

February 9, 2020 – II Corinthians 10:3-5 (NIV)

THEME: The Purpose Of The Church.

We thank the Lord for bringing Pastor Porinsky to guest preach.

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

February 9, 2020. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5. The Purpose of the Church. You might be aware that the United Methodist Church, which is the second largest denomination in the United States, is strongly considering a split right down the middle. It started at the end of February last year, when the United Methodist Church, with delegates from all over the world, held a special convention in St. Louis, in which they voted to uphold their ban on same-sex marriage and gay clergy by a vote of 53%. Many United Methodists, especially in the United States, were devastated; many of them had already been performing same-sex marriages and ordaining gay clergy. The next week on the radio the pastor from West Side United Methodist Church in Ann Arbor expressed his disappointment. But as far as I'm concerned, an African-American female pastor who I think has a church near Flint, Michigan made the most eye-opening statement; she said she thought the vote was the correct one, and that the gay issue was not a major item in her congregation; she said her church is about more than who's sleeping with who; I can't remember her exact words, but she said something like, "We've got more pressing things to do; our concerns are low income housing, senior care," and she listed a number of other things. Significantly, she did *not* say anything about the church's calling to preach the gospel and attempt to get people to heaven through faith in Jesus Christ. At least she was not pushing the homosexual agenda; but neither was she promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Of course it is not just the Methodist church. This past summer in my town of Howell, a sign outside the First Baptist Church, which is an American Baptist congregation, said, "Seek Truth. Make Peace. Choose to Love. Reverence Life." What does that even mean? I'm not saying the Gospel is *not* preached there, but you'd never know it from those words. And of course there are tons of *Lutheran* churches that have little to do with the Gospel.

There still are churches, though, whose main purpose is to get people to heaven. Yours is one of them. In fact, I have never met a single WELS pastor who does not talk about saving people eternally through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have a lot of faults and shortcomings in our church body, but that is not one of them

OK, but what *is* the "gospel of Jesus Christ"? Well, "gospel" means "good news." When we refer to the gospel of Jesus Christ, we mean the good news that God sent His Son into the world to rescue lost human beings from an eternity in hell and lead them to an eternity in heaven. That is good news, because all human beings are by birth and nature lost souls, on their way to hell, because of their sins. So in order to proclaim the gospel, it is generally necessary to address the issue of sin and make a person see that he or she is a sinner. Then we can tell them that God's Son came as a human being to take our place and live a life *without* sin, and His life counts for us. And He died to pay the *penalty* for our sins – both for the bad things that we do and the good that we fail to do. And He rose again to show that His life and death were accepted by His heavenly Father. The entire purpose of the

church is to proclaim that message. The entire purpose of the church is to use that message to bring people to faith and to keep them in the faith in Jesus Christ. Anything else the church does is secondary, and supplementary, to this.

So it is all about words – using and explaining the Word of God to demolish false ideas about God. As St. Paul said, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” In the previous verse, the world’s false ideas are pictured as “strongholds.” We use the Word of God to demolish these strongholds, like a bomb.

We use the Word of God. And nothing else, except the Sacraments, which are simply a graphic presentation of the Word. As St. Paul says, “Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” If the world wants to get people to behave in a certain way, what do they do? They use politics, pass a law, and enforce it with physical force. St. Paul says *we do not do* that. The mission of the church is *not* to make unbelievers behave like believers.

Neither the Roman Catholic Church nor most non-Lutheran Protestants agree with this. They all believe that it is the goal of the church to control society by political means. And we, too, would love to see a society that was more in line with God’s will. We might even feel as if that would make it easier to be a Christian. But it does *not*. My generation was raised in the early 1950’s to the mid-1960’s, at a time in this nation’s history when everything was God and country. Why, when I was four years old they even added the phrase “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. What a bunch of hypocrisy! It was all political! And you can see where it got us: In spite of all the political, and spiritual, advantages we had, my generation dropped the ball! We got into the cultural revolution of the late 1960’s and stopped worshiping the Lord and failed to bring our children up in the Lord.

So politics is not the church’s calling, and it does not work. Nor is the social agenda that the lady Methodist pastor mentioned on the radio. Yes, the Bible says, “as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:10). But charity work as such is not the work of the church, although a lot of people think it is. A number of times each year my church would receive phone calls from non-members asking for rent money. But what is our mission? To save people eternally by sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If charity work will gain the favor of outsiders and gain a hearing for our Gospel message, then it can be a very good thing. That is how our church body uses it. A recent report about our church body’s “Christian Aid and Relief” committee stated that they were making “remarkable efforts around the world to connect humanitarian aid with opportunities to share the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.”

It is also not the church’s calling to provide programs just for the sake of providing programs, *unless* those programs will connect people to the gospel of Jesus Christ. All the efforts that WELS congregations pour into day care, soccer camps, and other activities intended for outreach – the vast majority of them fall short, because we fail to make the connection and reach people with God’s *Word*. And even if you get people to eventually join the church through one of these avenues, you need to keep working to keep them in God’s *Word*. One thing that has become very obvious to me over the years is that people who come to the church because of outward things *leave* when they are not getting what they want. People who come because of a church’s youth ministry, or music ministry, or preschool program, or Lutheran Elementary school, or because the church has a friendly or dynamic pastor – You know what happens: As soon as they are not getting what they want, they’re gone. As soon as their children outgrow the preschool, or the Lutheran Elementary school

closes, or the church gets a less dynamic pastor, forget it. It's all about "What have you done for me *lately*?"

So ultimately, we are back to nothing but God's Word and His Sacraments – the Word, that can demolish strongholds and "arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God." When that Word takes root in a person's heart, and is watered and fed with God's Word and Sacraments, then and only then does the person have a reasonable chance at ultimate salvation.

Almost two years ago I was jogging in the woods across the road from Faith Lutheran Church, Stinchfield Woods, which is owned by the University of Michigan, and sitting by the side of the trail was a man named Eric, who was somewhat younger than I am. As I approached he said to me, "I'm looking for a non-aggressive profession. Are *you* in a non-aggressive profession?" I smiled and said, "I'm a Lutheran pastor," to which he replied, "That sounds non-aggressive," and I jogged on. But after a couple minutes I thought, "This man deserves a more complete answer than that," so I jogged five minutes back to where he was and explained that my profession often does not come across as non-aggressive. In fact, it often gets a rather angry response. He said, "Well, if someone doesn't like it, that's *their* problem." I tried to explain that my goal is to get people to heaven with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in order to do that I sometimes have to expose people's sin, and the thought that we are sinful and need Jesus does not go over well with a lot of people. Eventually I resumed my jog. I saw Eric about 6 or 7 months later just walking towards me on the trail. He was surprised that I remembered his name. So was I.

Does a pastor have a "non-aggressive profession?" Is the mission of the church non-aggressive? Not from what St. Paul describes. "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." *That is warlike talk. That is aggression.* Satan and his wicked angels are in control of the world, and have control of people's minds, with impressive philosophies, with the alleged findings of science, or simply with the desire for earthly things. We need to blast those things to pieces with the Word of God. Onward Christin Soldiers! Every human being by nature wants to be the self-sufficient center of the universe, and Satan assures them, "Yes, you *can* be!" Our mission is to knock that down and let them know that there is only *One* who is the center of the universe, and it's not *them*; that is bad news for them, they think; but we explain, "No, that is *not* bad news; that is the greatest *good* news there is, because that One who is at the center of the universe is your God and Savior and wants *you* to be with Him forever."

Most people do not seem receptive. Most of the time this spiritual weapon of God's Word does not seem to work. But it *does* work. You are living proof of that. You are not here because of a dynamic pastor – although your current pastor is kind of dynamic; but that's not why you're here. You are not here because of all kinds of frills and programs, or because your church has given you handouts. You are here because God's Word has taken hold of your heart, the gospel of Jesus Christ, who loved you and gave Himself for you (Ephesians 5:2) so that you can belong to Him forever. *That* is what the church is all about.