

SERMON

Pastor James Bauman

Immanuel Lutheran Church - Bartlett, Illinois

Pentecost 16, C, September 28, 2025

Amos 6:1-7 1 Timothy 6:6-19 Luke 16:19-31

Text: From the Holy Gospel today-- the words of Abraham in the parable: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone would rise from the dead.”

What does it take for people to believe?

At another time in another place

- a Lazarus **did** rise from the dead--
- Lazarus, beloved brother of Mary and Martha.
- Lazarus, dear friend of Jesus.
- Jesus wept.
- Jesus raised him from death,
- just by commanding him to come out of his tomb.

The reaction of the Pharisees?

“If we let Him go on like this, He will have so many followers that the Roman authorities will decide to destroy our nation.”

A Lazarus rising from the dead

- did not change their hearts.
 - What DOES it take for people to believe?
- “The Word is all you will get,”
- Jesus tells the Pharisees in the parable we heard today.

That Word, which can seem so undramatic-

- so weak in comparison to the mighty powers which oppose it,
- so lowly in comparison to the grand MAJESTY of the message it proclaims,
- so hard at times for us to hear in faith.

“That Word is all you will get.”

Especially in this age when we delight in

- spectacular visual and sound effects
- in movies, at concerts, at half-times in football games,
- we are not easily impressed with mere words.

And how easily God’s past spectaculars are forgotten by His people.

- There was the CREATION,
- the greatest spectacular of all.

Stars exploding into life,

- fish swarming,
- birds flocking--
- and a man, a woman-- great complex wonders in themselves.

But soon Adam and Eve decided they were so wonderful

- that they could be like gods themselves--
- too proud to recognize their creator alone as God.

Then there was the drowning of wickedness in the GREAT FLOOD,

- so that things could begin fresh and new.
- But even that did not discourage the new wickedness
- of a Sodom and Gomorrah.

There was the spectacular EXODUS from Egypt.

- Lowly slaves set free against immeasurable odds,
- but soon they were murmuring against God
- even as He miraculously led them and fed them.

There was the frightening thunder and lighting,

- the dark clouds and the trembling at MT. SINAI,
- as God gave Moses the Law.

But how long did it take for the Law to be forgotten?

From the dawn of time God has acted in spectacular ways--

- and men and women have forgotten.
- They have decided, like Adam and Eve,
- that they are like gods instead,
- capable of living apart from Him--
- and even as judge over Him and His ways.

Let's think about our own lives.....

- How soon have YOU forgotten

- or explained away
- God's special, maybe even spectacular, actions in YOUR life,
- for YOU or possibly for someone for whom you prayed?

What does it take for people to believe, for US to believe?

Holy Scripture tells us that when God created things,

- they were all very good.

Then it was through humans,

- deceived by Satan,
- that evil came into the world,
- the evil which clouds and HIDES God from us.

Evil had its beginnings

- in humans refusing to recognize that God is God,
- no matter what He did...

We need to be careful about

- asking for another spectacular to rid us of evil.

If God were to do a new spectacular

- and destroy all the evil in the world,
- who of us would be left?

Evil has become a part of US as fallen sinners,

- attached to us,

- infiltrating our hearts,
- riddling our lives and relationships.

And so through the words of the prophets

- God's people began to hear of a new day
- when God would act in a completely new way
- to restore His creation,
- to bring it back to Himself.

There were these words from the prophet Jeremiah:

“Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- NOT LIKE the covenant I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant WHICH THEY BROKE..... This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel..... I will FORGIVE their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

When the time had come, God sent His only Son,

- the Word who was there at the spectacular beginning,
- through whom all things were made,
- but now wrapped now in baby flesh,
- His first home a barn.

As the prophet Isaiah had written,

- strangely He was NOT “spectacular”
- from a human point of view.

- He was oppressed and afflicted.

Like a lamb led to the slaughter,

- He was wounded for our transgressions.

- He was bruised for our iniquities.

-The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Very different, isn't it?

Different from God's using His almighty power

- to impress,

- to destroy evil by His almighty power,

- or to turn us all into robot-like creatures

- with no choice but to do His will.

We don't expect almighty God to act like that--

- a man dying on a Cross

- between two criminals

- is NOT very spectacular.

So Christ was in the world,

- and as St. John writes,

- the world was made by Him,

- yet the world did not know Him.

But He was God's Word in flesh!

He came to His own,

- but His own did not receive Him,

John continues.

“But as many as did receive Him He gave POWER to become children of God!”

And so He comes to us today--

- in all humility,
- knocking at the door as a beggar,
- pleading with us to see and to receive His love
- so that we MAY be enabled to believe and love in return.

Beggar-like words sometimes read in a stumbling fashion,

- falling from the lips of less than spectacular preachers.
- or maybe from a simple caring grandmother
- or a concerned Christian friend
- who may have difficulty finding the right words.

It's in such surprisingly lowly ways the Word so often comes.

- Yet we despise it at our peril.
- Just as the rich man despised Lazarus,
- we despise the Lord Jesus Himself
- as He comes beggar-like in His Word,
- and we ignore Him

- Comes like Lazarus, with His glory disguised.

In that often unimpressive Word,

- that Gospel,

- is the power of God for our salvation.

Recall what St. Paul once wrote:

“Jews want miracles for proof; Greeks look for wisdom..... We proclaim Christ, on the Cross, a message that is offensive to the Jews and nonsense to the Gentiles.... For what seems to be God’s foolishness is wiser than men’s wisdom, and what seems to be God’s weakness is stronger than men’s strength.”

There are ways of God that **are** beyond our human understanding.

- That is a difficult thing to accept for sinners

- who by nature **do** want to stand over God like His judges,

- to decide whether His ways are acceptable or not.

As difficult as it is,

- we need to be open to the possibility that

- we do **not** need all the answers to believe.

And there is nothing more beyond our understanding

- than the knowledge that the only Son of God has come among US--

- fully human--

- to suffer and die for us.

It is a profound mystery,

- but it's **true!**

Jesus Christ Himself is THE Truth as the Word of God in flesh.

- And this Christ-Word is still working wonders,

- working out a whole new creation--

- just as through Christ the first Creation was brought into being.

By this Word we can grow to be confident of

- God's care and love for each of us,

- in spite of what we may not be able to understand.

So confident that we can be free.

- Free to share ourselves and our possessions

- with the Lazarus at our own gates,

- trusting Christ's own promise that

- it is in the needs of others

- that we can meet Him,

- the Word made flesh,

- to love Him back.

He is there in others who need us

- even as He is for us to welcome and love

- in the swaddling clothes of His Word and Sacraments,

- in the preaching of the Cross that they proclaim.

“My sheep hear MY voice; and I know them; and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them away from Me.”

Spectacular? No. Dependable? Yes.

What we want? Sometimes, No. What we need? Yes.

And THAT Word is NOT AT ALL dependent on what WE think of it.

It is as the Lord said, speaking through Isaiah:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord.
“As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are My ways higher than your ways
and My thoughts than your thoughts.
As the rain and snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my Word that goes out from my mouth:
IT WILL NOT RETURN TO ME EMPTY,
BUT WILL ACCOMPLISH WHAT I DESIRE
AND ACHIEVE THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH I SENT IT.”

Isaiah 55:8-11

The Lord Jesus Himself has promised also you and me,

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but MY WORDS will NEVER pass away.

Matthew 24:35

And by that Word, the peace of God which far surpasses our human understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.

