

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus' ministry among the people began as a preaching ministry. A couple Sundays ago, we heard how Jesus began His ministry, "*proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel'*" (Mark 1:14-15). Then last Sunday, we heard how Jesus distinguished Himself among the people with His synagogue teaching. The people received Jesus' teaching with astonishment, "*for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes*" (Mark 1:22). And today, we heard Jesus say to His disciples: "*Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.*"

It's not all Jesus did, of course. In last week's Gospel and this week's, Jesus did some marvelous works of mercy: He cast out an unclean spirit; He healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law with a touch; He "*healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons.*"

Jesus said that He came out to preach, but preaching is not all that Jesus came to do; you know that, too. "*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mark 10:45). Jesus came to die, as He had taught His disciples a bit earlier: "*the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again*" (Mark 8:31). It was the Lord's will to crush Him, the prophet Isaiah says, that He might pour out His soul unto death, an offering for guilt (Isa. 53:10, 12).

What then are we to make of Jesus' enigmatic statement regarding His preaching: "*for that is why I came out*"?

I offer this observation — as Jesus came preaching with authority and performing miraculous signs and wonders, He was establishing His identity among the peoples. The kingdom of God had come near in His person. Jesus was different than the scribes — He taught with authority. Even the unclean spirits obeyed Him. He could heal with a touch. And He would do much more.

Truly Jesus was the One foretold by Isaiah the prophet: "*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me*" — yes, anointed by the Lord with the Spirit to be the Christ; He anointed Jesus "*to bring good news to the poor; he has sent [the Anointed One, Jesus] to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor*" (Isa. 61:1-2). As Jesus Himself affirmed, "*Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And all ... marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth*" (Luke 4:21-22). Here was a teaching and with authority. It would take Peter a few chapters before

he could confess it, but with these words Jesus was establishing Himself as the Christ.

In fact, these miracles are how John the Baptist was assured that Jesus was indeed the long-looked-for Christ. *“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up”* (Matt. 11:4-5). These signs and wonders are also how we recognize Jesus for who He is — the Christ, the Son of God. *“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name”* (John 20:30-31).

Luther similarly affirmed: Jesus “displayed His glory and power in proof of His divinity.” “Of this [truth] He gave proof with His teaching, His preaching, His signs and wonders, convincing anyone of His Godhead who was not blinded and hardened by the devil, .... By word and deed He proved that He was God by nature: He healed the sick and raised the dead” (*Luther's Works*, 22:114).

Of course, the greatest of these signs was His own resurrection — when the evangelist John talked about Jesus' many other signs, he was talking about signs other than the resurrection. Jesus did other signs, but especially by Jesus' resurrection victory over death, He showed that He truly was the Son of God — as the centurion confessed at the cross: *“Truly this man was the Son of God!”* (Mark 15: 39) And by His resurrection, Jesus demonstrated that His sacrifice truly atoned for the sins of the world.

The Christian church now follows in Jesus' example — she is a preaching church and a teaching church — a *“necessity is laid upon [her]. Woe to [the church and her pastors] if [they] do not preach the gospel”* for she was sent with a commission for this purpose: to proclaim Jesus' authoritative words, to *“proclaim the gospel to the whole creation”* (Mark 16:15), to teach all things that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20), to preach Christ and Him crucified for our salvation, to preach *“repentance for the forgiveness of sins”* in Jesus' name (Luke 24:47), to preach that the kingdom of God has come in Christ Jesus. The Church preaches this with the same goal as Jesus did — that hearers might believe this good news.

But whereas Jesus began His ministry both preaching and doing signs and wonders, the Church's ministry always begins with the proclamation of the cross, with a call to believe this Gospel. *“For the word of the cross is” “the power of God” “to us who are being saved”* (1 Cor. 1:18). *“[W]e preach Christ crucified,”* says St. Paul, *“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”* (1 Cor. 1:23-24). We preach it that our *“faith might ... rest ... in [this] power of God”* (1 Cor. 2:5).

And this is true even if you're talking about the Sacraments, for what do we proclaim of baptism, except that by it "*our old self [has been] crucified with him*" (Rom. 6:6)? We "*were baptized into his death,*" St. Paul reminds us (Rom. 6:3). Similarly, you know that "*as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26). The Lord's Supper, too, is a proclamation of Christ crucified, and that His body and blood are given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

This message is what St. Paul calls the things of first importance: "*that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to*" many different people as eye witnesses of His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:3-5). His death and resurrection — this is the good news that Christians are called to believe.

But much as Christ Himself did more than simply preach but did works of mercy, so the Church has a duty of mercy. Here I call upon our own President Harrison's little pamphlet: "The Church Is a Mercy Place." In it, he acknowledged the "both and" of the Gospel. Certainly, the church is not church without Christ, forgiveness, life, salvation, grace being preached. But neither is the church a grace place if she is not a mercy place, for much like Jesus did works of mercy affirming who He is, so the Church does works of mercy affirming whose she is. By doing works of mercy she opens ears and hearts to a hearing for the Gospel by which the Spirit moves hearts to salvation.

Pastor Harrison wrote, "In affirming the essential nature of the church's 'marks' (Gospel and sacrament) which tell us surely where the church is present, we dare not miss the fact that love and mercy toward the needy mark the church's corporate life. If not, it risks denial of the very Gospel and sacraments which constitute it."

We at Zion have been privileged to have a long history of pastors who have proclaimed the Gospel of Christ, forgiveness full and free, who have served up His grace by word and sacrament — and also who have seen the need for acts of mercy. Ours may not look miraculous like Jesus', but with a dedication not just to preaching but also to mercy, to a ministry like Jesus' own, body and soul, the Spirit is at work. God help us to love and serve our neighbors, that their ears may be opened to hear the preaching of Christ, that they may come and find here a God gracious and merciful, that they may experience a foretaste of the reign of God.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.