

Sermon for Easter Sunday, Year A
St. Martin's Lutheran Church Gladstone
Calvary Lutheran Church Rockhampton
Living Waters Lutheran Church Yeppoon QLD.

“Taking God at His Word” Pastor Peter Noble
Acts 10:34-43

Brothers and Sisters I bring Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Let's Pray.

Heavenly Father. As you have ordained Christ to bear witness to you in both resurrection and proclamation. May we too be worthy to bear and fear your name, coming to new life through faith in your Son Jesus Christ and proclaim his death and resurrection to the world. In his name and for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Taking God at His Word

Faith—is the gift of God. So too is the air you breathe. But have you ever thought you have to breathe air both to receive it and receive its benefits. Bread also is a gift. Thus, you must also eat it to satisfy your hunger. Likewise, water in the same way is a gift. But a glass of water alone does nothing for you. ***Until you drink it,*** only then does it benefit you, quenching your thirst and nourishing your body, bringing life.

How then do we ***receive faith from God?*** Is faith what we feel when we read the Bible or hear a sermon? Personally, I don't think it is a feeling, for we know that “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the ***Word of Christ***” (Rom. 10:17). That is an objective faith. A faith that comes to you outside yourself. Is it for us to sit down and wait for faith to “come upon us with a strong kind feeling of some kind or another”? I would say no. Rather, faith comes to us when we—***take God at his Word.***

What about you? Do you sometimes find it hard to take someone at their word? What would it take for you to trust someone or take what they say in good faith? This is hard isn't it, in a world that's so full of mistrust and misinformation. “Fake news!” as President Trump would say.

Faith is the same as trust. I have faith that I would wake up this morning. I didn't know I would, but I trusted God's grace that It would be so. You too, have faith. Even if you're not a Christian. You have faith in WIFI, faith in internet connections to bring you this sermon. You can't see WIFI, but you believe it exists. And sometimes we know we can trust someone at their word because we like to know they wouldn't lie to us about important things. for example—

The 2am fire

I know of a true story where a Church member called a pastor at 2am screaming, "Pastor the Church is on fire!" The Pastor didn't need to be convinced that what the parishioner had said was true. He believed him straight away because of the urgency and desperate moment of fear and panic.

Fear of the unknown. Fear of not being in control. Fear in isolation. Fear of the Covid-19 health pandemic and global economic shut-down. Whatever your fear, you can name it.

Speaking into this fear Jesus also has a message for you and me, and the whole world. This message is that ***Jesus is the Son of God—and you can take him at his Word.***

Today on Easter Sunday as we celebrate the resurrection, you can take the Word of Jesus for three reasons today.

1. Anyone who fears God is acceptable to him.

2. God raised Jesus back from the dead.

and lastly:

3. Jesus is ordained by God to judge the living and dead.

Context

The background up to this point in Acts 10 is that Jesus has ascended into heaven. Pentecost has come. The Church is expanding explosively. Many Jews are coming to Jesus by faith. The Ethiopian Eunuch is baptized by Philip. Saul is converted. And now a Godfearing gentile called Cornelius has been remembered by God and has sent Peter the Apostle to his house to proclaim the Gospel of how God is saving not just the Jews, but the whole world—that is—both Jews and gentiles. (In other words. If you're not a Jew ethnically by birth, you are a gentile.)

Peter in Cornelius' house hears Cornelius' confession that God has remembered his prayers and alms giving to the poor, and that he was told by a man in bright

clothing of Simon Peter, a ‘tanner by the sea’ (Acts 10:32). Cornelius sent for him and here he is hearing of Cornelius’ confession of faith, **taking God at his Word**.

Let’s begin at v. 34 of Acts Ch. 10:

Gentiles Hear the Good News

*³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows **no partiality**, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who **fears him and does what is right is acceptable** to him. (ESV)*

1. Anyone who fears God is acceptable to him.

Up until this point in the book of Acts, God only gave salvation to the Jews. That is the nation of Israel. They are God’s chosen people. God’s elect. A nation elected through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Patriarchs. In the Old Testament you could not be saved unless you were **born into a Jewish family**. Unless you were born into the covenant, you could not be saved. You could say, it is **not a choice** but by **grace you are born into a Jewish family**. However, there are times when people are born outside of the Jewish covenant and find themselves in a moment of God’s grace, and grafted in. One example is Rahab the Spy (Joshua 2:1-24, 6:22-25).

Rahab was a Canaanite woman in the book of Joshua who assisted Jewish spies sent by Joshua to overthrow the city of Jericho. She is described as a prostitute but when she helps these spies she confesses to them “The LORD your GOD is God in heaven above and earth below” (2:11). Her faith in God later developed into a genuine commitment and she was certainly incorporated into the Jewish community later on (Josh. 6:25). I believe the book of Hebrews even remembers Rahab’s faith and righteousness where it says:

³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies. ¹(Heb. 11:31).

Another example is this man in our passage Cornelius.

Now what do we know about Cornelius? He is a Gentile. This is assumed as he was a Roman soldier. He is a man who does what is right in the eyes of God. He is one who **fears** God. The Greek word for fear has a few ranges, and this fear in our context is to denote a reverence-healthy, righteous fear towards God. (Greek: **φοβέομαι** trans. *fear, be afraid of; fear, be afraid (to do something); fear, worship,*

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Heb 11:31). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

reverence (God); *respect* (Eph. 5:33); intrans. *be afraid, be frightened*²)

Now Peter visits Cornelius' home and when he hears Cornelius' confession Peter now understands God does not show partiality. (**προσωπολήμπτῆς**, **οὐ μὴ** *one who shows favoritism*³). Up until now in the Old Testament God had only saved Israel. But he loves Israel all the same. In one sense God has a general love for the world, and in another sense God does not love the Philistines in the same way he loves Israel. Nor the Moabites. But God reveals himself in a special way to his chosen nation Israel. To Israel he reveals himself in a salvific way. And when he saves, he saves with the same love equally to each person he redeems.

In other words, in the New Testament, God does not have favorites amongst the Church. He does not look at Peter the Apostle and say, I love Peter more than Paul, or Andrew more than Thaddeus. No. ***He loves his people all the same.*** He does not show partiality or rank them by love and order, and he does *not* show favoritism.

*³⁶As for the **word** that he sent to Israel, **preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ** (he is Lord of all), ³⁷you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the **baptism** that John proclaimed: (Acts 10)*

Two comments. 1: God sent his Word to Israel. He does this through his prophets. In fact, I would go one step further to say God has not just proclaimed (or preached) the Word, but we now have the written Word (i.e. the Bible). And God sent Jesus the incarnate Word, the Word made flesh to the nation of Israel so that all might hear this “...**preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ** (he is Lord of all).” (v.36)

2: “...the **baptism** that John proclaimed” (v.37). Jesus' anointing began in his baptism. Unlike our baptism, i.e. all of God's people. Jesus' baptism was not to forgive his sin, for Jesus is sinless. But rather, God ordained him for this purpose. To receive the Holy Spirit objectively and now proclaim the Gospel which brings salvation. Again, Peter is grounding the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection in factual places geographically, and in real time and space that Cornelius and many others can bear witness to as they had seen Jesus.

² Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament*. (p. 194). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

³ Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament*. (p. 155). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

*³⁸ how **God anointed Jesus** of Nazareth with the **Holy Spirit and with power**. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.*

Notice ‘Holy Spirit’ and ‘power’. The Holy Spirit in the book of Acts and Jesus’ ministry is accompanied by the power of God. That is to say: proofs of Jesus’ messianic identity, that he is the Son of God. Healing the sick, the lame can walk, the blind can see, the oppressed hear the Good News in his name. Jesus went around performing these miracles and began undoing all the work the Devil had done. The kingdom of heaven is beginning to break into this world through the incarnate Word, who is baptized, anointed by God, and through God the Holy Spirit (the 3rd person of the Trinity) is healing all those oppressed by the Devil. **God is both with Jesus, and God is—Jesus.**

³⁹ And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree,

Besides being factually and historically true. The cross here is referred to as “a tree,” making a clear connection with the use of the same word (Greek: *xylon*) in the Septuagint translation of Deuteronomy 21:23, “**cursed by God is everyone who is hanged on a tree.**” Jesus was put in a position that the Old Testament says is “cursed by God,” thus taking on himself the penalty for sin. (See Galatians 3:13.) Jesus who died on Good Friday has made peace with God for the World. Atonement. *Shalom* in the Hebrew (**PEACE** שָׁלוֹם , *shalom*; εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*)⁴.

⁴⁰ but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, ⁴¹ not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

My second point.
You can take God at his Word because—
2. God raised Jesus back from the dead.

Not only does Jesus suffer and die a horrible unjust trial and crucifixion, but by the power of God’s Spirit is raised to life again after three days in the tomb. Jesus appears not to all people, but only those chosen by God as witnesses. Only ones who he intimately reveals himself with. Only those who he has chosen. I believe this eating and drinking is a reference to Holy Communion as it is in Luke’s Gospel. (Luke 24:13-35 esp. vv. 30-31). It is in the “breaking of bread” God reveals Christ to us in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The Lord’s Supper is

⁴ Greever, J. M. (2016). Peace. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

where Christ gives his body and blood *for you*.

Notice who Jesus is not revealed to. Not those outside the Church. Outside the covenant. Not those who *do not fear God*. God does not reveal himself to these people. But only those that fear his name (i.e. Cornelius! cf. Rahab the Prostitute). Those who trust in him. Those who trust in his Son's testimony of God, those who are baptized and have repented of their sins.

Maybe you fear God and you're asking how does God come to me? How can I know him?

My answer is simple.

Through what the Book of Concord calls the *Means of Grace*. That is the Word of God, both written and proclaimed. Your baptism. As Lutherans we teach, believe and confess in the *efficacy of baptism*. When you are baptized, your sins are *actually forgiven* and Christ is truly present through these means. God's Son Jesus is truly present in the water and Word. Baptism is the physical element of water combined with God's command (Matt. 28:19, Acts 2:38-39) and the Spirit comes to you objectively through these means (it's why both the Book of Concord and Bishop Ambrose of the 4th century call these means—*the means of the Spirit*). God is localized in these means. God reveals who he is through these means. What do I mean by this? One could say, as in **1 Peter 3:21**:

²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, *now saves you*, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*,⁵

Notice the “your saving”, your salvation, is in your baptism. And this directly connects to the resurrection (resurrection and baptism are not two isolated events—they are connected by the power of God). (Check out Romans 6 for more info.) In the Word, in your Baptism, and in Holy Communion is where God localizes himself. God is present truly in these means *for you*. *You are forgiven by these means. Christ comes to you in these means. God saves you by these means. God gives you the Holy Spirit by these means.*

The self-localization of God.

Dr. John Kleinig wrote a paper on God's localization⁶. In this paper, Dr. Kleinig

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (1 Pe 3:21). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁶ Kleinig, John W. “Where Is Your God? Luther on God's Self-Localization.” In *All Theology Is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, edited by Dean O. Wenthe, William C. Weinrich, Arthur A. Just, Daniel Gard, and Thomas L. Olson, 117–31. Indiana: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, 2000.

unpacks a biblical theology of how God is truly present in the Garden of Eden, present with Moses on top of Mt. Sinai, present in the Ark of the Covenant in King David's time, present in the Temple in the Holy of Holies. In the NT in person of Christ, the Word made flesh. God is localized in human form. Now, today, after Jesus has died and is resurrected—**how does God come to us now? Where is God localized?** That's right—in this Holy meal. In his Word. In your baptism. **Jesus is not revealed to the whole world in this intimate way.** He is a general way, but only intimately revealed in a saving way *by faith* to only those who are baptized. As it says in the Augsburg Confession:

[XIII. Concerning the Use of Sacraments]

[1] Concerning the use of sacraments it is taught that the sacraments are instituted not only to be signs by *which people may recognize Christians outwardly*, but also as *signs and testimonies of God's will toward us* in order thereby to awaken and strengthen our faith. [2] That is why *they also require faith and are rightly used when received in faith for the strengthening of faith.*

[3] *Rejected, therefore, are those who teach that the sacraments justify ex opere operato without faith and who do not teach that this faith should be added so that the forgiveness of sin (which is **obtained through faith and not through work**) may be offered there.*⁷⁶⁷

You can take God at his Word.

Lastly. You can take God at his Word, because—

3. Jesus is ordained by God.

⁴² And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. (Acts 10)

Two points. 1: Jesus commands that we (the Church, its people, its pastors and teachers) **must testify** this Gospel to the world (Matt. 28:19).

The Greek verb here for testify is very formal. It means to “solemnly declare.” (Greek: **διαμαρτύρομαι** *declare solemnly and emphatically; charge under solemn oath; warn* (Luke 16:28)⁸ I think the closest we could apply this culturally is getting up in a courtroom and being sworn

⁷ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 46). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

⁸ Newman, B. M., Jr. (1993). *A Concise Greek-English dictionary of the New Testament*. (p. 43). Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies.

in to make a testimony before a court, or even signing a statutory declaration. Such moments of bearing witness, if found untrue at later stage, have penalties that are rather serious under civil and criminal law. The punishment for bearing false witness can be huge fines and jail time (in Lutheran terms, “breaking the 8th”).

This is how serious this command is from Jesus. We ***must confess*** our faith that God has appointed Jesus to ***be judge of the living and the dead.***

This clearly relates to our confession.

2: The Nicene and Apostle’s Creed. Jesus was appointed to judge the living and dead. We confess this every day and every week.

[5] He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death, and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into the heavens and **is seated at the right hand of the Father.**

(that part is finished. But there is eschatological element to this creed. A part yet unfulfilled)

[6] **He is coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead.** There will be no end to his kingdom.⁹

Brothers and sisters, we are called to bear witness to this crucified One. Jesus Christ. Because he made himself the lowest in this age, in the age to come, when he comes back to judge all the living and all the who have died, on that Day, his kingdom will reign unceasing. Unchallenged. He will judge the world in righteousness.

This leads to the final verse as it says:

⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”¹⁰
(Acts 10)

Two points.

⁹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 23). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

¹⁰ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ac 10:34–43). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

1: The Prophets bear witness; you know the Nicene creed is based on this—it says:

[7] And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],²⁸ who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, **who has spoken through the prophets.**¹¹

God the Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is testified *through the prophets* in the Old Testament and still today by Pastors and Priests. Those who are prophets will bear witness to Christ. The Holy Spirit speaks through prophets. And when Prophets speak who do you think they testify about? ***They proclaim Christ crucified.*** By the Holy Spirit's power, they proclaim and confess that **Jesus is the Christ**, the crucified One, the One whom God has ordained and appointed to be the Judge of both the living and the dead.

This is what the Church is called to do. To bear witness to Christ as Judge of all. He will return. You are called to bear witness.

Because of what Jesus has done for you, you are called to bear witness that he is the king who comes to judge.

In Closing: Why can you take God and his Son at his Word?

Because this king was born **for you.**

He lived a righteous life where you could not, **for you.**

He was circumcised on the 8th day **for you.**

He was baptized and ordained **for you.**

He was arrested this Holy Week **for you.**

Betrayed by his closest friends **for you.**

Falsely accused before Caiaphas and Pilate **for you.**

Beaten and mocked, spat upon **for you.**

Had a crown of thorns shoved into his skull **for you.**

He carried the cross to Golgotha **for you.**

Was crucified and murdered **for you.**

And he was raised on the third day in the flesh—**for you.**

He did all these things, so that you wouldn't have to bear the judgment of God for your sins. Rather your sin has been **paid for by Christ.** You are not saved by your obedience to God in your testimony; you are saved by the mercy of God through his Son's horrific death and crucifixion **for you.** Jesus' righteousness by grace is yours through faith, and you receive it, **in your baptism.** That's where you

¹¹ Kolb, R., Wengert, T. J., & Arand, C. P. (2000). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (p. 23). Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

objectively receive salvation. If I could put it in ‘court-room language’. You receive Christ’ righteousness **objectively—forensically outside of yourself**, God’s righteousness through Christ comes to you **independently of you in the means of Grace**. In other words, you are **declared righteous outside of yourself and your justification is true for you even in times when we doubt and are troubled**.

This is what makes grace through faith so amazing.

How do you know for sure that you are saved? **You are baptized**. Clothed in Christ, objectively. Clothed and washed by his blood, when you were washed in the waters of baptism, all your sins are forgiven, God sees you and sees Jesus’ righteousness in you. You are righteous and made right with God through his Son’s death and in baptism you receive all the benefits of Christ’s death in your baptism. You are adopted. You are justified. You received objectively the Holy Spirit. The sanctification process objectively begins. And you now have the ability to do what is right as God’s Spirit is in you so that you—like Peter the Apostle can confess by grace alone:

“Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation **anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.**¹² (Acts 10)

Amen.

*May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.*¹³

¹² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ac 10:34–35). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

¹³ *Lutheran Hymnal with Supplement*, 29.