**April 7th 2024 Quasi Modo Geniti Sunday**

**Text: John 21:15-23** 0716

**Theme: The Power of the Gospel.**

May the Lord God grant that you ever firmly believe in the power and glory of the Gospel to convert and keep souls. Amen. Dear friends in Christ: I want to open today’s sermon by posing a question to everyone here: do you hold firmly to the power of the Gospel? Now the initial reaction and answer to this question from a Christian would be: “Of course I believe in the power of the Gospel! Why would you even ask such a question?” However, I will admit that all too often my own flesh prompts me to doubt the power of the Gospel, and that doubt is borne out in how I go about my daily life. For example all too often when speaking to those outside our congregation I often lean too heavily on my own wisdom and understanding, my own power to do the work necessary. In so doing, though not intentional, I have harmed the cause of the Gospel, for there is nothing in me that will ever change the heart of any person. No amount of wise words, even when quoting Scripture, can change a person’s heart according to myself. And thus the question is posed again: Do you hold firmly to the power of the Gospel? Do you rather try to convince a person by using logic and reason? If our arguments for Christianity are from logic, then we are not holding firmly to the power of the Gospel, but are rather trying assist the Gospel where it is lacking in order to convert or comfort, to restore or strengthen. Now this is not to make anyone think that I am disparaging their faith or to accuse of sin, but rather to improve, to exhort to do better than we have done.

Now as much as we might want to, we cannot change the past. There is nothing we can do to go back and undo things we have done. It might be true that we have committed very shameful deeds, we may not have spoken up when someone has spoken against our God, we may have denied His name, we may have doubted His power to save. Nothing can change those things, but if we do not face up to those mistakes of the past, and we do not recognize our own failures, we have opened ourselves up to the power of the devil to overcome us. One of the highest examples of doubt about the power of the Word and of regret over one’s own actions is that of Peter, the disciple of Jesus Christ, who, though boasting great things and confident in his own great faith, denied his Lord three times. *“And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” (Luke 22:61-62)* When Jesus was arrested in the Garden earlier that night, Peter had drawn a sword, and had begun to fight against those who came to arrest Jesus, at which point Jesus rebukes Peter. Later Peter, coming to a realization of his own impotence, is identified three separate times as being Jesus’ disciple, and all three times denies that he even knows Jesus at all. In both of these instances Peter doubts the power of the Word, first because he takes up weapons of the world to fight a spiritual battle, and secondly the power of the Word to save him even if he were killed in his body. Now I want each of us here to note how much like Peter we all are. We are all very quick and confident to declare how faithful we are, and how we are the greatest of Jesus’ disciples, and how we would never, no never, deny Him or His power; but if we are honest with ourselves and one another, we have no choice but to admit that we have committed deeds very similar to these. The purpose of our sermon then is to encourage us going forward to remember the power of the Gospel. We will do so according to our text for today which is found in the twenty first chapter of the Gospel according to John beginning at verse fifteen.

**Quote text here.**

Let us pray, O Lord God almighty, we confess unto Thee that we are weak creatures, fearful of harm and only of the looks on the races of others. Help us, O Lord, by the power of Thy Word to restore us to a right spirit, and to strengthen us in the true faith, that we may not deny Thy name, nor doubt the power of Thy Word to convert, to restore, and to strengthen. Teach us of Thy compassion toward us and our infirmities, that even when we fall on our face and shamefully sin against Thee, that Thou dost come to us in Thy mercy to convert us back to faith in Thee, to restore us to reconciliation, and to strengthen to preach the true Gospel without fear or doubt. Grant Thy Spirit unto us, O Savior, that we may feed Thy sheep and lambs, and do so firmly believing Thy power and the power of Thy Word. Grant unto us comfort and hope in Thy forgiveness and Thy grace. Save us from ourselves, O Lord, and help us to go and sin no more. Give us courage and hope in Thy Gospel, and help us use our own example of mercy from Thee to convert others. Grant us all these things for Thine own sake. Amen.

Guided then by the Spirit of God let us learn of the power of the Gospel:

1. **To convert.** We read verses fifteen through seventeen of our text: **read verses here.** Following Peter’s denial and Jesus’ resurrection, Peter had knowledge of his risen Lord, but had yet to confess his faith in Jesus. Here in our text, before Jesus ascended into heaven, He appears to the disciples as they fished in the Sea of Galilee, and Jesus engages in conversation with the fallen Peter, not to d=condemn him, but to convert him. We know that peter did indeed fall from the faith, for Jesus had told him before he had fallen: *“And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31-32)* Peter’s fall was the result of doubt in the Word, and so Jesus sets out to re convert him by showing him the power of God’s Word, the Word made flesh. He asks Peter if Peter loves Him, using the Greek word Agape, meaning unconditional love, and Pet answers that he does love Jesus, but uses the word Philo, meaning brotherly love; not the same thing. His love for Jesus had waned, and Peter though sorrowing over his sin greatly, had lost the zeal he once had because he thought that the power to convert and to remedy the chasm between God and man was to be accomplished through the sword instead of by the Spirit through the Word. Jesus is here teaching Peter that the power to convert is not found within Peter himself, but in the Word given to him by the Lord. Thus, Jesus tells him to feed His lambs. Feeding the lambs means to feed the children of God with the Gospel, which has the power to convert. The apostle Paul says: *“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16)* The Gospel of the forgiveness of sins wrought by the crucifixion of Jesus, and sealed by His resurrection is that whereby men are converted. We need to learn this, dear brethren, for there is nothing in us which has the power to convert no matter how wise and great we might be. Again Paul says: *“I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.” (1 Cor. 3:6-7)* The work to convert then is the work of God, not man. It is helpful in our mission work, and in our own Christian lives to understand this, for it is akin to a man who plants seed in his garden or field. He can only put them in the ground and water them, but he cannot make them grow, nor can he make them produce fruit, both are due to the power of God alone. As Christians we believe in God, let us firmly then believe in the power of God to convert by His Word for we are shown that power in our text and are convinced by our own experience. Thus does the Gospel have power to convert, and:
2. **To restore.** We read verses fifteen through seventeen of our text: **read verses here.** Peter and Jesus continue their conversation with Jesus asking Peter twice more if he loved him, and Peter finally replying in the last instance that he loved Jesus using this time the word agape. Jesus asked three times in answer to the triple denial of Peter and restores Peter back to the faith of the Gospel. Peter had learned something quite valuable, that of the power of God’s Word. Never again do we read of Peter taking up a sword again, despite being arrested multiple times. He would go on to become a great preacher of the Gospel of Christ In his second general epistle, Peter talks of his own shameful deed, warning Christians of apostasy from the faith by a denial of Christ’s name and of the power of His Word. Peter says: *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.” (2 Pet. 2:20-22)* Peter describes his own fall, and compares it to a dog returning to his own vomit to eat it again, and at the same time warns all Christians of the desire Satan has to deceive them and to make them doubt and ultimately discard the power of the Gospel. He knows that if we do not have the Gospel we have no hope of salvation.

Now as we have seen, many of us are quite similar to Peter, at least in our actions, and our text is teaching us that like Peter our actions of the past are shameful, but our Lord can restore, our Lord and Savior forgives our sins and grants us salvation. In truth there is no sin greater than God’s grace toward the sinner, and only sin that will not be forgiven is unbelief. As Christians we must recognize then what Satan is trying to do. His ultimate goal is not to cause to sin out of weakness, for we are forgiven of those sins and saved, but truly his goal is to cause us to put away our faith. We must be aware. We must cling to the grace of God in Christ, and found in the power of the Gospel. Peter is thus restored to faith and given instruction to use the power of that Word to feed the lambs and sheep of God’s kingdom, seeking them out and spreading the seed and God gives the increase. Thus have we seen the power of God’s Word to convert, to restore, and:

1. **To strengthen.** We read verses eighteen through twenty three of our text: **read verses here.** Our Savior then gives information to Peter, which would frighten any of us, but for the newly restored Peter is just what he needs to hear: there is a day coming in which he will indeed give his life for the Word as he had once declared, but from this time on instead of leaning on his own strength would lean on the Gospel Word. Historians agree that Peter was martyred, and more than that he was crucified, but upside down at his request, because as he had said he did not deserve to die in the same way as his Savior. Peter’s ignominious denials were forgiven and he became a champion of the true Gospel. Peter then asks about the apostle John, and while Jesus would not tell Peter the details of John’s future life, we know that John met a similar end: being sent to prison on the island of Patmos and later martyred for his preaching. Now it is so that these men went to these things, not in their own strength, for they surely would have forsook Him and fled again as we have seen them do already, but in the strength of the Gospel they are upheld in the true faith and gave strong witness to it.

Now I have said before that the Holy Spirit has made it clear to me that there are dark clouds above us right now. That there are terrible things coming on this earth and in this country. I want to reiterate that today in light of Jesus’ words to both Peter and John. Recently the gloom and thought of coming judgment and horror have only increased. I want to warn all of you that something is coming, and what exactly it is I do not know, but it would seem to be a great deception. I pray for all of you that God would give you strength, for our resolve is to be tested, our knowledge of Scripture is to be tested. I implore all of you to steel your nerves and be prepared, be ready. Lean not on your own understanding or strength, but lean on the strength, peace, and hope which can be given by no one else than God, and nowhere else than in His Word. Do not fear what is coming, do not be deceived by strange things you might see, but remember what Jesus says in His Word. It is clear and certain, and God will not contradict Himself ever. Please do not be deceived. Pray for each other, pray for the church, pray for discernment, pray for strength. May God’s grace be with us, may He grant us His Word always, and give us understanding hearts. May He be ever glorified and may He return to deliver us from the wicked one. Amen.