**Sermon Text**: Revelation 14:6-7

**Occasion**: Reformation Sunday, 27 October 2024

**Proclaim the Message**

Grace, mercy and peace be to you in the name of God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The angel in our reading flies through the heavens to give the gospel of God. Although, from what he says in Revelation, we wouldn’t exactly phrase the Gospel in the same way. But I will come back to this later. First, let’s talk about who this angel might be.

This angel speaks with an eternal gospel, a message for all time. Who can this be? Some people have proposed this is Martin Luther, which is why this is a reading for Reformation Sunday.[[1]](#footnote-1) After all, Luther was the central figure of the Reformation who placed the Gospel front and centre in our theology. Five hundred years ago, the Roman Catholic Church eclipsed the message of salvation in Christ with good works. Instead of the angel’s message of, “Fear God and give Him glory,” the cry would have been, “Fear God and give Him money,” since you needed to give the Roman Church money to be freed from the suffering which Christ’s wounds apparently did not cover for you. (Of course, things were more nuanced than this, but this was still an error in Catholic theology.)[[2]](#footnote-2) The Gospel needed to be proclaimed—the *eternal* Gospel needed to be continuously preached: Christ has freed you from your sins for all time, and if the Son has set you free, then you are free indeed (John 8:36). There is nothing left for you to pay. No sin for which you need to suffer. The world, the devil, and your sinful self might try to make you suffer, but as Christ bore the burden of suffering and broke free of it in his resurrection, so will suffering and death be flung off you as you continue in eternal life. But this is not merely a Gospel preached by Luther but by Christ himself.

Christ proclaimed freedom from sin and evil long before Luther, and that is exactly what we want to hear. We don’t want to hear a new teaching made up centuries after Christ. We want to hear Christ’s own words from his own mouth which proclaim that he frees us from the world’s evils. The Gospel has to start from Christ. The Gospel must be eternal. Therefore, if we are considering who this angel is, then we should say that this isn’t just Martin Luther. Luther continued the message of freedom in Christ, but the message came much earlier than that. In fact, it came much earlier than Christ’s birth. The message of Christ’s salvation began all the way back in the Garden of Eden—from the beginning of the world. For at the beginning of the world, our Lord God promised that Christ would break the curse of the ancient serpent, Satan (Gen 3:15). Christ would set us free from the sin brought about by that lying devil and set us back in the land of paradise. The Gospel has been around since forever.

This means everyone who proclaims the Gospel is one with this angel in Revelation. Everyone who shares the good news of Christ Jesus is doing the work of sharing Jesus who sets us free. You are this angel—you are this messenger who shouts with a loud voice, “Fear God and give Him glory.” Because that is what the word “angel” means. “Angel” means “messenger”. If you share Christ’s forgiveness and love with one another then you are a messenger of God. You are speaking the message of salvation. You are being an angel shining Christ’s light into the world. Each and every one of us—from the time of Adam and Eve, to the time of Luther, and to our day today—we are all messengers of Christ’s love setting us free from sin and death.

Don’t forget that. You were set free from the house of slavery—your bondage to sin, death, and the devil. Christ came to break those bonds and bring you into the house of God. You are a child of God and a member of His household. You do not belong to the unbelieving world any longer. That life of guilt and shame is left behind you. You are in the house of glory, fed with forgiveness and strengthened with eternal life. The devil cannot take that away from you. Death itself cannot take that away from you. You are no longer bound to sin, so now Satan and death have no control over you (cf. Rom 6:17-18). You are free to preach Christ and bear the good news of salvation.

So, do it. Preach the good news. The angel in Revelation flies to proclaim the eternal gospel, and so should we. We should be preaching it to every nation and tribe and language and people. Christ desires all people to be set free from sin and come to knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). This means talking to every nation, tribe, language, and people. But before you set out to book plane tickets, sign up to learn other languages, or what-have-you, we should recognize that when we hear the list of nation, tribe, language, and people, this does not mean that we should ignore the people around us. We do have an obligation to help different ministries worldwide, and we do help some, but we first have an obligation to help all the different people here around us—all kinds of different of people around us. That’s a lot of what Revelation’s list of peoples means. We should be looking to all sorts of different peoples.

We can’t say that we are only going to help the Ukrainians, or the Thai, or the Cambodians, or other places where Lutheran Church Canada has missions. We also need to help the Canadians who are already pretty diverse—but diverse in many ways with which we may feel uncomfortable. We need to proclaim Christ sets you free to the Conservatives and to the Liberals and to the NDP and to the Greens. We need to preach Christ’s forgiveness to the imprisoned, impoverished, and drug-oppressed. We should proclaim Christ’s sacrificial love to everyone under the LGTBQ rainbow. All these groups fit under the categories of “nation, tribe, language, and people”. They need to hear the gospel of Christ as well as us.

Now, here we need to make a distinction between Gospel and gospel. There’s the gospel in the broad sense and the Gospel in the narrow sense. The Gospel in the narrow sense is proclaiming the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ. This is the news that Christ sets you free from sin, death, and the devil. It is the welcoming into the household of God. As for the gospel in the broad sense—which is the gospel the angel in Revelation is spreading, the broad sense of the gospel is the whole Word of God, which includes the Law. When we hear the angel in Revelation, he says, “Fear God and give Him glory because the hour of his judgment has come,” (14:7). The angel warns people they need to repent. That is preaching the Law. There is forgiveness in Christ but you also need to repent, turning yourself away from sin. If we have been set free from sin, then how can we live in it any longer? (Rom 6:2)

For us, we live in the freedom of Christ, how can we live in sin? How can we go backwards into slavery to sin? How can we go back to the ball and chain of death? We can’t. So, whenever we do sin, we turn to Christ once more to be set free in forgiveness (1 John 2:1-2). We seek his love and strength to resist temptation and walk in the fullness of faith. And this takes constant encouragement. There is a reason why the gospel we seek is eternal. We constantly and continuously need to hear that our Lord loves us and sets us free to live rightly with him. And if we constantly need the love and direction of Christ, think of all the people who are living without the gospel.

There are people hurting spiritually in our community who need Jesus. Not only do they need freedom from sin and evil, they need to live out this freedom. They should be constantly denying temptation and repenting from sin. We can encourage people to do that. We can be like the angel in the book of Revelation urging people to love and good works (cf. Heb 10:24). That is the gospel in the broad sense—the sense that includes both God’s Law and His promises. That is the angel saying, “Fear God because of the judgment to come.” But we should be leading with the Gospel in the narrow sense—the promises of God alone. How can people resist temptation and repent from sin without the promise that Christ sets them free from these evils? We need to proclaim Christ. We need to proclaim there is freedom from sin in him.

This means recognizing that in Christ there is no east or west. There is no division among people that should separate us from spreading the Gospel. Ask yourself: what is keeping you from telling people Christ forgives? What divisions are separating you from the people around you? Is there some prejudice? A dislike of their person, ideals, or attitude? That should not matter because all these divisions fade away in Christ. He has come that every nation, tribe, language, and people may be saved.

Be a messenger of God’s Word. Be a proclaimer of the gospel. Tell people how you yourself were saved, that Christ has freed you from your sins and freed you from death. This is a promise for one and all throughout the whole wide earth. Amen.

The peace that surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

1. Lenski, R.C.H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation.* 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Catholicism was selling indulgences, which were promises of papal authority remitting temporal suffering as a way to work off sin in purgatory before entering heaven. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)