

# Sermon

Freedom is Coming.

## Holy Communion and the Proclamation of the Gospel<sup>1</sup>

Year B 2021, Pentecost 15, Mark 7.24-37



‘Good leadership is guiding the way out of pandemic. With a pathway to post-Covid life becoming clearer, a great moment approaches for our country.’ The newspaper headline on Friday read. Finally, some light at the end of the tunnel, a sign that the present fog will lift.

Whatever may or may not happen in the next few months, for Christianity at least, good leadership is guiding the way out of the wilderness, toward the promised land. A great moment approaches, for our world. Freedom is coming.

---

<sup>1</sup> The inspiration for this sermon series on the Lord’s Supper has come from the Protestant theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg.

Today our series on Christian worship comes to completion. With the Lord's Supper and the Proclamation of the Gospel. I am preaching, on preaching. The preaching that since the beginning of the Christian church has always gone hand in hand with the celebration of the Supper. Preaching and celebrating, Word and Sacrament, belong together. Like a hand in a glove. Two sides of the one coin.

If from the earliest days of Christianity, the Lord's Supper was the heart of all Christian worship, it was never celebrated apart from the proclamation of the Gospel. In fact, the celebration of the Lord's Supper rests on the Gospel. Is nothing without it. Apart from proclamation, there is no believing remembrance. Already the words of institution, and the act of communion, are a proclamation of the Gospel (1 Cor 11.26). But proclamation in Christian worship is never limited to these. Remembering Jesus and his death at celebrations of the Supper have always called for an exposition of the past saving event, as well as of the Supper, as this rests on that past saving event.

At early Christian worship, this was the work of prophets and teachers, who expounded the meaning of the Old Testament (1 Tim 4:13) as a prophecy of the coming of Christ. In this way, the coming of Christ, his person and history, was located within the history of Israel, and as the fulfilment of that history. A history of salvation, that came to be seen as God's saving action, not only for Israel, but for the human race. So that the history of the human race, came within salvation history. As an anticipation, of the future fulfilment of history itself, at Christ's return.

In the early church, proclamation of the Gospel of salvation, did not take place only in worship. No less important was the church's public missionary witness to the world that did not yet believe. Baptism instruction, the church's catechesis, too, were proclamation. Liturgical preaching was only one of many forms of Christian proclamation. We find preaching, too, in services for preaching, prayer, ordination and reconciliation. Preaching took centre stage in the Middle Ages, and at the Reformation, in Reformed worship. In the history of Christianity, however, Eucharistic worship has been both the normal form of Christian worship, and the normal setting for liturgical preaching. Fitting into the framework that remembrance of God's work of salvation in Jesus provided for Eucharistic celebration, it had a special function, uniting Eucharistic celebration into one.

But already, preaching, too, is, by very nature, remembrance of the past saving event. We see this already in the early church, in which the biblical text was used to open up access to salvation history, to that same salvation history that is the subject of eucharistic remembrance. The salvation history of Israel, its fulfilment in Jesus Christ, as an action of God on behalf of history itself. So that history is now, in light of the person and history of Jesus, an anticipation, of the future destiny of the human race, in the kingdom of God. At Christ's return.

As in the Eucharistic liturgy, Christian proclamation, is the proclamation of future salvation. The future salvation of the world, at Christ's return. The occasion for which is the past event of salvation itself, to which the biblical texts bear witness. The past event of God's salvation, whose meaning, is promise. God's promise, of future salvation. The promise, the future salvation, that is, in turn, the basis of the past event of God's salvation, and of the act of Christian remembrance. Remembrance of the inbreaking of the future kingdom of God, in the person and history of Jesus, his death and resurrection, the Word of God.

Because the biblical texts in all of their different settings have to do with the future destiny of the world and humanity in God, they have within them the power to show that our situation under God, our life situation in this world, our problems, are not ultimately characterised, by time-relatedness. To the extent that the biblical texts give expression to our future destiny, in the kingdom of God, they have something decisive to say to us.

All Christian proclamation is proclamation of the good news of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God that dawned in the person and history of Jesus Christ. To the extent that Christian proclamation is this, it is God's own Word. But the Christian Church can faithfully discharge this function only as remembrance of the historical event of salvation in which God's Word became flesh. The history of Jesus is the Word of God.

In the Word of proclamation, the Word of God, the future kingdom of God comes to us, as the summons of God himself. In virtue of the future of salvation that dawned in it already now. The Kingdom of God himself, in the person and history of Jesus. The summons that means, as it did in the life of the first disciples, the call to lay down our life in this world, and take up our cross, to

follow Jesus. So that his proclamation, becomes our own proclamation. 'The time is fulfilled; and the kingdom of God has drawn near; repent and believe in the good news.'

In Christian preaching, we go back, to the future. We go back, to the person and history of Jesus, the Word of God. To the future kingdom of God, that has dawned in his coming. The Word of God. The Kingdom of God. The Future of God. The Power of the Future.

All Christian preaching, whether missionary preaching, as this is aimed at the conversion and baptism of new believers, or liturgical preaching, as this is aimed at the strengthening and confirmation of the faith of the Church, is Christian remembrance, of the person and history of Jesus, the Word of God.

Christian preaching that happens within worship, has a special function, that give shapes to the whole celebration. This is so in a number of ways. First, by giving contemporary relevance to the biblical history, by demonstrating the universal relevance of the Word of God, as God's promise of salvation, for the world, the contemporary congregation, their life in this world, is brought into that universal history of salvation. Lifted up, by this participation in the history of salvation, the congregation is lifted up, into fellowship with Jesus Christ, in the Lord's Supper.

Lifted up, too, into fellowship with God himself, as he is present already now in the world in Jesus Christ, the church is lifted up into the fellowship, not of the local worship congregation, but into the fellowship of the worldwide Christian church. In fellowship with God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are in fellowship with every other Christian. There to make our own the common confession of the worldwide Christian church. There to feed on Christ himself, who is present to each one of us, personally, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit that, in the eternal life of God, binds the Father to the Son. The Spirit that, in this world already now, binds the worldwide fellowship of Christians, binds every Christian, into the body of Christ, the spiritual reality of the risen Christ himself, and with him, to God the Father, as this happens in every local celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Liturgical preaching, like the Lord's Supper, is not an end in itself. It is a means to the end. The end that is the life of the worldwide Christian church, the upholding of its unity, that belongs to it in

Jesus Christ. The unity of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. The unity that is the special task and function of the church's ordained leadership. For this reason, the public proclamation of the Gospel, like presiding at the celebration of the Supper, is normally entrusted, with some exceptions, to the church's ordained leadership. Whose special calling amongst the individual members of the body of Christ is the task of strengthening and protecting the church, in the fulness of its unity. The Church of God, which Luther said is 'ruled' by the preaching the gospel and by the sacraments.

Not from the present human political order, but from the future kingdom of God himself, freedom is coming. Not just to you and I. Not just to the Christian church. But to the human race. And by it, to creation itself.

The worldwide Christian church is a sign, in and for the world, of the future destiny of the world, in the future kingdom of God. But the church is only a sign of this future. It is not yet the kingdom of God, in all of its fulness. But, by the presence of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, in Christian liturgical celebration, and in Christian preaching, the kingdom of God, has dawned upon the world.

The Christian Church cannot change the world, into the future kingdom of God. Oh, how it has tried! No. But in its liturgical life, it opens up room, in every human heart, for hope. For the Christian hope, for the future kingdom of God. Mediating, to the individual believer, the assurance of participation, in future salvation.

[Freedom. Oh, freedom. Freedom is coming. Freedom is coming. O yes I know.](#)

[Yes, I know. Oh, yes, I know. O, yes, I know. Freedom is coming, O yes I know.](#)

Yes I know. Oh, yes I know. O, yes I know. Freedom is coming, O yes I know.