

For those who believe in the one and only true God...

For those who believe in God’s love and gift of life and grace sent to them through God’s Son, Jesus, who is the Christ, who is Lord and Savior...

For those who believe in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit as advocate and comforter and guide... Salvation is yours!

Salvation is yours! Salvation from sin and shortcomings and imperfection and brokenness. Salvation from this life, which can be littered with trial and tribulation. Salvation from darkness. Salvation from death. Our God, the one and only true God is a God of life, light, love, grace, peace, hope, and joy. Our God, the one and only true God is a God of creation, redemption, and salvation.

Just recently I came across a phrase. It is a phrase that has been popularized on social media, but I can tell you that its truth dates way before the first code of computers or internet. Its truth is rooted in the nature of God and is at the foundation of spirituality and especially Christianity. “God loves you and always has and always will no matter what you may have heard or been taught.” (Repeat)

The world we all live in today and have been living in for the last several decades and scores and centuries, is one that can put this truth to the test at times. And by put the test, I simply mean the world can cause us to question who God is and what God does and who we are to God and who we believe or see ourselves to be.

God wants us to be certain and know; therefore, God leaves no stone unturned to reveal steadfast and enduring love for each and every one of God’s children. I don’t believe there is anything God can’t or won’t do to bring God’s children home; to shower them with love and reassure them of their worth and value in God’s eyes; to deliver them and save them from the world and even from themselves.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the good news of the gospel. For those who believe, salvation is yours!

Now what?

1 Chronicles 16:23, a verse we spoke in our Call to Worship this worship this morning says, “Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim the good news of God’s salvation from day to day.”

Here David encourages us to proclaim the good news of God’s salvation continually. God’s salvation can include the miracles God does to deliver and protect His people now, and it also refers to the ultimate deliverance from the bondage of sin. Through Christ’s sacrifice He saves us from eternal death and makes possible the gift of eternal life in the Kingdom of God!

This is truly good news! Jesus Christ commissioned His Church to preach the gospel—good news—of the Kingdom of God around the world (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20). We should also fulfill this mission with joy and zeal and eagerness as David did.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “Preach the gospel, and when necessary, use words.” I shifted it today to read “proclaim” because “to proclaim” embraces more of the essence of what Christ’s commission for us is. “To preach” suggests speaking and teaching and may carry with it a limit of time, space, and occasion. We also may tend to think that “preaching” is something reserved for preachers. “To proclaim,” however, embodies speaking and teaching and doing and living, and is something we are all called to do.

There has continued quite a bit of debate around this phrase. Mostly it is about whether Francis of Assisi wrote it or not. But also, whether the phrase carries the right message. For the record, many don’t believe Francis of Assisi wrote it, but their reasoning has to do with the message itself. You see, Francis of Assisi believed firmly in speaking and preaching the gospel boldly and out loud with his mouth. For many people, this phrase has come to stand as an invitation to not have to speak, that is using words, about the good news of the gospel with others. They have used it as an excuse to simply say they share the good news in the way they live and that is the only thing that matters. “Words are cheap,” we might say. “Actions speak louder than words.”

One author (Galli) explains, “Preach (proclaim) the gospel, and when necessary, use words” goes hand in hand with a postmodern assumption that words are finally empty of meaning. It subtly denigrates the high value that the prophets, Jesus, and Paul put on preaching. Of course, we want our actions to match our words as much as possible. But the gospel is a message, news about an event and a person upon which the history of the planet turns. It can give us an incomplete understanding of the gospel and how God saves sinners. Christians are quick to encourage each other to “live out the gospel,” to “be the gospel” to our neighbors, and to even “gospel each other.” The missional impulse here is helpful, yet at its roots the gospel isn’t anything the Christian can live out, practice, or become.

How come? The Apostle Paul summarized the gospel as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through whom sin is atoned for, sinners are reconciled to God, and the hope of the resurrection awaits all who believe. The gospel is history. The gospel is the declaration of something that actually happened. And since the gospel is the saving work of Jesus, it isn't something we can do, but it is something we must announce. We can and shall live out its implications, get in the habit of doing so actually, but to make the gospel known to all, we must also do so through words.

Proclamation is the central task of the church. No, it is not the only task God has given us, but it is central. While the process of making disciples involves more than verbal communication, and obviously the life of a disciple is proved counterfeit when it amounts to words alone, (James said, "faith without works is dead.") the most critical work God has given the church is to "proclaim the excellencies (salvation)" of our Savior.

The Bible tells us that there are certain truths. Faith comes by hearing. And hearing by the word of God. Other people hear when someone declares the message. You can love people, serve people, care for people and model a great life. Your actions will nudge people. They will create curiosity. They will open hearts to an interest in the gospel. Others may even model your actions—and this is a good thing. But there will come a moment when you will need to tell your story. When you will need to tell *the* story from start to finish: sin and redemption, death and resurrection—and why it matters. You, we all, need to be equipped and prepared to tell the story and articulate your faith. The truth is that no matter how much we try to live in a way that reveals the presence of Jesus, *words* will still be needed. At some point along the way, everyone needs to hear and comprehend the content of the gospel.

Wait, what? How can I do that? Disciples of Jesus Christ have always been under the obligation to take God's gospel to the world (Mark 16:15–16). Nevertheless, sometimes it is difficult to open our mouths and speak about our faith to those around us. While some members of the Church have a natural gift for talking to others about religion, others are a little hesitant or may feel awkward, embarrassed, or even fearful of doing so.

Here are a couple of ideas of embodying proclamation in its full glory- both with tongue and talent. And with it being Father's Day, I will encourage all fathers and father figures to strive to embrace each just as our Father in heaven asks us to.

- Embrace conversations. Be conversational. Bringing up the subject of religion—particularly to our kids, friends, and loved ones—can seem daunting and challenging. It doesn't have to be. Mentioning spiritual experiences or talking about Church activities or events in casual conversation can be easy and pleasant if we

invest a little courage and common sense. Many people find a way to work Church-related topics in their conversations with friends and acquaintances. For example, when someone asks about your weekend, you could say, “This Sunday we had an impressive experience in our church! The children sang, or fellowship was joyful, or Impact was powerful.” Or “In my Sunday school class, I learned about a woman who has knitted more than 500 blankets and gave them to our Church’s prayer shawl ministry to be given to folks who need some comfort.” More often than not, the people who hear these things want to know more. They ask questions. And that leads to opportunities to talk about the gospel in a natural, confident, non-pushy way. With the advent of the Internet and social media, it is easier today to talk about these things in a conversational way than ever before. What we need is simply the courage to do so. To embrace conversations including the good news of the gospel is to be an influencer and mentor to others.

- Be filled with faith. Sometimes we take upon ourselves too much credit or too much blame when it comes to others accepting the gospel. It’s important to remember that the Lord doesn’t expect us to do the converting. Conversion comes not through our words but through the heavenly ministrations of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes all it takes is one single phrase of our testimony or about an experience to set in motion the softening of a heart or the opening of a door that can lead others to experience sublime truths through the promptings of the Spirit. We must have faith. The Lord can magnify the words you speak and make them mighty. God doesn’t ask you to convert but rather to open your mouths. The task of converting is not yours—that belongs to the person hearing and to the Holy Spirit. We can help plant seeds and we can even be a part of helping to water those seeds and keep the soil around the seed nourishing, but it is God’s power alone that helps the seed to grow and God’s love alone that will harvest that seed upon bearing fruit. When we are filled with faith, the good news of the gospel will want to pour out of us, like a cup overflowing with water.
- Be full of grace. Unfortunately, it is so easy to be disagreeable. It happens too often that we argue, belittle, and condemn. When we become angry, rude, or hurtful with people, the last thing they want is to learn more about us. It is impossible to know how many people have either left the Church or never joined because someone said something that hurt or offended them. There is so much incivility in the world today. Because of the anonymity of the Internet, it is easier than ever to say toxic or grating things online. As hopeful disciples of our gracious Christ, loved and saved, don’t we have a different standard to uphold? The scriptures teach, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). I like the idea of our words being clear as a sunny sky and full of grace, don’t you? We all need to receive grace and we all need to give grace.

- Be a light. We hear this one often. It may be the go-to image of embodying the good news of the gospel. Jesus said, “You are the light of the world, a city on a hill cannot be hid (Matthew 5:13-16).” When we have integrity and live consistently by God’s standards, people notice. When we radiate joy and happiness, they notice even more. Everyone wants to be happy. When we members of the Church radiate the light of the gospel, people can see our happiness and sense the love of God filling and overflowing in our lives. They want to know why. They want to understand our secret. That leads them to ask questions such as “Why are you so happy?” or “Why do you always have such a positive attitude?” The answers to these questions, of course, lead perfectly into a conversation about the restoring and saving good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim the good news of God’s salvation from day to day.”

And since it is necessary proclaim the gospel in both word and deed, for to all who believe in the one and only true God, salvation is yours!

Let all God’s people say... Amen.