



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

August 30, 2009

Pastor Ott's 20 Years in Ministry

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Pastor Ross Henzi

First Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 100

Second Lesson: Colossians 3:16-17

Gospel: Mark 8:34 – Mark 9:1

It's All about Jesus

In this place you hear of Christ crucified

In this place you see the Spirit's power

Let me ask you this, do you believe the Lord has blessed this congregation? That's okay, you can nod your head, raise your hand, shout out your answer. Do you believe the Lord has blessed this congregation? (Yes.) Alright, let it be known the vast majority here at least seems to agree. The Lord has blessed this place.

But have you ever wondered this? Why is this congregation so blessed? Some of you may be so bold to answer by saying, "You know what Pastor Henzi? I'll tell you. If you really want proof that the Lord has blessed this congregation, it's really pretty easy. All you have to do is consider the fact that we've been around for 147 years. That should tell you something. Since we've been around so long, it must prove that we're doing something right."

Somebody else might say, "If you want proof that the Lord has blessed this congregation, all you have to do is take a look at the church. It's a beautiful building. Built in 1927, and it has been lovingly cared for and preserved ever since."

Someone might say, "Take a look at the addition we put onto the school to handle the growth that we've been experiencing. That says something right there."

Someone else might say, "Well if you want proof the Lord has blessed this congregation, all you have to do is take a look at the people themselves." Someone could say of this congregation, "They're very warm and gracious and caring. They love to sing, and they're really good at baking pies."

Then finally, someone else might say, "If you want proof the Lord has blessed this congregation, all you have to do is look at the fact that we've been blessed with a faithful pastor. He's a good preacher. He's down to earth and easy to talk to." Isn't that in fact one of the reasons why we're here today? To give thanks to God for Pastor Ott's 20 years of service in the pastoral ministry – first in Minnesota, and now here in Morrison.

If you were to answer any one of those or give any one of those answers, you'd be right, those are all plausible answers; but I think there's a better one. I think there is another

answer that really gets to the very root of the issue. That is this – I would like to offer that the reason why the Lord has blessed this congregation is not because of your longevity, not because of your beautiful buildings, your wonderful people, or your faithful pastor. The reason God has blessed the people and the ministry here at Zion Morrison is simply this. It's because the people here have been led to know it's all about Jesus. In this place, you hear of Christ crucified. And in this place, you see the spirit's power.

Our text for this morning is part of the apostle Paul's first letter to the Christians gathered in the city of Corinth. Corinth was a fascinating city and it was inhabited by a very gifted people. Early in the letter Paul writes, "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge." Gifted, yes, but the church at Corinth, as we know, also had a lot of issues. As we read on, we find out that many of the problems that the church of Corinth faced are many of the same problems that we face today. Problems like spiritual immaturity, division within the church, jealousy and envy, lawsuits, marital difficulties, sexual immorality and the misuse of spiritual gifts. So now Paul writes to this congregation in order to instruct and to restore. And the way that he did it was by keeping his message simple.

The church at Corinth was certainly heavily influenced by Greek culture at the time, which also included the pursuit of worldly wisdom. Now the apostle Paul, he also was a very educated man, and he could have more than held his own in debate with the people, but he chose not to do that. He resolved to keep it simple. He wrote, "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

Paul understood that the message that he was to share was all about Jesus, and nothing but Jesus. He knew that the only thing that would change hearts, the only thing that would lead people to repent of their sins and be assured of a home in heaven was faith in Jesus as the Savior. So everything he did, everything he said, it all resolved around Christ with both passion and patience. He told the people how Christ died, Christ rose again, and how one day he will come again. God sent Paul to Corinth in order to share his message, and he also inspired him to write this letter.

In a similar fashion, Pastor Ott has been sent by God to this congregation. He too has been commanded by God to preach nothing but Christ crucified. What do you know about Pastor Ott? I'll help you out. Like Paul, Pastor Ott is also a very educated man. He has a very quick mind. He is a voracious reader. He also possesses the ability to speak both passionately and eloquently about the truths of Scripture. But he's not here to impress you with his eloquence. He speaks passionately, yet simply and clearly, for he too has resolved to know nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And there's a reason for that. That is because your pastor understands it's not about him. He's been led to understand that everything we believe in, everything we hope for, absolutely everything revolves around Jesus.

It is in this beautiful place, in this house of worship that you hear about Jesus as your Savior. It is in this place that you hear how Jesus gave his life in payment for your sins. It is in this place you hear how Jesus died, he rose again, and will one day come again. It is in this place you hear that you have been justified; you have been saved by grace through faith. Isn't that what you hear when you gather for worship? And that is the same message the rest of your staff shares in your elementary school and in your Sunday school. In this place you hear the message of Christ crucified taught in your Confirmation classes and in your Bible classes. It's what you hear during weddings and what you hear during funerals. Everything you do, everything that is said is all about Jesus.

But unfortunately the message of Christ crucified is not the only thing that you hear in churches across this country and throughout the world. Unfortunately there are a great many preachers and churches who deny that the Bible is verbally inspired. They deny it is God's Word, true in every part. And these pseudo intellectuals have somehow convinced themselves that they are the far more enlightened age, and therefore they believe what their itching ears want to hear.

For example, just last week the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the largest Lutheran church body in America voted to allow active homosexuals to serve in the preaching ministry within the church. The very fact that Scripture is quite clear about that subject doesn't seem to register with them. Thank the Lord that's not taught in this place. You know it. Your neighbors know it too.

Again, isn't that one of the reasons why we are here today? We are here to give thanks to God because he has sent a man to this place that is faithful to all of God's work, someone who preaches nothing but Christ crucified. Granted, Pastor Ott is not perfect. He'd be the first one to admit it. However, he has proved to be faithful. And God has certainly blessed this congregation.

Now you might say, "How in the world can you say that Pastor Henzi? You're not around here on a regular basis. How can you say God has blessed this place?" The answer is this, when the message is all about Jesus, that's when you see the Spirit's power.

Listen again to the words of Paul. He said, "My message and my preaching were not with persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." Paul was someone who got to see the Holy Spirit's power working through the Word. He saw the Spirit's power in his own life.

In his former life, Paul was someone who persecuted the church. But then one day, on the road to Damascus, the Lord called him into service. He himself went from being a sinner to a saint. And Paul also saw the Spirit's power working in his own work. Paul was enabled by God to cast out demons and to heal people. He also saw the Spirit's power work miracles in the lives of others, both Jews and Gentiles alike. He was

privileged to be able to share the Gospel and stand back in humble awe and watch as God worked the miracle of faith in people's hearts. Paul was gifted to be able to see some extraordinary things. He was gifted to be able to see individuals leave their former lives of sin and immorality and now confess Jesus to be the Christ. He saw the Gospel spread throughout the Mediterranean world. He saw Christian churches grow and thrive despite persecution. He saw the Gospel compel people to do some amazing things. And again, he realized it wasn't because of him. Paul knew that he was used by God to serve as his tool to carry out his work and his will.

So now I have to ask you. Have you seen the Spirit's power work in your life? Have you seen the Spirit's power working inside this congregation? Have you seen it? I bet you have. The Spirit's power is visible every time there is a Baptism. For in Baptism, faith is created in that little one and our faith is strengthened through the promise it provides. You see the Spirit's power every time we gather for worship. We have an opportunity to confess our sins and receive the assurance our sins have been forgiven for Jesus' sake. You witness the Spirit's power every time you come up here to the Lord's altar to receive Christ's body and blood together with his bread and wine for his personal promise that he has paid the price that your sins demand. You've witnessed the Spirit's power every time you are in the Word, whenever you are in a Bible class. I'm telling you, sometimes it's almost like you get to see a light bulb go off in people's heads and hearts as Scripture is made more clear to them.

You've also witnessed the Spirit's power in your own lives as the Lord now leads you in loving service to him, whether it's singing in the choir, serving on the Council, a Board or Committee, whether you are cutting the lawn or shoveling snow, whatever it may be. You've also seen the Spirit's power working in your own heart because that's what motivates you to give of your offerings and service to the Lord's work while on this earth.

You've seen the Spirit's power. I know you have. And God has accomplished amazing things in this place. And again, it's not because of anything we have done. It's all about Jesus.

That doesn't mean that you still don't have work to do. If this congregation is anything like my congregation, there are still people who are straying from the means of grace, God's Word and Sacraments. There are still empty seats in Bible class. There are still friends and neighbors that we could invite to be with us in worship. And I'm sure there are still those who have yet to experience the grace of giving.

So my encouragement for you today is to give thanks to God for the blessings that you have received, and then set about to carry out that work the Lord has laid out for you to do. Keep Pastor Ott and the rest of your staff in your prayers. Pray that they remain in the Word. Pray that they remain faithful in their calling. Then seize the opportunities that the Lord provides for you to be in the Word.

I've known Pastor Ott for a long time. From time to time, we do get together, both professionally and socially. And we often talk about the work the Lord has called us to do. You may not know this, but Pastor Ott can get pretty excited. Or maybe you do know. But I'll tell you this; he gets pretty excited when he begins to talk about the blessings that take place in this congregation. He gets really excited when he talks about maybe there was a special worship service where something new was tried, or maybe there is a Bible class and he sees you, his people, respond. He gets excited because he sees the Spirit's power at work in you.

You know, it is wonderful that you have chosen today to honor Pastor Ott for his 20 years of service in the Lord's kingdom. And it is a privilege to be able to be here and worship with you today. Today is a day to give thanks. The Lord has certainly blessed this congregation. And again, the Lord has blessed this congregation, not because of your longevity, not because of your beautiful buildings, your wonderful people, and your faithful pastor. The Lord has blessed this congregation because you, the people, have been led to see it's all about Jesus. That's what makes this the place to be.