

## **Speak Up**

In the name of him who faced privation and temptation for us, dear friends in Christ: Last week we celebrated the Transfiguration of Jesus; and in the course of the sermon message, I made the case that forward progress in the Christian life is attained by doing little more than what each one of us does as part of our every morning routine: namely waking up, washing up, and dressing up – the only difference is that we need to do these things in a spiritual sense. And to expand on that a bit, I explained it like this: because of our fallen condition it's as if we are spiritually asleep and dreaming most of the time. Our focus is on the tangible and concrete. We are preoccupied in this life with attaining for ourselves the trappings of earthly glory like happiness, health, prosperity, and worldly honor. Even our religious aspirations are geared toward achieving such goals. So, we try to do what's right, and most of the time we imagine ourselves to be basically good people with whom God ought to be pleased. And since he ought to be pleased, we think that it's only right that he reward us in this life with all those things we seek. Sure, we're also interested in the next life – but that's just too far removed to really be concerned about. Besides, we figure if we're worth rewarding now, then we don't have anything to worry about later.

The trouble is that this distorted dreamland in which we live has no basis in ultimate reality. The truth is that this world and everything in it is passing away. The vast majority of what we value so much now will one day vanish in smoke. And when we awake to the dawn of the eternal day, we're going to see things quite a bit differently. All human works, however good they may have seemed to be, will be revealed as corrupt and shameful. The only thing counted good and right to come out of this world will be the life of the Lord Jesus. The only glorious triumph will be his suffering, his death on a cross, and his resurrection. And only those who trusted in him and his work to save sinners will inherit the everlasting kingdom. That will be all that matters.

And because that's true, growing now as disciples of Jesus involves progressively leaving behind our dreamlike self-deceptions that have to do with our own goodness and attaining the fleeting glory of this world, and waking up to the truth and seeing the far greater glory that is ours in Christ. And seeing it – and our sinful shame by contrast – it motivates us to confess our sins and be cleansed more and more by the washing of his forgiveness. And by being cleansed in this way, we dress up in the brilliant white robe of his righteousness. Trusting in him and in his death for our sins we put on ourselves his glory which was briefly shown to the disciples on the mountain.

So, this idea of continuously waking up, washing up, and dressing up is a pretty good overall summary of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ; but in light of today's three readings from Scripture, I see now that it's missing a very important element. Yes, every day we are to *wake up* to more of our Lord's truth, *wash up* in his blood-bought forgiveness, and *dress up* in his righteousness; but while doing these things it's crucial also that we *speak up*. We need to open our mouths and declare God's truth. And to understand why, we need to recognize that there is a war going on. It's the war between good and evil. It's the war between the holy God and all who oppose him. It's the war for the souls of men. So, the stakes are infinitely high. And though we know for certain that it is the Lord who will triumph in the end, what we don't know at this point is who will be standing with him in the final victory. Many—no, according to Scripture, *most* will not make it. The victorious will be only those who fought the good fight of faith, who engaged the enemy in battle, and who remained faithful in Christ until death. The victory will not belong to those who consistently fled from the fight, or who made compromises with the enemy – or who for the sake of earthly pleasures sold themselves over to him completely. It's like we used to sing in the old hymn: "*Who bears not the battle's strain, the crown of life shall not obtain.*"

This being the case, the question is: How does one engage in the battle? The answer is with your mouth. You know, we often discount people who said to be "all talk and no action", and there's a sense in which being that way is wrong. But the fact of the matter is that with respect to our eternal salvation we don't have any actions. It's all been done for us by Christ our Lord. This is what we believe for this is what God has

said. We believe in justification by grace through faith alone without any works of the law. So there's nothing for us to do – except to confess the faith through which we are saved.

This, in part, is what Paul has in mind when he says in today's Epistle lesson "With the heart you believe and are justified, and with the mouth you confess and are saved". We normally think of faith as merely a matter of the heart. It's something that's deep down inside us. And while it's true that that's where the roots of faith are, it's equally true that the primary fruit or flower of faith is what comes out of the mouth. Or say it this way: just as faith without works is dead, a faith that cannot be articulated or that does not give rise to its verbal expression is also post mortem. The reason for this is that the bitter cosmic struggle in which we are engaged against all the forces of hell is, when all is said and done, nothing more than a war of words. And no, I'm not being flip: *it's all about words*. The only weapons we have in the fight are the Word and Spirit of God. Even God himself only fights this war only with words: it's what he says on one side, and what those who deny his words say on the other. On God's side you have Christ who is the truth and on the other side you have Satan who is the father of lies. The question is whose words are you going to believe and trust in? Whose words are coming out of your mouth? The victors are those who are fighting the war by confessing the Lord Jesus Christ and his truth.

It's no coincidence that this Sunday is named "Invocavit". It's Latin for "He will call". It's from the traditional introit for this Sunday, in which the Lord says through the psalmist, "He will call, and I will answer him." The idea is that the Lord promises to come to the aid of those who *speak up* to call upon him for help. The point I want you to see is that calling on the Lord is a form of confessing the faith. When you call out to God for rescue you are saying, "I can't do it. I need you to save me. I'm turning to you because I know you can and will." This is what the saving Christian faith is all about: calling upon God to save from sin through Christ our Lord because we recognize that cannot save ourselves. And as Paul says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

In our Lenten devotions this year we are talking about prayer – which is simply another way the Christian has to engage in the fight. It too is a form of confessing the faith. When you pray you're saying, "Lord, I'm asking you for ... *whatever* it is"; but the very act of praying takes faith. It declares, "Lord, I know you can hear me and that you can answer me." So, prayer is in and of itself a way to speak up and carry on the fight in this war of words.

And there are other ways in which we are to speak up. In today's Old Testament lesson the Lord gives specific instructions to his people about what he wants them to do once they occupy the land he promised to give them. He tells them, "after you're all settled in and enjoying the blessings I've given you in this new land, I want you to go to the Tabernacle with a basket full of the first fruits of your harvest. And here are the specific words I want you to repeat: say, 'My father was a wandering Aramean ... and so on'." And what follows is a summary retelling of God's mighty works of salvation for his people. He wanted them to say aloud all that had happened – all that God had done for them. And I know I've mentioned before how in the Passover meal that the Lord commanded his people to eat in order to annually celebrate and remember their rescue from bondage in Egypt that the story of salvation was always told in the first person. Even centuries after the events themselves, God's people said, "We were slaves in Egypt; but the Lord our God delivered *us* from the house of misery with a mighty hand and outstretched arm." The Lord wanted them to recount what happened as a means to build them up and reinforce them in their own faith. So speaking up is not only about showing forth the faith – it's also about rooting it more deeply and firmly.

And this is why much of our worship together involves reciting the content of what we believe. For example, together we often recite the Creeds in which we tell again that God created us; that he sent his Son into the flesh to save us; that he, the Son of God, was crucified, died, and was buried; and on the third day rose again – all for us; and we confess our faith in the person and work of the Holy Spirit. We do this both to declare our faith and to reinforce it. Our Lutheran hymnody works the same way. It's rarely the theologically light and fluffy emotional stuff heard so often elsewhere. No, our hymns are for the most part biblical texts and meditations set to music; they are accounts of what God has done for us. And even our confession of sins is a form of speaking up and declaring what God has done. That is, we don't just say, "God forgive me" but "forgive me for the sake of the innocent suffering and death of your beloved Son." So even in our asking for

forgiveness, we're declaring the means by which it was already accomplished. So we speak up to build ourselves up in the faith.

And we have yet another reason to speak up as followers of Jesus; and that is to refute the lies and distortions of the enemy. That's what we see going on in today's Gospel lesson. Jesus, weakened by forty days of fasting in the wilderness, is being tempted by Satan. The devil tries various tricks and angles with which he hopes to divert Jesus from his messianic mission and lead him astray, all to no avail. Every time Satan speaks, Jesus responds with, "That's what *you* say. Now listen to what *God* says. It is written ..." The point is that Jesus consistently resists and defeats temptation by speaking up with God's truth, and we can do the same. I mean, it's awfully hard to give in to a temptation when you look it square in the eye and say, "God says, 'Thou shalt not'" or, "No, this is wrong. I'm certain that the Lord would not be pleased if I were to do this."

But there's more at stake in speaking up to refute the lies of Satan than just overcoming personal temptations to sin. You've heard the expression that all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. That's true. But similarly, all that is necessary for Satan's lies to gain the upper hand and deceive many is for those who know the truth to remain silent. So also for the sake of others we must speak up. When confronted by false teaching, by distortions of Scripture, or by people bending and twisting God's Word to suit themselves we must say, "No, that's wrong; here's what the truth is ..." Love of Christ, his truth, and our fellow man demands that we do. How can they come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved if we don't? And no, it isn't always an easy thing to do. But it's war. It's a war of words. And to fight it we must speak up.

And as we do, we know that there is One who speaks up for us. Seated at his Father's right hand in glory, Jesus our Lord intercedes on our behalf. He's asking his Father to keep us by his grace and power, to give us his Spirit and his Word, to forgive our sins for his sake, and to ultimately bring us to glory with him. And because he does speak up for us we know that there is nothing that Satan can do to harm us in any lasting way. That's what gives us the courage and strength to carry on in the face of adversity and temptation, and to fight the good fight of faith by speaking up for the Lord who redeemed us by his blood. May God grant it to us for his sake. In Jesus' name. Amen.

***Soli Deo Gloria!***