

Epiphany: January 6, 2021
“The Cure for Sangriness”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

In order to find peace and purpose, people are willing to go to very great lengths. It is no secret that people are searching for both of these things. Peace is hotly sought after, and seemingly in short supply. What is my purpose for being here? This question posed many challenges as the world fought about what jobs are lucky enough to be deemed “essential.” If your work is not essential, what does that mean about you? This of course erodes peace, and you can see the wickedness in this slippery slope.

To a hurting and dying world, the Church knows where true peace is to be found, where purpose is given. It is no secret that when these truths of the Church are twisted for man’s self-serving evil ends, it makes me sad and angry—sangry. The Gospel is not for sale. The Church doesn’t need fads or gimmicks to draw people. It has what all men need, without glitz and glimmer. It has the truth for all people, in all places, at all times. It has Jesus. It has the forgiveness of sins. It has eternal life. The Church has something better than anything that can be offered by the world. This is the very message of our Epistle reading.

The very content of the Gospel of which Paul “*was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace,*”¹ is Jesus; the baby born in Bethlehem and visited by the Magi. For Paul, preaching was the proclamation of Christ. He first tells the Corinthians, “*Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God,*”² therefore, “*we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*”³ This means that anyone with a religious message who doesn’t let the hearer recognize Christ does not have a Christian message.

¹ Ephesians 3:7

² 1 Corinthians 1:17-18

³ 1 Corinthians 1:21–25

They are not preaching; they are making religious noises—they are a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

What is it about Jesus that God reveals in the Gospel? “*The unsearchable riches of Christ.*”⁴ Riches raise all sorts of pictures in the modern American mind, especially at the end of the Christmas season. The riches of Christ are much more than fancy new gadgets, grand homes, happy marriages, well-behaved children, and a loving community. In Christ, we have what need the most for our past, our present, and our future. God has made Christ our “*righteousness and sanctification and redemption.*”⁵

No matter how rich we try and portray ourselves to the world, we remain beggars before God. On this side of heaven, we still have the sinful flesh clinging ever so closely. Which one of us can truly stand before God and say, “I have no sins on my conscience.”? Loveless actions and cruel words that scar those around us, even during the last season of love. Selfish thoughts that make us feel dominant and superior in the presence of others. Idolatrous thoughts and actions, raising people, feelings, and events over God Himself, even during the time of celebrating the birth of His Son!

We are unrighteous, impoverished, and looking around the table waiting for someone else to pick-up the tab. Not only have we forgotten our wallet, we don’t have enough credit limit left to even make a dent. This is where the riches of Christ shine forth, manifested in the person of Jesus. He took all our unrighteousness to the cross, suffered the punishment for it, and secured another righteousness for us. He was perfect. He never sinned. He kept God’s Law, every demand, and He did it all for you. By faith, the Holy Spirit exchanges your unrighteousness with Jesus’ righteousness. All past failures are forgotten, and all sins are forgiven.

His riches don’t just cover the past, they flow in abundance in the present. As renewed Christians, as saints in Christ, our will is changed—it is aligned to be the same as our Father’s. We want to live and do the right thing. We want to live in faith towards God and in perfect love towards our neighbors, but it’s so hard. Church is too long, my pastor is boring, and have you met my neighbors? Do you know my family? While we are saints, we still have this sinful flesh constantly seeking to tear us away from God and stumble headlong into the evil we so enjoy.

⁴ Ephesians 3:8

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:30

Here again is where Christ's riches pour forth. He is our sanctification. He gives us the power to do what is right. Through His Holy Spirit, God is at work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. While death is at work in us, life is at work in you. The resurrection of Christ is at work in your sinful flesh. Through your baptism, every day the Old Adam in you should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. We never have to search for purpose, or ask, "What's the use?" You are given many moments of everyday to turn to Him, receive His grace and use His riches given to you for the welfare of your neighbor living your vocation in areas of God's representatives, life, marriage, possessions, reputations, and contentment.

With the riches of Christ for past, and present, make no mistake, they extend into the future. Redemption means we have been ransomed, we have been bought back. Jesus shed His innocent blood to deliver us from the dominion of Satan and death back to the eternal Kingdom of God. By His own blood, He secured an eternal redemption for you.⁶ These effects will never end. He didn't give the riches of His money, because money runs out and its worth fluctuates. He gave His blood; His life. Death no longer has dominion over Him, and this He gives to you. The ancient hymn sings, "In the midst of life we are in death." We can just as easy sing, "In the midst of death, we have life." Our physical death opens the way to perfect, unending life. All of this is given by the Gospel. All of this is given by God Himself. He speaks. He washes. He feeds.

Paul was continually amazed at the universality of God's offer. Salvation was not just for the Jews; it was for all people. In the evilness of man's mind, we twist this gift for our own purposes. It is true that the Church, the people of God, are not limited to a building. This phrase has been used as a gimmick for men and women to convince themselves it is ok to stay away from the gifts of God in Word and Sacrament. It has been used as a twisted self-justification to despise preaching and God's Word. Look at our Gospel reading! Where do the Magi go? They could have stayed home and convinced many others in the East of the greatness of the Star and what it means the King has been born. Where to they go? They go to the house where Jesus was. They go to the place where God has located His presence so that they would know this God is for them.

This God is for all people. For all who have faith in Jesus who died for them, they are saved. The Church is not divided. We have various denominations, and many disputes,

⁶ Hebrews 9:12

arguments, and fights over God's Word, but His Word doesn't change. Membership in this Church is open to all; regardless of race, sex, education, abilities, or class. Confession in the truth is the only requirement; that is, faith is what makes one a member of God's Church.

This is no secret. It is something that must be shared; lives are stake. This is where the church comes in. The church is the place where God continually makes His Gospel known. It is the place where He continually gives His gifts. Where His Word is not preached in its truth and purity and where His Sacraments, His gifts, are not given according to His own institution, they are not the church—they are religious noise makers, noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. The simple fact is that we need the church. God doesn't shout His word from the heavens. He doesn't spread it in secret games of telephone. He uses His servants to hand down His gifts.

The church and her ministers are gifts. They are created and given by God, ***“to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”***⁷ What a high privilege we have to gather and receive these gifts. As we live our lives in the midst of our families, our jobs, the pandemic, coping with sickness and setbacks, surviving successes and pleasures, Oh! How many opportunities we have to make known the Gospel! Always prepared to make a defense for the hope we have in Christ.

Consider this. In the many conversations surrounding health during the pandemic, we could say God let me get well, or God gives me the strength to face these days. This leads us to say something good about God's purpose always being good, because He who did not spare His own Son is surely not going to do anything bad to us. He might send death, but even then, Jesus has given me eternal life.

What about someone who in their search for peace and purpose are sangry and say, “Well, all churches are the same. After all, they are all helping people get to the same place. They all just speak about being good, and I try to be a good person already.” Here we have an opportunity to tell them that what really matters most in any church is that Christ is put forth as the only Savior. We might also say that the church is where Christ is proclaimed through His word and His Sacraments properly taught and administered. This

⁷ Ephesians 3:9–10

verbal witness goes hand and hand with the nonverbal witness of our lives by which we show patience and kindness to those with whom we come into contact through our vocations.

These are just two examples of how God makes His Gospel known through His Church. The only way that message is going to get out of these doors is carried by you, His children. That's quite a challenge, isn't it? We know that we don't always let the Gospel be known through our words and deeds. We kept the secret of the Gospel to ourselves, when it needed to be shared.

For this reason, so we don't become discouraged or worse, indifferent, Paul reminds us that through the church we have access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is for all men, women, and children, Jew and Gentile alike. Here purpose is clearly put forth, and peace is abundantly given. Here, sad and angry is buried away as tongues are opened to proclaim,

“Faith clings to Jesus’ cross alone
 And rests in Him unceasing;
 And by its fruits true faith is known,
 With love and hope increasing.
 For faith alone can justify;
 Works serve our neighbor and supply
 The proof that faith is living.

All blessing, honor, thanks, and praise
 To Father, Son, and Spirit,
 The God who saved us by His grace;
 All glory to His merit.
 O triune God in heav’n above,
 You have revealed Your saving love;
 Your blessèd name we hallow.”⁸ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

⁸ Salvation unto Us Has Come LSB 555:9–10

Prayer of the Church
The Epiphany of Our Lord
January 6, 2021

P In peace, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For this holy house and for all who in faith, piety and love come to receive His gifts and praise His name, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For Matthew, our Synod president; Brian, our district president; Sam, our circuit visitor; all pastors and congregations; and our parish, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For all families and homes, that one generation may tell to the next the wonderful works of God in Christ, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For Donald, our president; Kim, our governor; all our leaders; our legislature and Congress; those elected and preparing to begin service to our nation; and our military, and police and all who serve for the public good [*especially Caden and Zach,*] let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For our catechumens, [*especially Joey, Lauren, Dylan, Sloane, and Elizabeth,*] that they may grow in repentance, faith and holy living, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For all women with child and all mothers with infant children, that they would have joyful fruition and success, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For the shut-in and homebound, the sick and sorrowful, for those who mourn, and for all who stand in need of our prayers, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P For all who commune this day, that they would receive our Lord's body and blood in repentance and faith for the forgiveness of sins, and in the unity of a true confession, let us pray to the Lord:

G **Lord, have mercy.**

P Lord God, heavenly Father, we here remember the sufferings and death of Your dear Son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation. Praising His victorious resurrection from the dead, we draw strength from His ascension before You, where He ever stands for us as our own High Priest. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers, deliver and preserve us, for to You alone we give all glory, honor and worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

G **Amen.**