pilate that was to protect the tomb of Jesus from those who might steal his body. In the book of Revelation believers are identified as those who “*have the seal of God on their foreheads.*” Revelation 9:4.

There are a number of illustrations we might use to help explain this seal of ownership. Many people engrave their tools and possessions with their name or some kind of identification code so that they can be identified and returned to their rightful owner if they should be mislaid or stolen. At one time, Minnesota had a program with the goal of engraving a 16 character code on possessions, so that they could be returned to the owners if they were stolen. Kings would have a ring which they would press into melted wax so that their seal of ownership might be attached to such things as documents.

God owns the Christian. We belong to him! It isn't a bad thing to be owned by the true God. It is not a burden but a joy. It means that we are the Lord's, as we sing in hymn 453: (stanza 1)

“We are the Lord's; His all-sufficient merit,
Sealed on the cross, to us this grace accords.
We are the Lord's and all things shall inherit;
Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.” He will take care of us. We are his!

The fourth point is that God put his Spirit into our hearts. This is a guarantee of what is to come. This points the Corinthians to something God had already done for them. That God has anointed them, put his seal of ownership on them, and now puts his Spirit, the Holy Spirit into their hearts are things that have already happened. This assures them – and us – that what God has begun he will complete. What is to come is nothing other than the full glory in heaven that God wants us to have.

We read that God put his Spirit in us, that is, the Spirit of God himself, the Holy Ghost. He gave us the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is faith. This is also what happened on Pentecost. There were other gifts given on Pentecost, but the greatest was putting the Holy Spirit into the hearts of those who believed that day. When we realize that God puts his Spirit into our hearts, we realize that this is not just something that happened on the surface, outwardly, but it is within us. When we read, hear, and study the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Ghost is also coming into our hearts.

This putting the Spirit into us was done as a deposit, a down payment, as an earnest – as the King James Version says – or as earnest money. This is a guarantee.

The King James Version says that God has ***“given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.”*** That’s a word – “earnest” that we don’t hear much today. It has been used in the sense of “earnest money”, that is, a sort of a deposit or down payment. When you put down “earnest money” on something you were thinking of buying, you showed you were serious about buying the item and in most cases you’d lose your earnest money if you didn’t follow through with the purchase.

The words of the New International Version, ***“put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come”*** is much clearer to us today. A deposit is a down payment which guarantees that the buyer will follow through. When you sign a contract to buy something and pay a deposit, you should know that you will lose your deposit if you don’t actually complete the purchase. The deposit God has put into our hearts is something guaranteeing what God is going to give us. There is nothing for us to buy, and we couldn’t buy salvation if we wanted to. God’s salvation is free, and when he puts the Holy Spirit into our hearts, he is guaranteeing that he will keep his part of the deal. However, we can reject it and turn our back on God’s eternal salvation, and in that case we will lose eternal life in heaven.

All three of these expressions: anointing, sealing, giving the Spirit as a down payment or deposit refer to the same event, the time when the Corinthians were brought into God’s kingdom. For us it refers to the same thing, and for many of us that is when we were baptized and were brought into God’s kingdom through baptism. Through the preaching of the gospel the faithful God had worked faith in hearts, a faith that says “amen”, “it is true”, to God’s message. In baptism God anoints believers and seals them and gives them the Holy Spirit as a pledge and promise of eternal life and through the same gospel God would continue to make them stand firm. So it is with us. In our baptism, if we were brought to Christ as infants, we shared in those things even though we may not have been aware of it at the time.

It is because of what God has done that we can stand firm in Christ, knowing God has promised us eternal life in heaven. God’s message this morning is plain: ***“Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”*** St. Paul says much the same thing to the Ephesian Christians, as he also says to us: ***“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession--to the praise of his glory.”*** Ephesians 1:13-14.

May God keep us all in that grace! Amen.