

February 17, 2013
Lent 1

"God's Word Is Near You"

ROMANS 10:8-13

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

It came on the news that Cedar Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles is adding a multimillion dollar addition that will specialize in replacing defective heart valves. They will be training surgeons from all over the world to put in new heart valves with non invasive surgery. This means in the future it will not be necessary to split the breastbone and open the chest to perform heart valve surgery. It will be done with laparoscopic procedures. Little cameras and robotic arms and wires will go through veins and arteries to perform the delicate surgery of replacing a heart valve.

As much as we are impressed by what modern medicine is doing to heal human beings we are far more impressed by what our God has done to heal our problem of sin. In God's holy Word we are told that you cannot be saved and spared from the judgment to come by a righteousness you produce in yourself. Here in his Word you learn that you are cured of your problem of sin by the righteousness that is found only in Christ.

My good friend in Phoenix had to wait in line to receive a new heart. He is now able to live a new life with a heart that was donated to him by someone who died in an auto accident. How long do you have to wait in line to receive a righteousness that is good enough for God to accept you and love you? This morning we listen to the words of Paul in Romans that tell us "The Word of God Is Near You!" God's Word is right here for us bringing us Christ and his salvation.

The Word brings us Christ

The Word of God comes close to you and shows you clearly that you cannot be saved by what you do. "'The Word of God is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming." Read the book of Romans. You are reading a medical chart of your hopelessly lost spiritual condition. "There is no one righteous, not even one, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks after God." I once read these words from Romans 3 to a prominent Hispanic physician in Santa Barbara. After almost every verse he kept saying with tears in his eyes, "That's me! That's me." God's Word exposes our sin for what it is. It shows us with vivid detail that our righteousness never measures up to what God expects of us.

Today the medical experts can send little cameras into your body to search for problems. My oldest son uses an ultrasound to help doctors see why a heart is not pumping the blood correctly. God's Word is so close to you that it can show you exactly where you have failed God. God's Word also reveals how foolish it is to think you can do something to save yourself.

In the opening words of this chapter, the Apostle Paul deplored how foolish it was for his fellow Jews to think they could save themselves by their own righteousness. He said, "I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they do not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to God's righteousness." Paul knew from experience how he once believed with all his heart that God loved him because of his efforts to be zealous and religious. He thought killing Christians made him righteous before God.

You are surrounded by people in your community who are very religious people. They set their own standards by which they think God will bless them in this life and even give them a better world in the life to come. I may be able to fix simple plumbing problems in my house such as a leaky faucet. I may even be proud of my accomplishments and enjoy the kudos from my wife. If I have a plumbing problem with my heart similar to what my father had, I cannot hope to perform a surgery on myself to solve this problem. I have to look outside of myself to medical experts. God's Word shows me clearly that the righteousness I have in my life never measures up to what God expects of me. God's Word shows me that Christ and his righteousness is near to me. It is right there for me. What a joy it was to show the medical doctor from God's Word in Romans 3 how close Christ's righteousness was for him.

Earlier in chapter ten of Romans, Paul tells us not to say, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is to bring Christ down) or "Who will descend into the deep?" (that is to bring Christ up from the dead). You may have to travel long distances to receive the right medical attention for certain problems, but you don't have to go into the heights to find Christ and his righteousness. You don't have to descend into the depths. No, the righteousness of Christ is near you in God's Word. Listen to what God's Word says in Romans 3, "All have sinned and come share of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ."

This past week we had another opportunity to bring God's Word near and close to the children at the Transitional Shelter. Our lesson was on Jesus' Baptism. We showed different pictures on a screen of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus. One of the boys read the words that our heavenly Father said of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." We used God's Word to bring the children close to the perfect life Jesus lived that was pleasing to his heavenly Father. We asked them if our heavenly Father was always pleased with their lives. They could see the sinful anger on the face of an angry boy that we projected on the screen. They also saw this anger in themselves. What a privilege it was to show them from God's Word that through Jesus their sin is forgiven, and through Jesus they have a perfect life that is pleasing to God the Father. God's Word came near to them and led to put their hope in Jesus instead of themselves for their eternal salvation. Because God's Word is close to these children it is able to work faith where faith did not exist.

The Word creates faith to believe

Because God's Word is near you, it creates faith to believe where there once was nothing but unbelief and rejection. "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and with your mouth that you confess and are saved." God's word leads you to confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and God. God's word leads you to believe and confess that Jesus rose from the dead.

Think of how Jesus convinced his disciples that he rose from the dead. He compared this to how Jesus brings us word close to us. He appeared to the disciples and showed them the nail prints in his hands. He showed them the spear mark in his side. It says "the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord." Thomas would not accept what the disciples said about Jesus' resurrection. Jesus made a personal appearance to Thomas. He showed him his hands and side, and then said to him, "Stop doubting and believe." Thomas then confessed with his lips and believed in his heart that Jesus was his Lord and God. Then Jesus told Thomas and the others, "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus comes to us and gets close to us here in his Word and leads us to confess and believe he is our Lord and God.

Because God's Word has come close to you and created faith to believe in Jesus and his resurrection, it says here you are justified. That means you are declared forgiven. God's Word comes to you and directs your eyes to the wounds Jesus kept on his hands after his resurrection from the dead. These wounds declare to you that you are forgiven. This Word of God creates the amazing faith that joyfully proclaims, "I am forgiven because of what Jesus has done for me."

The Apostle Paul found great joy in bringing God's Word to the lives of people. One day he went to the outskirts of the city of Philippi where he found a group of women gathered by the river for worship on the Sabbath. It says, "We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." What did Paul speak to them? He spoke the Word of God to them. He talked to them about Jesus. Then it says of a woman named Lydia, "The Lord opened her heart to believe." Jesus says of the words he has given us, "My words are spirit and they are life."

The Word is for all people

Cedar Sinai Hospital may be limited on how many surgeries it can perform on people with heart valve problems. God's Word is not restricted on how many people it can help with a cure for sin. "As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Anyone who trusts in Jesus will not be put to shame. Put your hope in Jesus for your salvation and you will not suffer disappointment when he returns in clouds of glory.

Did you hear about the large meteor that struck in Russia this past week? They say this 70 ton meteor was the size of a bus. It came hurtling to this earth at 35,000 miles per hour. It broke the sound barrier and created such a loud sonic boom that it broke the windows

in thousands of buildings. Lots of people, young and old, were injured from flying glass. Every week we hear about more signs that tell us the end of the world could come at anytime. Our God wants all people to be saved. He wants his Word to reach out into the world to all nations. Those who call on the name of the Lord will be richly blessed with a righteousness that only Christ can give them. Later in this chapter, Paul writes, "Did they not hear? Of course they did: `Their voice as gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." Today people all over the world carry cell phones and MP3 players that instantly bring God's Word to them. The cure for sin is right there in their hands. And so we pray, "Lord Jesus, help me to bring your Word to people so they can share in the cure for sin I have come to know." Amen.