

2 Timothy 4:9-18.

⁹ Do your best to come to me quickly, ¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. ¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. ¹² I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. ¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments. ¹⁴ Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. ¹⁵ You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message. ¹⁶ At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. ¹⁷ But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

God strengthens us
Through mutual encouragement.
Through the power of his Word.

Reformation 500. In celebration of the 500th Anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the 95 theses, much has been made of this event, and rightly so. Movies have been made, documentaries produced, all sorts of educational and promotional materials have been churned out, with many different sources citing the importance of this event for social, political, and religious reasons. And in celebration of this anniversary people have come together. Large gatherings have taken place in the tiny German towns where Luther lived and wrote, taught and preached. Christians from around the world, and other interested onlookers have traveled to the birthplace of Luther, visited the Castle Church in Wittenberg to see the place where the 95 theses were once posted, and have traveled throughout the German countryside to take in other sites and sounds of the Reformation. Closer to home there have been gatherings of a celebratory kind throughout the Christian church as the world commemorates this historic event.

But it's not just about a moment in history is it. As we come together as Christians, as Lutherans, we come together around the Word of God, which has been rightly restored to the church. And that's why we are proud to bear the name. This is our Lutheran heritage that we celebrate: God's Word is present among us, we have access to this Holy Scriptures in our own language so that we may read, study, learn and know clearly what our God has to say to us.

And through that Word, God speaks to us sinners and tells us of his gracious plan to send his Son to save us. God's Word speaks to us and it tells us that we who deserve only death and hell because of sins are saved by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. God's Word speaks to us and tells us that we who were enemies of God by nature are made to be his

own. It assures that we who were slaves to sin and guilt have been set free to worship him, made God's children so that we may live for him and pray to him. God is with us. God loves us. God saves us and forgives us freely by his grace. We could never earn or buy such a status with God, but this is given to us as a gift. The Bible speaks this truth to us. We have access to this truth which tells us: that we are justified freely by God's grace, that we are given the righteousness that Christ won for us through his perfect life and his innocent death. God's Word has this wonderful power to create faith and it strengthens us in this saving faith as it declares: The righteous will live by faith. We gather around the Word of God that has been restored to the church and this is the Word that testifies about Christ. The cross of Jesus is at the very heart of the Bible and therefore it was at the very heart of the reformation for through the reformation God uncovered the truth that was once hidden by corrupted practice and false teaching. With the truth restored we are assured by God's own word that through the cross of Christ, and by the power of his empty tomb, we are made right with God, forgiven, and made heirs of eternal life. Freely given, clearly proclaimed, through the Word of God.

To have this word of God that so clearly declares that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone is reason to celebrate not just on milestone occasions, but every year, every week, every day, for that matter. It's good to come together around God's Word, and through the gathering around the word, God strengthens us through mutual encouragement. As children of God, our Father, strengthens us through the power of his Word. And through this Word the LORD assures us of his love and his presence among us.

Perhaps some of you were able to attend the local Reformation festival at Martin Luther college in New Ulm, MN last Sunday. Nearly 1200 people came together to celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation. What a joy to be gathered with so many for worship! What a joy to join together with those of common faith, to praise our God and Father with one voice! {We have chance to join together again this evening, November 5th in Renville for another festival celebration.} But even if you are not able to make it to those larger gatherings, what a joy to gather here today, with a few extra guests from St. John Lutheran School in Redwood Falls, to hear and study God's Word, to worship a God who has revealed himself to us in the Scriptures as our loving Father and Savior. We gather together as his dearly loved children and God strengthens our faith as we realize that we are part of something bigger than ourselves as we are members of his church, members of God's family, brothers and sisters in faith.

It is a good thing to come together as Christians around God's Word. Whether it is 1200 people, 20 people, or even 2 or 3, God blesses and strengthens our faith through mutual encouragement. And so, our lesson for today begins with this plea from one Christian to another, Paul calls out to Timothy, "***Do your best to come to me quickly.***" Paul was in jail. The end of his life was near, and he was lonely. Some of his fellow believers and friends had moved on due to necessity, some had gone on to further the cause of the gospel, other friends and colleagues have deserted him. He is in prison. He is in need. He senses that winter and his own death is near, and he could use the warmth of warm coat, and the warmth of encouragement, and some strengthening. And so, he asks his friend, his brother in the faith to come and to bring another Christian friend, if at all possible. ***Do your best to come to me quickly... Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.***

I can only imagine that Luther felt a little bit like Paul did, as he stood alone before that

Castle Church door. From his writings we know he was bold in his opposition to the practices within the church that were not in line with holy Scripture. But we can also deduce that he had his own reservations about standing out from the crowd, seemingly standing alone or at least in the drastic minority as he spoke out in his criticisms of the church. This solitary man, this unknown monk from a backwater town of Germany, was taking on the universal church of the day, of course he would have some reservations. However, according to God's good and gracious plan Luther would receive mutual encouragement from those who would read his writings and who would stand by his side as the reformation developed, spread, and grew. {Whenever we celebrate the Reformation it is a worthwhile exercise to get to know other figures that were pertinent to the Reformation: to learn about Elector Friedrich, Philip Melanchthon, George Spalatin, and others, who supported Luther and played their part.} Martin Luther was encouraged greatly by the presence of these supporters and collaborators. But how he must have still very much struggled with feelings of loneliness and self-doubt not just in 1517 but also in 1521 as he stood before the emperor himself in a room full of princes and church officials demanding that he recant his works and cease and desist in his writings, in his preaching, and his teaching. And yet he stood firm, for not only was Luther encouraged by those who had read his writings and supported this same cause, but he knew and believed that God was with him. He was willing to stand in these lonely situations because of the power of the Word of God, the Word strengthened him, the Word assured him that as a dear child of God the LORD was with him.

The Word of God has that power to strengthen and sustain the people of God. This was proven in front of that Castle Church door in 1517, it was proven in that room full of enemies at Worms in 1521, and countless other moments throughout the Reformation. Luther once made this statement about the Bible and its power to comfort and strengthen the people of God. *"The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me."* – LW vol 9, 24. By God's grace the Word of the Lord has the power to hold firm, to hold fast, to strengthen and sustain God's people even in the most difficult and the loneliest of circumstances.

It very much seems that Paul sought out the same type of encouragement from Holy Scripture. For not only did he request that good Christian friends would come to his side, but he asked this of Timothy: ***"When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments."*** When Paul was very much alone he urged his friend to come to his side, to bring his cloak, but most importantly bring my scrolls, especially the parchments. It would very much seem that Paul was asking Timothy to bring him the Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament writings likely found on the older 'technology' of the scrolls, and possibly New Testament readings, letters, perhaps even the accounts and the words of Jesus, written on the newer and more expensive parchments, that were longer lasting writings that were written on animal skins. To have access to God's Word, to be encouraged by the promises of God, to be encouraged by the good news of Jesus, would have brought Paul great strength. For through his study of the Scriptures and his subsequent knowledge of his Lord Paul was blessed with a faith that could make this wonderful confession even in the bleakest of circumstances: ***But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue***

me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Through his Word, God speaks to us today as well. As he did for Paul, as he did for Martin Luther, the LORD speaks to us, he runs to us, he reaches out to flawed undeserving sinners like Paul, and Martin Luther, and you and me, and he wraps his loving arms around us and he assures us that he is with us.

There is a sense of unity, of numerical strength, that buzzes with the talk of Reformation 500. There is a bond of fellowship that is very tangible right now, as we hear about and attend these special gatherings, but that won't always be the case. It's not always Reformation 500. It won't always be such a talked about anniversary year. 6 days removed from October 31 and some of the excitement and celebration of the day has already started to fade, as we go on to the next thing, on to the next occasion, on to the next season. It is good to be in God's house, it's so encouraging to be here on a Sunday, but it is not always Sunday morning. As we go about our days, as we live out in the world, we notice that the world is not just coldly uninterested in what we believe, but and more and more it is actively hostile to our faith. Such opposition can very much make us feel alone, and that loneliness can weaken our faith, cause us to doubt, it may even lead us to reach out and seek comfort or protection in the arms of the world around us. Don't be like Demas, the man who Paul described in these words to Timothy, as a person who loved the ways of the world and therefore left his Christian friend behind! But rather like Paul, like Luther, be strengthened and encouraged as you read and study the word, as you seek out the encouragement and the strength of being with fellow believers, as you gather around the word of God as the family of God.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, know that the Lord is here with you. Jesus makes this promise to you: *Where two or three gather together in my name there am I with them.* Find refuge, God's love, purpose, and strength, within the fellowship of the church. Be strengthened by mutual encouragement as you come together for special gatherings, and for weekly worship. Come to each other's aid and be a source of encouragement for each other as you gather together for Bible study or as you share an encouraging word with a Christian friend. Enjoy the precious gift of Christian Education in a Lutheran school, value the importance of mutual Christian encouragement. Be strengthened by the Word as you sit down with your family and read the Scriptures together, as you study the God's Word through the use of the catechism - Father with child, mother with son or daughter, teacher with student. And as the Word is read, spoken, recited, and heard, know that the LORD is with you. Through his powerful Word he will rescue you from the doubts of your own sinful flesh, he will deliver you from every attack that the devil and this world can dish out.

You are not alone. The Lord is with us, his church, his children. Thanks to faithful servants of God like Martin Luther the LORD's Word is open among us and our Lord speaks to us. Through word and sacrament, our God, our Savior runs to us, and wraps his arms around us, and holds us close until he brings us safely to his heavenly kingdom. His word strengthens us, his promises sustain us, his grace and truth in Jesus saves us. What a joy it is to come together and celebrate these wonderful truths, to be strengthened in the faith until the day that our Savior delivers us to his heavenly kingdom. To God our Savior, be glory forever and ever. Amen.