

3 October 2016
Commemoration of Jerome (observed)
SELC District Eastern Circuit Pastors Conference

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Word Must Be Proclaimed”

Text: Luke 24:44-48; 2 Timothy 3:14-18; Isaiah 62:1-7

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

I wish I knew what language Adam and Eve spoke in the Garden. I know some Old Testament scholars who say Hebrew is the language that is spoken in heaven. So I guess it would have been in Eden then. We're not told.

But I wonder what the language was before Babel? When, as Genesis says, *the whole earth had one language and the same words* (Genesis 11:1). Before all the languages came into being and people were scattered over the face of the earth because of their idolatry. And how many languages came into being at that time? I wonder, but we have not been told all of that.

But after Babel, with all those new languages, this fact remained: the promise made to Adam and Eve had to be proclaimed. And then the promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The promise of the Saviour. To save us from Adam and Eve's sin. To save us from Babel's sin. To save us from our sin. It was at Babel that the need for translating the Word of God began. To make the promise of Christ known, and give hope to people in many different places and many different languages.

And we know that's exactly what happened. We know of an Israelite girl taken captive as a slave in Syria who told her master Naaman about the God of Israel who could heal him of his leprosy. Daniel learned the language of the Babylonians and they learned about the one true God through him. In Egypt, the Scriptures were translated into Greek for the people to hear and understand. For the Word must be proclaimed. The promise must be proclaimed. Christ must be proclaimed.

Into this long and venerable tradition, then, stepped Jerome, who we are remembering today. A fourth century early church father who translated the Scriptures into Latin, his translation became the standard in the Western Church until the 16th century - when a man named Luther took up the task again. That the people could hear and understand the Word and promises of Christ in their own language. The Scriptures that are, as we heard, *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

But it's not just a matter of speaking the same language. As you know, even among us who speak the same language there is often translation that is needed. There is misunderstanding. We say one thing but people hear something else. People hear between the lines. There are fights, people become divided, and Babel happens all over again. And so people need to hear of Christ and the hope that is in Him. Hope for healing, hope for forgiveness, hope for reconciliation - both with God and with one another. From Adam and Eve down to us today.

And while this Word of Christ is spoken by all the priesthood of the baptized, by all believers, in all the places you have been put - your families, communities, and places of work and school, to give hope, healing, and forgiveness - it is especially given to us, my brothers gathered here today, to proclaim this Word, both to those who are children of God now, and to those who will be but are not yet. To proclaim the Strong Word of God (LSB #578) that cleaves the darkness and brings the light of Christ to our hearts and minds.

That's what we heard Jesus doing with the disciples in the Gospel tonight. They, the disciples, were in the deep darkness of those hours and days after the crucifixion - when, by the way, *translation also took place. Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews* was written on the titulus above Jesus in Greek, Latin, and Aramaic (John 19:20) so that everyone would know who this was that hung condemned on the cross. And after their Master died, the disciples were plunged into the darkness - into the grip of fear, the despair of death, and the guilt of sin, when hope seemed a million miles away. Or more.

But into that darkness came the Word - and the Word made flesh, risen from the dead, triumphant over sin, death, and the grave, translated and explained for them everything that had been written about Him. He *opened the minds* of the disciples and filled them with the Word. With Himself.

Our world today praises being open-minded - but that's only half the equation. For once your mind is opened, what is it then being filled with? If garbage, if untruth, if the wisdom of the world that opposes the Word of God, then that opening is not good. But to open the mind and fill it with the Word of God, with the truth and the hope and promises fulfilled in Jesus, is not only good, but the highest good. The good that can restore the good of Eden - the way things were before sin. Before Babel.

Which is what we need; our greatest need. For the divisions still come among us, among friends and families, in homes, even in and among churches and pastors. The darkness of sin still enshrouds our hearts and minds. Troubles and distress still often rob us of hope. We need to hear the Word that our sins, our shortcomings, our failures, our stubbornness, our weakness - all of it has been washed away, fully - even more fully than *BleachBit* can wash away e-mails! - by the bleaching blood of Christ shed on the cross for you, so that they can never be recovered. We need to hear that the God who knows everything

somehow remembers our sins no more (Jeremiah 31:34). That your sins are separated from you as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12).

We need to hear, as the people heard from Isaiah, that you are not forsaken, and no longer desolate, but that the Lord delights in you.

That is the Word that transforms. That brought a frightened Adam and Eve out of hiding and gave them hope. That brought Naaman the Syrian to Elisha and then to the Jordan for healing. That, perhaps, brought the Magi from Babylon to Bethlehem. That gave despairing disciples joy and confidence in the future. And that gives us the same today. Transforming us from sinners to saints, from death to life, from orphans to children of God.

For we have heard the Word that all of our sins - the sins of the present and the sins of the past, the sins of the soul and the sins of the body, the sins done to please myself and the sins done to please others, sins that were committed and sins done by omission, wonton sins, idle sins, serious and deliberate sins, the sins that are known and the sins that are not known, the sins that we have so labored to hide from others that we have hidden them from our own memories - all of them have been forgiven. The Word has been fulfilled, and it continues to be fulfilled every time that Word is proclaimed here, poured here, and eaten here.

That is why Jerome translated the Scriptures. That is why Luther did, and why we still do today. In language, in preaching, and in our conversation. The Word must be proclaimed. Christ must be proclaimed. That a world created good be good again. That a people once scattered be united again.

And when that unity becomes visible around the throne of God, that great vision of heaven given us in Revelation, when *people of every nation, tribe, people, and language* come together as one (Revelation 7:9) . . . what will be the language spoken then? Or will we all speak our own languages and also understand them all? Again we're not told.

But we'll get a little taste of that tonight, as we taste and see that the Lord is good, as we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sin. For we'll join here in the song of heaven with *the angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven*. Many peoples, but one voice. United in Christ. United by Christ.

For that is true unity. We could all speak the same language and yet be divided from one another - just ask Adam and Eve. Or, we could all speak different languages and yet be united in Christ. That is better. So in any language and every language, we speak Christ. For that is the Strong Word that cleaves the darkness, bespeaks us righteous, and fills our songs with alleluias - now and without end.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.