

Session #3: – Means of Grace, Part 1

Read: Chapter 2, pp. 49-61
(note: this is the first half of the chapter)

Introduction

So much controversy has been stoked and ink has been printed in trying to understand God's Word and humanity's relationship to it. Was it written by God or by men? Should it be subject to the same historical evaluation as other texts, or is it simply a matter of faith? Is it an inspired guidebook to life or an inerrant revelation of God's very self? Is the Bible God's very Word, or does it just contain God's Word? This session will help to shape a Lutheran understanding of God's Word and the Bible.



*Last Supper, Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1547
oil on hardwood, altarpiece at Evangelische Stadtkirche
St. Marien, Wittenberg*

Opening Prayer – Collect 101 (LSB 305)

Merciful God, we humbly implore you to cast the bright beams of Your light upon Your Church that we, being instructed by the doctrine of the blessed apostles, may walk in the light of your truth and finally attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

Opening Hymn – LSB 584: Faith and Truth and Life Bestowing

Scriptures –

Romans 10:13-17 ¹³For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴But how are they to call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" ¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Quotes and Questions from Veith:

“When we come before the Holy God, He does not turn away in judgment; rather, He sees us through the lens of Christ – we might even say, He sees us *as* Christ... Those things that we feel so guilty for, Jesus objectively bore in His body; thus, despite any subjective feelings we may have of guilt over what we have done, forgiveness is also objective.” (50-51)

- These words serve as a nice review of last session. How does this differ from the teachings of other religions? Other Christians?

“Lutherans are thus always wrenching their attention from themselves to remember the concrete objectivity of what God has done for them in Christ.

But what is the connection between our lives, here and now, and what happened on Golgotha, the hill on which Jesus was crucified? ... If there is an objective justification, there must be a subjective justification, wherein the fact of Christ’s work on the cross has its impact in the life of an individual human being. If faith is neither a decision nor an experience nor some inner work, and if salvation is totally the work of God, it would seem that faith too must be the work of God...

The answer, in Lutheran spirituality, has to do with the so-called *Means of Grace*. We are connected to Christ, and the Holy Spirit works both faith and good works in our lives by means of the Word and the Sacraments.” (51-52)

- This is one of the most distinctive features of Lutheranism: that God alone brings faith, but that he does so through means. How does this differ from other Christian teachings?

“The early evangelists were proclaiming the Gospel (God’s Word), a message that could be traced back to the teachings of the first apostles (who taught God’s Word), who heard it from Jesus Himself (God’s Word made flesh). The apostolic testimony was written down from the beginning, along with the more ancient prophetic writings of the Old Testament, and later the various books were collected and printed together. But it was always the Word that God was using to bring people to Himself.” (55-56)

- One of the things current critics of Christianity will dwell on is the fact that the Bible wasn’t fully agreed on until centuries after Christ. What does this passage tell us about that? What gives Scripture its authority?

“That God’s Word is written in a book, which anyone can read whenever they want, sounds unspiritual to many people. They prefer communication with the divine to be more vague... But Christians believe that God’s Word is something tangible, written down in ink and paper, accessible, and objective.” (56-57)

- Do you think that the availability of Scripture, its commonplace familiarity, actually serves to make it less appealing to people? Why? What can be done about it?

“The words of the Bible do not merely convey information, they convey the Holy Spirit. ‘The Word of God is living and active’ (Heb. 4:12). The words of Scripture actually connect

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us to what they are describing. As we read those words on the page, God is literally and objectively present and working, inscribing in our hearts the gift of faith... [Lutherans] see the Bible as a Means of Grace; in other words, the Word of God is sacramental.” (58)

- What about this statement is challenging? Comforting?
- How does this understanding of Scripture shape our approach to it?

Connections with Small Catechism:

The Lord’s Prayer:

The Second Petition: Thy kingdom come.

What does this mean?: The kingdom of God certainly comes without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come among us also.

How does God’s kingdom come?: God’s kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that we believe his Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity.

- How do we believe God’s word?
- What effect does this belief have?

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism:

How can water do such great things? Certainly not just water, but the word of God in and with the water does these things, along with the faith which trusts this word of God in the water. For without God’s word, the water is plain water and no Baptism. But with the word of God it is a Baptism, that is, a life-giving water, rich in grace, and a washing of the new birth in the Holy Spirit.

The Sacrament of the Altar: *How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?* Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: “forgiveness of sins.”

- In what ways has God made his Word tangible and concrete?
- Why is the Word so central to the Sacraments?

Conclusion

We can best understand the Scriptures when we consider them to be God’s means of grace to all people today. It is through these words of Scripture that faith is created by the Holy Spirit. It is through these words of Scripture that the Sacraments can be means of grace, giving forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. It is by these Scriptures that God has revealed himself, both in time and for eternity.

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Closing Prayer

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