

“The Kingdom is Yours Through Faith”

Luke 10:1-20

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Back in the old West, as settlers began to move beyond the Mississippi River, one of the key features of that land rush was that all they had to do was simply write their name on a stick and stake it on the place they wanted to call home. That land became their property by their own doing, and by their action of writing their own name in history. They were proud and making a name for themselves, establishing their own “kingdom,” as it were, as they realize their manifest destiny. Despite the reality that Scriptures teaches the opposite when it comes to the faith, this mentality is pervasive throughout modern Christianity. “Name it, and claim it,” is the mantra of the neo-evangelical in today’s world. This feeds the reality of their sinful nature, turning them in toward the self instead of having their hearts turned toward Christ. The kingdom of God is not yours by virtue of your “staking claim” to its riches, but the kingdom is yours through faith.

In a world corrupted by sin, death, and the power of the devil, it is easy for even the strongest in the faith to find reason to boast in themselves. Even in times when you tell others that you give “all glory to God,” there is still that seed of evil, your Old Adam that lives in you, that is whispering in your ear and patting you on the back for what you have done. This is a danger that could easily take hold of the disciples in our text this morning, and so Jesus points them to the true reality of their work, which is His work of salvation for all mankind, and their election to that salvation. It is not the miraculous works they performed, but the faith in Christ which they proclaimed that brings to light the reality of the Kingdom. And this naturally leads to a discussion about faith and works, and the appropriation of salvation to all who believe.

Dr. Arthur Just writes in his Concordia Commentary on verse 20, “The authority to tread upon snakes and scorpions and power over the enemy should not puff them up to seek visible achievements. Pride and a theology of success would be tools Satan could use to attack them and thwart true ministry.” This is a constant battle for the true Christian today. What Dr. Just brings out here is precisely what the majority of the Christian denominations teach in our society. They puff themselves up to believe that they have the power. They are the “masters of their own destinies” and if they want anything from God, all they have to do is claim it for themselves. The world has corrupted them into believing that there is more for them to do to secure what Christ has so freely given by His death.

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Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (7/6/2025); Luke 10:1-20

Any inclination that exists which gives credit for God's work of salvation to the work of man is evil, corrupt, and sinful. It is a tool of the devil, and your sinful flesh will simply not allow you to work for the good of your faith. It wants you to abandon your faith in favor of the things of the world, because those are the things that will keep you "happy and fulfilled" as you live your life to the fullest. But there is nothing you can do to fulfill yourself in this life without the work of Christ to mark you as His own child. You know that well from the words of Luther's Small Catechism, where it says in the explanation of the third article of the Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith."

Faith in Christ, not any work of sinful man, is what will take the people of God to the end goal—the goal of entrance into His heavenly Kingdom. It is only by the death of Christ on the bloody cross of atonement that you have your names written for you in heaven. And God Himself has written your names in the blood of the Lamb, and sealed them in the book of life in the blood covenant of Christ's death for the salvation of all mankind. Your works do nothing to accomplish this grace from your heavenly Father. He has done all the work that is necessary to secure the salvation that is assured for you by being His chosen child and heir to the kingdom. The Lord gives it, and your faith receives it.

The Greek word used in our text for "has been written" is a passive verb, meaning it is not being written by the disciples, but being written on their behalf. It is important to understand that their names have been written in heaven by the grace of God alone. All of the mighty works which they did when going out into the world – the casting out of demons, the healing of the sick, the proclamation of the Gospel – did not earn them the proverbial pen stroke that put their names into the book of life. It is by His authoritative sacrifice that their names will be written in heaven, written in the blood of Jesus who has redeemed the world. That is the true joy that these men ought to be focused on. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

And yet, Jesus commends the disciples for their amazing works, giving them "kudos" as it were, by saying, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." The Word which they proclaimed, given to them by the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, was so powerful that Satan himself is defeated by it along with his armies of demons. The message that He sends with the seventy-two, the message that the Kingdom of God has come in His person, will continually defeat Satan, death, and sin until He comes again in

glory. And anyone who rejects that message rejects not only Him, but His Father who sent Him. The power of the Word made flesh goes forth with them as they proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and this is a power that is manifested by God, working through His called servants who go out before Him and herald that the Kingdom of God is here.

So, to remind them of the source of their power, Christ immediately tempers His praise by reminding the disciples that it was not of their own will and words that these things happened. If you look back at verse 19, Jesus tells them that it is by His authority that they do these miraculous works, and His alone. He is the author and performer of these mighty deeds, acting through the spoken words of the men whom He sent out to proclaim the Kingdom to be near. And the Kingdom belongs to all who would hear the Word of God in faith and believe that Jesus stands before them as the reality of that Kingdom. This is affirmed by Paul in our Epistle lesson, where he writes in Galatians 6:14, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” You are “otherworldly” as those who are in Christ Jesus, and so your works which flow from faith will look and seem different than the “good works” of the world.

But your works certainly do matter. If they did not then you would not see in James 2:17 that faith without works is dead. You have been given the gift of a living faith, a faith that is given to serve one another in response to that gift. Your works done in love for your neighbor are the fruits of your faith, which believes in the salvation Jesus brings to you. But those works do not write your names in heaven, and they do not create faith or salvation. This is the important distinction being made by Jesus in our text. This is a “hard-stop” point of Christian doctrine that you cannot ignore. You do not earn your names being written in heaven — you do not earn your salvation. It is given to you as a free gift for the sake of Christ. This is the firm foundation of your faith, and this can be seen going back even to the patriarch Abraham, where in Genesis 15:6, “He believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness.”

The timeless Word of God carries with it tremendous power everywhere it goes, and that power manifests itself in the deeds of the men who proclaim it. But the true reality, beyond all works of man, is that this power would be an utter weakness without the Holy Spirit bringing forth faith in Christ through the divinely revealed and inspired Word. It is here, and in all churches that profess the one true faith, that this holy Word can always be found to be proclaimed. The Kingdom of God is here among us every time the Word is spoken and heard, stirring hearts to faith in Christ. This work of the Spirit, not the work of man, is the catalyst which brings people into the fold of the Kingdom.

And this message, as is the case in all Scripture, is timeless, and still applies to you today in Christ's church. Too often, it is seen across the world that people are moving away from God and His mighty Word of authority, and it is to the detriment of their faith. They lean on their reason and try to justify their faith before men, rather than proclaiming the faith with which God has blessed them. In a world filled with sin and evil, which is seen in every corner of the earth, the Word of God remains as “a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” as we read in Psalm 119. Contained in His Word, you find the clear truth of your justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. This is what the disciples in our text were delivering to the people; calling them, by the work of the Spirit, to believe that the Son of God has come into the world.

And, having proclaimed the Kingdom to those to whom they were sent to proclaim it, the seventy-two returned joyously, giving credit to Jesus' name for the miraculous acts they performed along the way. Your Lord and Savior quickly reminds them that the true joy, the true treasure of their journey, is not that they performed these mighty deeds in His name, but that they are counted among the elect. They, and those who believed in Jesus by hearing the spoken Word, are chosen to inherit the Kingdom they proclaimed. Their names are written in heaven for eternity, sealed in the blood of the Lamb who was slain which has been shed for their salvation. And that, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is the true treasure of your journey as well. Your names are written in heaven and sealed in the book of life by the blood of Jesus Christ. Written and sealed by Him alone, for you, for me, and for all who have received the gift of faith in Him. Amen.