

Pastor Daniel Waldschmidt – Sermon Preach at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Tomah, WI at a service thanking God for blessing the ministry of Mr. Geoff Hoffmann. Preached on Pentecost Sunday, May 20th, 2018.

Scripture: Romans 1:16-17

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes – to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed by faith, for faith, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith.’” (EHV)

“The Cardiac Kids” was the nickname that Mr. Hoffmann gave to our eighth-grade basketball team. He called us the “cardiac kids” because we won the championship game in triple overtime. How did we get the energy to play hard through four quarters and three overtimes? Where did we get the *power*?

Mr. Hoffmann, you called us the cardiac kids because we had the energy and the power and the endurance to play a whole tournament plus three overtimes, but you have had the energy and the power and the endurance for 43 years of ministry. Where did you get the power? Of course the answer is found in our Bible passage for today. You got the power from the gospel, the good news that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, that was the power behind your ministry every day for 43 years. So the theme that we will consider from God’s Word today is that The Gospel is Power of God 1. For salvation and 2. For ministry.

First, the Gospel is the Power of God for Salvation. Long before you received a call into the ministry, you first experienced the ministry of others.¹ You first experienced the ministry of others when you were a little baby. Your family lived in Kansas at the time and a Lutheran pastor poured water over your head in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. And there in your baptism the Holy Spirit worked faith in your little heart (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). There in your baptism God washed all your sins away (Acts 22:16) and connected you to Jesus (Romans 6:3-4) and made his own dear child (Galatians 3:26-27). There was your first encounter with the power of God for salvation.

As you grew you continued to experience the ministry of others. Pastor Hartwig at Zion in South Milwaukee instructed you in God’s Word and you were confirmed on March 19, 1967. As you experienced the ministry of other people it was always all about the gospel, the good news which is the power of God for salvation.

Paul explains what the good news is in our passage for today. Paul says, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed” (Romans 1:17). We need a righteousness *from* God because we don’t have any righteousness of our own. We have sinned and broken God’s commandments. But the good news is that God has given us a righteousness, the righteousness of his own Son Jesus. Because God has given us the perfect righteousness of Christ when God looks at us he doesn’t see the sinful life that we’ve lived. Instead he sees the perfect life that Jesus has lived. That’s good news. That’s the power of God for salvation.

Paul says, **“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed by faith, for faith, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (1:16-17). “Righteousness” and “righteous”** are courtroom terms. In Greek, the words “righteousness” and “righteous” and “justify” all come from the same Greek word. When the Bible says that God “justifies us” it means that God declares us *not guilty* of sin. God declares us to be completely innocent of all sin. And that’s amazing because we deserve to be condemned. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) and we have sinned many times.

But if we have sinned many times how can God declare us to be innocent of all sins? How can God justify us? How can God declare us *not guilty* of sin, when it’s obvious that we have sinned many times? The answer is all about Jesus. Jesus took our place and the condemnation that we deserve fell completely on him on the cross. The book of Galatians says that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). In another place the Bible says that “God made him, who did not know sin, to become sin for us, so that

¹ I owe these insights to Dr. John Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2009), xi-xii.

we might become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took away all our sins by his death on the cross and in exchange he gave us his perfect righteousness and so God has declared us not guilty of all sins.

The benefits of this not guilty verdict are salvation and eternal life in heaven. And we receive these benefits *by faith*. Paul says, “**For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed *by faith*, for faith, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live *by faith*.’” (Romans 1:17). Through faith in Jesus we are saved from hell and have eternal life in heaven. Notice it says, “**The righteous will *live by faith*.**” Through faith we have spiritual life right now and eternal life in heaven. And the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts through this Gospel message. That’s why it says, “**For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed *by faith, for faith*.**” This Gospel message is “*for faith*.” It is the power of God to create faith, and through faith in Jesus we have eternal life and salvation. The Gospel is the power of God *for salvation*.**

And because this Gospel message is the power of God to create faith, this Gospel message has been the center of your ministry. Mr. Hoffmann you have taught this Gospel message for 43 years and as you taught it this gospel message has strengthened faith in the hearts of young people. So the second part of our theme today is that the Gospel is the power of God *for ministry*.

Today is Pentecost Sunday, and the day of Pentecost was certainly a ministry high point for the disciples. As the disciples looked back on their ministry I’m sure that the day of Pentecost was one of the high points. And Mr. Hoffmann you have certainly had high points in your ministry. One of the things that you are really good at, Mr. Hoffmann, is encouraging young people to use their gifts. And you talked about how one of the highlights of your ministry is seeing young people use their gifts and the joy on their faces as they realize success by using their gifts.

On Pentecost the disciples got to see the power of God in a very visible way. It says, “**They saw divided tongues that were like fire resting on each of them. They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, since the Holy Spirit was giving them the ability to speak fluently**” (Acts 2:3). These outward displays of power were meant to draw attention to the message. The crowd says, “**we hear them declaring in our own language the wonderful works of God**” (Acts 2:11). You see it’s all about the message. The crowd heard the sound so that they would come to hear *the message* (Acts 2:6). The Holy Spirit filled the disciples so that they would have boldness to proclaim *the message*. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak fluently in other languages so that they could clearly communicate *the message*. And the message was “**the wonderful works of God**” (Acts 2:11). They proclaimed the wonderful things God has done. They proclaimed that God sent Jesus to die on the cross to take away the sins of the world. They proclaimed that people should repent of their sins and trust in Jesus for forgiveness. They proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead and that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life. They proclaimed the wonderful works of God and that is exactly the same message that you have taught to your students for 43 years.

Mr, Hoffmann I can say personally that my faith has personally benefitted from your ministry. I can speak for countless other students over 43 years when I say “Thank you for your coaching and your teaching. Thank you for encouraging me to use my gifts. Thank you most of all for pointing me to my Savior.” I thank God and we all thank God for your ministry. Amen.