

***Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025***  
***BELIEF: HEARING, NOT SEEING***

***Prayer***

Jesus, open our ears that we might believe that you were incarnate FOR US and recognize what you have done FOR US to bring us into your kingdom.

AMEN

***Believe Your Ears***

The title of today's message is *Belief: Hearing not Seeing* and is based on today's Gospel reading from Luke.

In looking for a suitable cover for today's bulletin, I couldn't find one that reflects that sentiment. What I did find was what you see on the cover – the phrase "Believe With Your Eyes – Not With Your Ears" – which is in fact a lie that the world tells itself! No wonder I couldn't find a good graphic.

How do I know this? Two passages come to mind – the first from Romans 10:17, where Paul writes:

*So, faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*

And in 1 Corinthians 1:18, where he wrote:

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*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing,  
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

***NOT Rich or Poor***

I don't know how many times you've heard sermons on this text, but in good Lutheran fashion, I want to dissuade you from a false reading of today's text. It's NOT about how God favors the poor and punished the rich. How can I say this confidently? From the text itself, we read that Lazarus was by Abraham's side; and in Genesis 13:2, Moses wrote:

*Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold*

So, Abraham – Abram before God changed his name – wasn't poor but had both temporal AND eternal riches. One might point out passages in both the Sermon on the Mount and in James where scripture seems to say that God may favor the poor, but those passages should properly be read as (1) promoting non-discrimination and (2) having a proper focus on eternal rather than on temporal riches. Paul wrote clearly to Timothy (1 Tim 6:6-10)

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*But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

***Hell is Real!***

If the text isn't about rich and poor, what's it about? The proper focus of the text is to understand heaven – where Abraham is – and hell. From the text, especially verse 24 (V 24), where the rich man says

*. . . for I am in anguish in this flame*

we understand that hell is real and that it's not a nice place.

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And why is the rich man in hell? NOT because of his luxurious and possibly wasteful lifestyle or his seeming neglect of those less fortunate. No, he is in Hell because He committed the unpardonable sin – He chose not to believe that the penalty for ALL his sins, both of commission and omission, were paid for by Jesus through His suffering and death on the cross.

***The Promise is Real as Well***

As the text continue is verse 28 (V 28), the rich man had Moses and the prophets to both warn him of the penalty for sin as well as sure promise of the Messiah who would pay for those sins.

We find that promise to Abraham most clearly in Genesis (22:16-18), where it is written:

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*By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring [singular] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*

And just to be clear, it wasn't the action of obedience that was being praised, but Abraham's faith, as we read later in Genesis (15:6):

*Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

***We Don't Trust Our Eyes***

We not only have Moses and the Prophets, but we have the record of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. But are we any better? No.

In the Gospel of Matthew, immediately after Jesus feeds over 4,000 people with seven loaves and a few small fish, the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven (Matt 16:1-4) – I guess that wasn't enough for them and they want to SEE something better . . .

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*He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.*

The religious leaders of the day weren't looking for a suffering servant, but a military leader in the manner of Jesus' forefather David. Even though they acknowledged the miracles done by our Lord, they, trying something like a Jedi mind trick, told themselves and the people of Israel "This is NOT the Messiah you are seeking."

God also shows us that He has a sense of irony. At the end of the reading (V 31), the rich man asks for a better sign, but the Lord replies with a prophecy – knowing that they and we WON'T believe either our EYES or our EARS.

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*He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.'*

Because even today, despite overwhelming evidence, many refuse to believe that Jesus was a real person, who lived, died in payment for your sins and mine, and rose victorious over sin, death and the devil on the third day.

***God Works Through Means.***

The Word of God, that which we hear with our ears, is powerful. God spoke the world into creation. He also speaks and creates faith in you and me.

Often, the first time we heard God's word FOR US is when we were Baptized, where by water and the Word we were adopted into God's family and gifted faith, guaranteed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Every Sunday, we are called to remember the Words of our Baptism:

*our name, followed by the proclamation, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

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And every Sunday, Pastor absolves you from your sins. We shouldn't SEE the Pastor at the front of the church, but hear the Words spoken as of by Christ himself:

*Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die FOR YOU and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you ALL YOUR SINS in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Finally, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, all we can SEE is bread and wine, but from the Words we hear:

*The true body of Christ, broken FOR YOU for the forgiveness of your sin.*  
and

*The true blood of our Lord shed FOR YOU for the remission of all your sins.*

May this proclamation of Good News, spoken with my lips, enter into your ears to create and sustain faith IN YOU unto life everlasting. AMEN