

St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Modesto, California
Reformation Sunday + The First Sunday in End Time
November 2, 2003

Sermon by Pastor Jonathan Micheel

Revelation 14:6 **Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.** (NIV)

The days are getting shorter. Have you noticed? No more playing outside till 8:30 in the evening; it's dark by 6:00. The end of the year is coming.

Toward the end of the year we take some time to listen to what God says about the end of time, what will be happening as the return of Jesus gets closer. The days are getting shorter, and so is the amount of time before the end of this world.

Jesus warned us this morning that all kinds of bad things will happen as the end comes closer: wars, deceptive religious messages, people making it hard on Christians because of their faith.

But there was also a good thing that Jesus told us about—a good thing that will happen as the end of the world gets closer. Jesus said, “And the gospel must first be preached to all nations” (Mark 13:10). “Gospel”—do you know what that word means? It means “good news”. Jesus told us that before this world ends, good news will be proclaimed. Good news amid all the bad news.

That good news is what we will focus on for a few minutes today. Today we receive this comforting promise from God: **The Good News Will Be Proclaimed!** This will happen in every age and to every nation.

Oh, we haven't forgotten that today is the Festival of the Reformation. There is a connection between this part of the Bible and the Reformation. Listen for that in just a minute.

The Good News Will Be Proclaimed!

In every age

The Book of Revelation has some wild stuff in it. The book is a written record of a series of visions that God gave to John, the disciple and apostle of Jesus, late in his life. In Revelation, Jesus foretells what will happen in the age we are living in now and what will happen when he comes in glory. Only Jesus does not foretell these things in the way he spoke to his disciples previously. We heard him being very straightforward with his disciples in Mark 13: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines” (Mark 13:8). But here in Revelation he communicates in a different way. For instance, we could take a look at Revelation chapters 12 and 13 (if you'd like, you can follow along with the chapter headings in your Bibles):

- In Revelation 12, Jesus pictures an enormous, seven-headed red dragon. The dragon is chasing a woman, trying to kill her. But the woman narrowly escapes, and the dragon cannot destroy her. The woman is God's family, the Christian Church. The dragon is—can you guess?—Satan. This is Jesus' way of telling us that the devil will try to wipe out

Christians, but God will rescue them. Christians of the past who read this got the point. They knew what it was to suffer because of their loyalty to Jesus.

- In the 13th chapter of Revelation, Jesus pictures a giant beast rising out of the sea. This beast wants to destroy the church. We find out as we read that this beast represents governments in the world that try to hurt or even destroy God's family. Ask our fellow Christians in some parts of the world if this can ever happen. I know some Christians who live in what used to be communist East Germany. The government made it hard for them to practice their faith.
- Jesus goes on to picture another beast, this one rising out of the sea. This beast stands for religious powers in the world. They look good. They even look like they're our friends. But really they are enemies of Jesus, because they don't tell the truth about him. Instead these religious powers lead people away from God. Are these at work in the world? Yes. Non-Christian religions are gaining strength, and there is plenty of poisonous false teaching even in Christian churches. With all these pictures Jesus warns us of real dangers that are present right now.
- But then comes Revelation chapter fourteen, the one we're looking at today. Here Jesus brings us good news: he pictures all his people safe in heaven, their final destination. All who believe in Jesus will be saved from the terrifying things he has just described. In Revelation 14:1-5, Jesus pictures the final outcome, and it's a glorious one for all whose sins have been washed away by his blood.

Then we get to our verse, verses 6 in chapter fourteen. This verse tells us what God is doing before the end of the world to save people. Listen again to Revelation 14:6: Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. An angel is a messenger, someone delivering a message from God to the people on earth. This messenger is delivering a special message to people: the eternal gospel. Remember again what "gospel" means. It means "good news", specifically, the good news about Jesus.

The main point that Jesus is making through this vision is the same one he made to his disciples: Before the end comes, "The gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10). No matter what is happening in the world, no matter how much evil there is, God will see to it that there is still good news to be heard. And this is good news that will never go out of date. It is an "eternal gospel".

The date was February 22, 1546. I imagine it was a cold day in northern Germany. Thousands of people solemnly walked the streets of the city of Wittenberg, all the way to the Castle Church. It was on the door of this church that a young monk named Martin Luther had nailed an invitation to debate some 28 years before. Now this same Martin Luther was being buried. People packed the church. They listened as Luther's pastor, Johann Bugenhagen, delivered the sermon. During the sermon, the people heard the pastor refer to this Bible verse: Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth... That's right—the same verse of the Bible we are looking at today. Pastor Bugenhagen recognized that something of major, worldwide importance was happening at the time of Luther. God was at work. God was restoring the good news about Jesus to a prominent place in the church.

You see, the centuries before Luther lived were dark times. You could go to a Christian church all your life and never hear a clear proclamation of the good news, the gospel. When people came to church looking for peace with God, they were often told essentially to do their best and hope for the best. They were told to do whatever they could to please

God and then to hope that God would accept them. That was not very good news. At best, people lived wondering whether they were good enough for God. At worst, they died in despair.

God used Martin Luther and others like him to bring good news back to people. God brought Luther to understand that it wasn't his own works that brought him peace with God, but rather it was the work of Jesus.

Thanks to what God did through Luther and many others before and after him, we can hear the gospel today. The good news that once was hidden is uncovered and made known to us. It is the good news that even though we are sinners who have angered God, even though we have gone against God and committed crimes against him, he still loves us anyway. And he forgives all our sins. The good news is that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, suffered the death penalty on a cross to pay for all of our sins. The good news is that Jesus is risen from the dead and alive right now. The good news is that we have peace with God. And this is not because of the good things we have done, but all because of what Jesus had done. God promises to keep this good news alive, no matter what happens.

A question: why is there a date stamped on a gallon of milk? It's the expiration date, right? After a certain time, the milk is no good anymore. Imagine a gallon of milk that never expired. Every time you drank, it would be as fresh and as healthy as the day it came out of the cow. Hard to imagine, right? Everything in this world expires. Except for this: the good news about Jesus. This good news never goes out of date. It is as true today as when Jesus announced it, as when Paul preached it, as when Luther taught it. We have peace with God through Jesus Christ. The good news will be proclaimed in every age—including ours—until Jesus comes. Today, let's thank God for that.

To every nation

There's another part to what God tells us in this verse from Revelation, something about the people who hear the good news of Jesus: Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. Not only is the good news something that will never go out of date, but it is a message that is for all people everywhere.

Today the red paraments are on the altar. Do you remember the last time these were up here? It was in June, on the Festival of Pentecost. On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose on Easter morning, God told people from all nations about Jesus. Even after Pentecost, many Christians thought that the message about Jesus was only for Jewish people, people who knew the Bible and its promises. But then God sent his apostles out into all parts of the world to share good news with everybody, Jew and Gentile alike.

For the last two thousand years, God has been doing that. Often it's one at a time, one Christian person telling one other person about Jesus. Now you'll find the good news about Jesus in central Africa, in Hong Kong, in Australia, in Indonesia, in Japan, in Russia, in Colombia and even in California. That's no accident. Luck has nothing to do with it. The good news has come to us because of God's grace and power. He has made sure that we heard it, even though we are of a different nation, tribe, people and language than the first believers.

And God is still at work bringing his good news to people all around the globe. He uses us to do it. Part of every Sunday's offering goes to support missionaries around the world

who tell people about Jesus in all the countries I just mentioned and more. Think of that; this cosmically important work of bringing good news that gives people life—God makes us a part of it!

Last summer, our church body met in convention. Representatives of 400,000 WELS members from around the world gathered to discuss the work we do together and to set priorities and direction for that work. One of the resolutions that came from the convention was this: that for the next four years we prioritize North American outreach with the gospel. That is, we direct our energy and resources primarily to telling the good news to people on our continent.

Does that sound right? I mean, shouldn't we tell the gospel to people in other nations like the verse from Revelation says? Well, we will certainly continue our overseas outreach work. But we in California know something, don't we? We know that in our state you will find people from every nation, tribe, people and language! God is bringing them right to us. We have opportunities to tell them good news.

Here's one exciting example. For many years, pastors in our church body have been sharing the gospel with people of the Hmong culture. Many of these people, who came from war-torn countries like Cambodia and Laos, live in the Minneapolis area. Hmong culture is very family-oriented. I've been told that there are only eighteen clans in the Hmong culture, eighteen large families. Well, many of these people who are now Christians are saying that they have relatives, people in their clans, who would be open to hearing about Jesus. And do you know where many of them live? In Sacramento and Fresno, California! Right in our backyard. We may have an opportunity to reach out to these people with the good news of Jesus, without even leaving our country. And even more—do you know what the Hmong believers do when they learn of Jesus? They, on their own, send missionaries back to Southeast Asia to tell their relatives there about him!

"End Time" is what we call this season in church. And we are in the end time. As Jesus told us this morning, before he comes in glory there will be wars and bloodshed in the world. Yesterday we heard of two more US soldiers being killed in Iraq. Jesus told us there will be natural disasters as the end draws near. Last week fires raged in Southern California, destroying thousands of homes and killing many people. Jesus told us that there will be fraudulent religions vying for our attention. Surf the Internet for half an hour and I guarantee you'll find many of these. What Jesus predicted is happening now; bad things are taking place in the world.

But don't forget the good news. God promises, amid all the bad things that are happening, to tell us over and over again, through his Word and through his Sacraments, that we have peace with him through Jesus. He kept that message alive in the past, a message that is for all time. And he keeps it alive today. Let's thank him for that. And, fueled by his good news, let's recommit ourselves to sharing it with people from every nation, tribe, people and language. Amen.