

26 January 2020  
Commemoration of St. Titus

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“It’s All About Jesus”

Text: Acts 20:28-35; Titus 1:1-9; Luke 10:1-9

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

Most of the people we hear about in the readings today . . . we don’t know who they are. They’re nameless men.

In the reading from Acts, Paul is speaking to the pastors of Ephesus. Instructing them, encouraging them. But who they are, we do not know. They’re nameless preachers.

In the reading from Titus, of course we hear Titus’ name, and Paul is writing to him, but we don’t know much about this Titus. And who are these men that he then appoints as pastors in every town? We don’t know. They’re nameless preachers.

And then in the reading from Luke, Jesus sends 72 disciples ahead of him, to preach, to proclaim peace. Who are they, these nameless preachers? Even his original twelve - we know their names but very little else about them.

It’s interesting, isn’t it? And it teaches us something. That it’s not about the preacher, it’s about what is preached. Or at least, it should be. It’s not like sports with stars and superstars. The man isn’t important. The man shouldn’t be the focus. The one he preaches is. Everything about Christ. Everything about His gifts.

When it’s not, when the preacher becomes the focus, that’s when things go wrong. When you hear about a preacher today, it is usually because something has gone wrong. Think about Peter. We mostly know not of his successes but his failures. And today, when a preacher makes the news, maybe it’s because he was no longer above reproach. Or maybe he was no longer the husband of one wife; or he was arrogant, quick-tempered, a drunkard, violent, or greedy for gain; or he no longer held firm to the Word and preached it. And when that happens, the message is lost. Everything is about *him*. Everything about his fall.

That’s why your pastor and the assistant wear robes. To cover us up. Which pastor is up here, which assistant, doesn’t matter. Or at least, it shouldn’t. What matters is the Word. Everything about Christ. Everything about His gifts. He’s the star.

The pastor is just a mouth, and hands. A mouth and hands put here by God to preach. That what the stole I wear means. It's not just decoration. I'm under orders to do this. It's supposed to represent a yoke - like a yoke that used to lie across the shoulders of a team of oxen, so the farmer could tell them where to go, where to plow. Pastors are not free, to plow where they want, to say what they want, to do what they want. They are put, called and ordained. To preach Christ. Everything about Christ. Everything about His gifts.

Isaiah said, *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news* (Isaiah 52:7). Feet. That's humbling. Not beautiful face or hair or clothes. Feet. Feet aren't beautiful. Only when they preach Christ. When they bring good news.

So Jesus sends seventy-two out, two by two. He tells them where to go, what to say, what to do. But it all boils down to this: **the kingdom of God has come near to you**. That's what it's about. Not which pair did the best, got the greatest results. Not who they were. But that **through the Word they spoke, the kingdom of God was there**. And the kingdom of God is *here*.

Not much of a kingdom, huh? *Or is it?*

In the reading from Acts, Paul told the Ephesian pastors he was giving his farewell sermon to that **fierce wolves** would attack the flock. Jesus too, when sending out His seventy-two, sent them out as **lambs in the midst of wolves**. And even for Titus, on the island of Crete, it says just after the verses we heard today that *Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons* (Titus 1:12). And that's what they were saying about themselves!

And that's the world we live in, isn't it? A world which crucifies the one sent to save it. A world which murders tens of millions of babies every year. A dog-eat-dog world that chews up and spits out whoever gets in our way. A world which devours reputations with twisted words and half-truths. And a world where these wolves are even in sheep's clothing - that is, are even in the church. And maybe even sometimes looks like you.

Yet out into such a wolfly world Jesus sends mouths *without* fangs, mouths to speak the truth, mouths to forgive, mouths to speak peace, mouths to give life - mouths to preach Him. Everything about Jesus. Everything about His gifts and His kingdom. **A kingdom where the lamb battles the wolf, and the lamb wins!**

Oh, it didn't look like it at first. The lamb was hanging dead on a cross and then His cold, lifeless body was laid in a tomb. That's what it looked like. And now the wolf was coming after them. So they locked the doors and barred the windows, that night when the kingdom of God seemed not near, but very, very far away.

But just when things were at their darkest and bleakest, the disciples found out the the kingdom of God was indeed near them! In fact, He was in that very same room. The

locked doors, the barred windows, the sealed tomb, no obstacle for Him. And the same peace He had sent them to proclaim earlier He now speaks to them. For the satanic wolf didn't win. He did. He had to enter the belly of the beast in order to provide a way out for us. And as Jesus stood there, alive, victorious, risen from the dead, He spoke of the way out. That the way out of the belly of the beast wasn't with might or power or sword, but with His Word of peace and forgiveness. If you try to fight the wolf with your own might or power or sword, with your own person or words or looks, with your own ideas or thoughts or name, you're done for. Only one name matters to the wolf, *and it's not yours*.

But where Jesus is preached, where His gifts are given, where there is Christ crucified, there is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God in the midst of a wolfly world. A little oasis, a refuge, a hospital. A place of forgiveness and life. A place of healing for the soul and rest for the weary. A place for you to be washed, baptized, in the name of the Lamb. A place where the only devouring is when the Lamb puts His Body into your mouth and pours His blood over your lips. By the hands and mouth that He has put here to do it. Who he is doesn't matter. Or at least, it shouldn't. Everything about Jesus. Everything about His gifts. Everything about His life. For you.

For as Paul told those Ephesian pastors, *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. So the blessed one is here to give to you, not to receive *from* you. To give Himself to you, that you might have all that you need in this wolfly world. And that you yourself, now so blessed, might do the same. Give. Not to make a name for yourself, but in His name. And where He has put you. In your families, in your workplaces, in your schools, in your communities. Wherever He has put your mouth and hands and feet. To be His Christians, His little Christs, in a world that needs what you have to give. What is given to you here by the pastors God puts here for you.

So . . . what about Titus? It's his day after all, and I haven't been talking much about him. *Or have I?* Maybe I've only mentioned his name once or twice, but his mouth, his hands, his feet - they've been here. His message and preaching, too. And after all, that's what made Titus who he was. Same as Paul, the seventy-two, the Ephesian pastors, pastors today and over the centuries, and you. Everything about Jesus. Everything about His gifts. For where His Word is preached in its truth and purity, and where His gifts are given as He gave them, there is He, and there is His kingdom. There is His forgiveness and there is His peace. There is His healing and there is His life.

And that's not just in a church, but in a hospital room, in a nursing home, around a family dinner table, in a coffee shop with a hurting friend. Wherever mouths speak the Word of the Lord, there the kingdom of God is coming near. For there is the Jesus who comes to the lost and frightened and hurting and helpless and hopeless. The blessed one who gives hope, that we might be so blessed.

And in this wolfly world, that need is great. *The harvest is plentiful*, Jesus said, *but the*

*laborers are few.* Over the years the Lord has taken some laborers from here and put them in other places. Maybe there will be more. If so, how blessed we are to be able to give in this way. But still we'll *pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.* More laborers. For the need is great. That all hear the good news. That all know there is hope. That all know that *the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,* not to demand but to save. That all know that the kingdom of God has come near to them. With His forgiveness and life.

And that you know it, is why I'm here. Just a mouth and hands and feet. To speak, to give. That here, everything be about Christ. Everything about His gifts, His forgiveness, His life. For you.

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.