

Reformation Sunday
October 31, 2021
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Revelation 14:6-7
The Gospel for All Time and All People

Revelation 14:6–7 (NIV84)

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. ⁷ He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

Dear Friends in Christ,

We celebrate the Lutheran Reformation today. We thank the Lord for clearing away the false teachings and corruption that had buried the true gospel so that we can more clearly see that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, revealed to us by Scripture alone. To God alone be the glory!

Martin Luther lived the early years of his life with a different view of the gospel. 500 years ago in Europe, the Roman Catholic Church reigned over the teachings of Scripture. Luther was taught to believe that Jesus Christ was a new lawgiver, that the gospel was another set of rules Jesus brought so that one could keep God’s commands and earn eternal life. Luther understood the second verse of our passage from Revelation today. He understood that Jesus was coming back and everyone would bow before him in fear. Luther was terrified of Christ. He even wrote that at one point he hated God for demanding perfect obedience, righteousness, from us.

Luther did not yet know the eternal gospel. To him and to many at his time, the gospel was a burden Christ put upon people instead of the free grace of God that forgives sinners through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Many Christians 500 hundred years ago just went along with whatever the church said. It was too difficult to be perfect but it wasn’t too hard to show up for confession once in a while. They could throw a few coins in the chest and get a piece of paper authorized by the pope himself that told them that they were not going to suffer for their sins after they died. But Luther’s conscience bothered him so that he could not accept the easy ways out of sin offered by the church.

How wonderful it was when the Lord revealed the eternal gospel to Luther. How wonderful it was when Luther realized that the gospel was not a demand of him but a promise that Jesus is for him. The eternal gospel set him free from guilt and sin because the gospel is always what God has done for sinners through Christ and not what sinners do for Christ. And this gospel applied to Luther. This eternal gospel is also for you and for all people.

The Eternal Gospel

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.

In John’s vision, God showed him an angel who proclaimed the gospel to the world. At Jesus’ birth, an angel proclaimed the gospel to a handful of shepherds in the field. We don’t know if this was the same angel but we do know the good news proclaimed in both cases is the same. The gospel is eternal. The good news about how God saves sinners has been the same from the time of the first sin. God does not

change the gospel message from generation to generation. It has always been that God saves sinners by grace, through faith.

Adam and Eve received the unconditional gospel in a promise after they sinned. They had not even repented before the Lord announced that he would send them a Savior, the offspring of woman, to destroy the devil. While they were still sinners, God promised a Savior. They had faith in God's promise of a Savior and are saved.

And then there is Noah. Some might think that Noah and his family were saved from the world wide flood because they were righteous. They kept God's commands and they were saved because of their obedience. But it was God's favor, his grace, that chose Noah and family to save on the ark. You see it clearly when Noah gets off the ark. After such a great deliverance by the Lord, Noah soon plants a vineyard, makes some wine and gets drunk. This sinner was saved from the flood and was given eternal life by God's unconditional gospel promise of a Savior, not because he had earned or deserved it.

Abraham was not righteous before God because he did so many good things. Many of his sins are recorded for us in Genesis. But God credited him with righteousness through faith. Abraham believed God's promises of many descendants and that one of his descendants would be the Savior. Through faith in God's promise of a Savior, Abraham was counted as righteous.

King David's sins were known to many at his time and to all of us now. And the prophet Nathan announced the unconditional gospel to him. "The Lord has taken away your sin" (2 Sam 12:13). No conditions added. No "when you do this..." or "if you do that." The sinner is forgiven by God's undeserved love, by grace alone.

Peter did not want Jesus to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die. Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times while Jesus was on trial. And Peter was forgiven by Christ. Peter did not deserve or earn the forgiveness. It was by grace he was saved, through faith in Christ alone.

Paul hated those who had faith in Christ. He persecuted them and had some executed. He did not want to investigate the claims of the Christians about Jesus. Instead, he wanted to eliminate any mention of Jesus as the Christ from Judea. And Jesus brought Paul to faith. It was only by grace that Paul believed and was saved.

This wonderful, unchanging, eternal gospel will endure on this earth until Jesus returns in glory. Certainly, there are times when the true gospel looks to be lost. But there is always a remnant that believes and confesses salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. This gospel has come to you. What comfort there is in knowing that the gospel message has not changed. God is not going to change his mind about the gospel for you either.

God does not save you by grace in baptism and then change the rules so that you have to do your part to save yourself now. God does not change the gospel after you are confirmed as if salvation is by grace up to that point and now you need to add some good works.

A young child in a high chair will throw food on the floor and smear it all over their face. That is cute. But if a 12 year old does the same thing, you might hear one of these: "You should know better!" As we grow in God's Word, we also should know better. But we don't. No matter how long we have been a Christian we still sin in ways that we should have known better. We are still drawn into sin by the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. We should know better. We should do better. If we think God's eternal gospel has changed for us since we are strong Christians, that we were saved by grace but now it is up to us to know and do better, then we will live in fear and terror of Christ's return to judge.

The unconditional gospel has not changed. You are forgiven only by the grace of God in Christ, who suffered and died for you. When you fall into sin, return to Christ and he will forgive you again. Return to his Word. Return to the sacrament of Holy Communion. The gospel is still free and still frees us from sin. It always has and always will.

The Gospel for All People

And this gospel is for all people.

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.

The devil, the secular world and the false religions of this world continually attempt to keep the people of the world from the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ. In John's vision he saw the devil as the dragon in Revelation 12. The dragon attempted to destroy the infant Jesus and all who believed in the Savior. In Revelation 13 John sees two beasts that attempt to destroy any who have faith in Christ. One beast represents the secular powers of this world, the anti Christian governments and authorities that keep people from Christ and persecute believers. The other beast is the false teachers and religions of this world. These attempt to distort and twist and eliminate the truth of the eternal gospel so that no one will trust in Christ. Luther reminds us to pray in one of our hymns today:

*Lord, keep us steadfast in your Word; Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would seek to overthrow your Son And destroy what he has done. (CW 203:1)*

The enemies of the gospel are powerful and numerous but the Lord assures us that the eternal gospel is still for all people – to every nation, tribe, language and people. This means that we cannot judge all the people of a nation as unbelievers and pagans. The gospel is for every nation. We cannot look at tribes and ethnic groups in this world and think the gospel must have skipped that group. The gospel is for every tribe. We cannot assume that people who speak certain languages will never believe in Christ. The gospel is for the people of every language. The dragon is speaking when we put limits on the gospel.

Sometimes the dragon attacks us by getting us to assume limits to the gospel for ourselves. He tells us things like, "You've gone to far into sin this time. You didn't even hesitate to jump into that sin with both feet. You even enjoyed that sin and bragged about it. Sure, the gospel is for everyone who tries not to sin, but God's grace isn't for you." The dragon is that ancient serpent who lied to Eve and continues to lie to you. Don't listen to his limiting of the gospel. Listen to the angel's message, God's message – the eternal gospel is for every nation, tribe, language and people. The gospel is for you.

Hold to this eternal gospel of forgiveness by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone until Jesus returns. When we know his grace and mercy, we do not need to live in terror at his return but instead we will give him glory and praise on that day. For our God has saved us through Christ.

[The angel] said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

Amen.