

"Time Is about Eternity"

Text: Acts 4:8-14

God grant to each of us an unobstructed and uninterrupted view of eternity, directing each thought, word and action to that end and to the glory of the God who there resides. Amen.

Dear Fellow-Representatives of one true Triune God:

Did your life peak in kindergarten? Can any of you even *remember* your time in kindergarten? I'm guessing most can't, except maybe a vague, random incident or two. Yet do you remember how you felt about kindergarten at the time? In case you don't remember, it was a big deal. It was one of those early milestones that kids tend to yearn for, in this case going to school for the first time and how it made you feel older and more important somehow.

So, again, does anyone here feel that those nine months or so of kindergarten represented the pinnacle of your life on earth? Of course not. Same with elementary school, high school, and even college. Hopefully you enjoyed all of those experiences, but most understand that the school years were just preparation for the rest of life. In fact there wouldn't be much point in going to school if life ended at graduation. Preparation leads to something. It anticipates the arrival of something bigger, more important and longer lasting. Same with athletes. They don't train just to train; they train to compete, and the goal is to win. Education is intended to train you for not only your career but for life.

Christians can and should carry that one step further. Since this life is really only about the life that is to come, every aspect of this life (including education) should be geared not toward this life but the next. Time, ironically enough, is really all about eternity. Since Jesus Christ is the only gate or path to an everlasting existence in heaven, there really then is no getting around the fact that life is rightly all about Jesus Christ.

No doubt this is why the unbelieving world struggles so with the meaning of life – a recurring question in every generation. If they never come to know Jesus Christ, the answer will forever evade them. There's a reason the Bible repeatedly refers to the gospel as *"the mystery."* Unbelievers just don't get it – and never will unless and until *"the mystery"* is revealed to them. God the Holy Spirit does that, working through his Word, shared by those in whom the Holy Spirit has already

revealed the mystery. Until they hear God's Word with faith, man will always struggle unsuccessfully to make some sort of logical sense out of the ***"deep things of God."*** (Job 11:7) Life on earth is the time that God gives us to learn about Jesus. You know this, which means that you have been given the divine wisdom to know the true relationship between time and eternity. That's part of the truth revealed to us in our text for this morning, found recorded in the Fourth Chapter of the Book of Acts:

ESV ***Acts 4:8-14*** ***Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** ¹³ ¶ ***Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴ But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.***

These are the inspired words of God. In fact, if they were *not* God's very words, spending any time at all on them would be pointless – an exercise in futility. Confident instead that our God *did indeed* give us these, his very words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Our text begins with a phrase that most often passes unnoticed: ***"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them..."*** We probably tend to skip over the concept of ***"filled with the Holy Spirit"*** because we don't fully understand what that means, or what it meant in Peter's day. One thing we can know for certain: no one who is "filled by the Holy Spirit" could ever speak anything but the truth. That means that whatever comes from the mouth of someone "filled by the Holy Spirit" is absolutely trustworthy and accurate. No possibility of error. Our text tells us that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit when he spoke the words of our text. Clearly we can trust them.

Understand also the setting to gain all that we should from this part of God's Word. Peter and John were standing before the same men who had sentenced Jesus to death. It had to be both intimidating and terrifying for Peter and John to be hauled before powerful and unscrupulous men that could sentence them to death on a whim. Remember too that, unlike their accusers, Peter and John were simple, uneducated fishermen. Historians tell us that everything about the Jewish Sanhedrin was designed to intimidate. Yet Peter and John were not intimidated. How was that possible?

Do you remember *why* the two had been summoned by the Jewish authorities? Peter had healed a lame beggar – a man *born* lame. Jesus, you will recall, also healed a man with a congenital handicap (a man blind from birth) but he did so on the Sabbath – which was the point on which the Jews accused him. Peter had not healed the cripple on the Sabbath, so why had the two been summoned? For telling others about Jesus. The Jewish leaders were finally abandoning their pretense and hypocrisy. They were finally admitting their true and basic motive: they hated Jesus Christ and the gospel that he taught.

Peter masterfully accomplished two things with his very first sentence. First, he cut away all the nonsense. Performing a kindness to a suffering human being was not the problem. For the Jews, Jesus was the problem. Second, Peter masterfully redirected the whole affair back to the real question, and he put a name to the problem. Hear again the words of a man "filled with the Holy Spirit: ***"Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed ..."*** (even the Jews had to admit that to arrest someone for healing a man born lame was nonsense.) He goes on: ***"let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-- by him this man is standing before you well."***

That was, in fact, the heart of the problem, wasn't it? These men could not care less about a lame beggar. Their hatred for Jesus, however, permeated their whole being. Clearly the Jewish rulers were *not* filled with the Holy Spirit. No one who is filled with the Spirit can, at the same time, be filled with such blind hatred toward something as pure and holy as the sinless Son of God, nor of his message of forgiveness, life, and peace. Peter knew this, which was no great insight. What *is* remarkable here is the fact that he tackled the real problem head on. Remember that he stood before cruel, unscrupulous, bloodthirsty men who had murdered the Son of God. He knew they would certainly not hesitate to

do the same to his disciples. Yet note well what Peter did, for his actions reveal one of the great lessons for us in this text. ***"Filled with the Holy Spirit,"*** the very first thing that Peter did was to deflect all attention away both from the cripple *and from himself*, and onto Jesus. This wasn't about the crippled man. It wasn't about Peter and John. It was all about Jesus the Messiah. The Holy Spirit, speaking through Peter, made this clear with a proclamation of both pure law and pure gospel. The law message here couldn't be any more obvious: ***"By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified..."*** Then also the gospel: ***"...whom God raised from the dead... And there is salvation in no one else."***

We live in a time where no one is supposed to accuse anyone of anything – especially when race is involved. Yet Peter did just that, boldly accusing the Jews who killed Jesus, and doing so *clearly and to their faces*. And they make no denial. Of course the Jews killed Jesus. They did so by means of the Roman cross. Why would these men even try to deny it? They were *proud* of it, and happy to be rid of the man. They regarded his death as a good thing. That's as good a picture as any of the face of evil.

Peter goes on with words of power that truly shocked his Jewish accusers. The power of his words didn't come from Peter, of course, but from the Holy Spirit. Hear again Peter's closing message and the reaction from the Jews: ***"This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*** Talk about a politically incorrect dialog. You recall the reaction of the Jews: ***"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."*** The enemies of Jesus had no answer to any of this. Our text ends this way: ***But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.***

The *highly educated* rulers had nothing to say. They couldn't deny that a miracle had been performed (the healed man was standing right in front of them) and they couldn't bully those poor dumb fishermen into submission, not when those poor dumb fishermen were filled with the Holy Spirit. When man fights God, man always loses. Peter and John had thus faithfully fulfilled their divine calling. Rather than hide, they boldly spoke. Rather than accept any personal praise for healing the lame beggar, they immediately and

expertly redirected attention away from themselves and to their Savior. This wasn't all about them. It was all about Jesus Christ. All life – every precious moment of it – is all about Jesus Christ and the unending existence with him in heaven. Time is all about eternity.

Test that statement (*time is all about eternity*.) Turn it over in your mind. Examine and reexamine it from every conceivable angle because it gives purpose to our lives and direction to absolutely everything we do. The longest life is nothing compared to the unending expanse of eternity. Life is just the time to come to know Jesus. Paul said much the same thing in a little different way: ***So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*** ^{ESV}(1 Corinthians 10:31) Again in Philippians 3:18-21 he said, ***"For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."***

Life is all about Jesus, *because* Jesus was all about us. We share *his* words, not ours, because his words reveal the only passage to eternal life. Disturbingly enough, those who hated Jesus probably would have agreed that "time is all about eternity." Their problem was that they spent their time in wasted effort – trying to earn what they could never earn by their own actions. Our calling is to reflect the truth and glory of our Savior, and to direct the focus of others onto that one pure Light, the one true source of anything good. There they will see the very thing that salvation is made of: Jesus Christ, who wrote a check to God the Father (drawn on his own personal store of perfect behavior) as payment in full for the sins of the world. God the Father accepted his Son's payment, and has, as a result, declared every single one of our sins to be forgiven. Our sin debt has been canceled always and only because Jesus paid the bill. Believing that Jesus did what he said he did, his perfection is ours – which means full and complete forgiveness of our sins, now and for all eternity.

Be then reminded this morning that earthly life is to eternity what kindergarten is to life. Direct every word and action here in time with a view to the eternity that will follow. Our acts of charity and kindness are never to be an end in themselves but a means toward a goal. Peter and John did not heal the crippled man in our text just so that the poor man

could have a better life on earth, but so that he (and countless others) could come to know Jesus Christ. It really is all about Jesus.

God grant us grace to be selfless, as was our Savior, and to reflect Christ's glory in every aspect of our lives – all with a view to the eternity that will follow this short time on earth. To do otherwise would be roughly the equivalent of imaging that life began and ended with kindergarten. Walk instead through this life remembering that one great day every human being will stand before our Creator, to be judged not on the basis of how good we have been, but on the basis of our relationship with Jesus Christ, who earned and then credited to us all righteousness. God hasten that great day, and direct every single one of our thoughts, words, and actions here in time accordingly. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Isaiah 55:1-5** "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴ Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵ Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

^{ESV} **Romans 9:1-8** I am speaking the truth in Christ--I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit-- ² that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. ³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. ⁴ They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵ To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. ⁶ ¶ But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." ⁸ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 9th Sunday after Pentecost – August 2, 2020

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 540 (Stanzas 1-3) (Red Hymnal)

"With the Lord Begin Thy Task"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 55:1-5) Our Old Testament lesson draws a striking comparison between earthly food and drink, and spiritual food and drink. While all men realize the need for the physical, most neglect their far more critical spiritual needs. So too the temptation for God's Church today is to focus away from the spiritual needs of mankind and is focused on the here and now. God give us wisdom.

Psalm 96 (Supplement page 26) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 9:1-8) There is no doubt that Paul had a deep and abiding love for his own people, the Jews. Yet it is foolish to imagine that God's favor is based on anything other than faith in the Promised Messiah. When the Jews rejected God's Son, God also rejected them. When the Jews rejected Paul's message of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, Paul also turned away from his own people and took the message of the gospel to the gentiles.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 348 (Stanzas 1, 3-5) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Jesus, Only Jesus"

The Sermon – Text: Acts 4:8-14 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"Time Is about Eternity"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 411 (Stanzas 1-5) (Red Hymnal)

"From Eternity O God"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 540 (Stanzas 4-5) (Red Hymnal)

"With the Lord Begin Thy Task"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Stefan Sonnenfeld has returned the calls to Redeemer of Bowdle and Zion of Ipswich. In addition to Bowdle and Ipswich, current CLC congregational vacancies include Lemmon (soon to be filled by Pastor Kanzenbach, which will leave his current congregations vacant) Trinity of Spokane, Bethel of Morris, St Paul of Ponsford, and Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Having retired from the active pastoral ministry, Pastor Doug Libby has been replaced by Pastor James Albrecht as Visitor of the Minnesota Pastoral Conference.

Home Vacation Bible School Materials – Due in large part to a lack of definitive information and a desire to err on the side of caution, our summer VBS has been cancelled this year due to COVID complications. An "at-home VBS" has been produced by our sister congregation, Immanuel of Mankato, MN. It is entitled "*Christ Over Viruses, Infections, and Disease.*" The series features video presentations of Bible stories, discussion questions, music, craft time, and a daily scavenger hunt. You can find an online resource page with instructions and all the links at tinyurl.com/vbs20resource or on the Immanuel Mankato website: <https://www.immanuelmankato.org/home/ministries/vbs/> If you would prefer a hard copy of the student packets, please let Pastor Roehl know. Parents with VBS-aged children are encouraged to choose an upcoming week for "at-home" VBS, and to make use of these excellent materials.

Man Up Retreat – The annual men's retreat (18 and older) is scheduled for September 24-27, 2020, at Wyalusing State Park near Prairie du Chien, WI. The cost is \$75, including lodging and meals. You can register at www.tinyurl.com/manup-2020 or find more information at www.manup.clclutheran.org.