



Christ Lutheran Church

605 South Fifth Street • Norfolk, NE 68701

Share God's Word, share His love, and do it now!

Pastor Chip Winter, Director of Ministries

"So Many Encouraging Words" Romans 15:4-6 **July 9, 2017**

Pastor David Paul Goehmann

Dear family in Christ,

I read about some research conducted in Germany. People were given a task that would take about 5 minutes. But that time frame would be reduced to just over three minutes by doing one thing: wishing the participants good luck before they started. The study chalked it up to something called "activating a positive superstitious belief" which boosted the people's confidence. The person who pointed out this research then went on to say he had a better conclusion. He believes that God designed us to give and receive words of encouragement.

I can see why he believes that. The Apostle Paul urges his readers of his letter to the Roman church to use encouragement of the Scriptures to bring hope. He wants people to be built up, and God's Word is the source for this encouragement. We can simply care for people by using the words of the Bible in such a way that they are encouraged and built up.

A little backdrop to what Paul was referring to. It seems that in the early church people were fighting over whether you could eat certain foods or had to worship on certain days. Some were holding to their Jewish roots and were offended when they saw some eating foods that had been prohibited before. They were upset that the

Sabbath day and other festivals were neglected for other days to worship. On the other side, some were looking down on those who still held to these food and worship laws. They held to the new found freedom in Jesus that made these foods clean and Sunday became a new day for worship. Some complained and criticized; others looked down and spoke disparagingly. It was not a pretty picture.

In another passage of scripture Paul goes so far to say, **Titus 3:9** But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Now I'm not going to detail when these kinds of verbal fights lead to complaining and criticizing or condescending put downs today. A heated voter's meeting. An animated conversation in the hallway. A sharply worded e-mail . A mean Facebook post. A parking lot confrontation. They happen and it is not a pretty picture.

I think it is worth mentioning also that a lack of encouraging words can happen in terms of a sin of omission. We sometimes conveniently omit words of encouragement. I went to the vet the other day and noticed a woman bringing in her very sick dog. There were a couple opportunities for me to say something encouraging like "The vet is very good here and I would imagine he can do something." Or I could have thought of anything else that would have at the very least let her know that I noticed she was distraught. Instead I said nothing.

As Christians we are given encouraging words like no one else. God wants us to use the words of scripture to give each other hope, give praise to God in harmony, and to welcome each other as Christ has welcomed us.

Martin Luther knew that God's Word was important. He once wrote: "For some years now, I have read through the bible twice each year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what was said and what it meant." (LW 54:165)

As we reflect on the Bible sometimes we have a very narrow view of what it really is. Many times we just look for what is right and wrong in the Bible. Many times we look for details about how things happened and what happened. But most of all we can look for life-giving words, words of encouragement, and words of hope.

These are the kind of words that Luther discovered in his breakthrough of the Good News of Jesus. He discovered things like Romans 5:6-8, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly, For one will scarcely die for a righteous person- thought perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we ere still sinners, Christ died for us."

These words are for all people, even those who talk nasty. Even those who are considered mean. And even those who seem to always be stirring up trouble.

Can you imagine what it was like to hear Jesus Himself say, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep"? (John 10:11) Or, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, Though he die, yet shall he live."? (John 11:25)

Try this today. Do a Google search. Type in "Encouraging words from the Bible" Whoa, you will be built up. A list of sites with dozens of verses will show up. You will be encouraged by God's own words. You will se His promises kept for you. You will

find words of encouragement for others. Lots of them.

I thought of a couple wise sayings about encouragement. “If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say it at all.” “Be an encourager, the world has enough critics already.” “Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle.” These are great sayings, but we know the deeper truth that kindness, encouragement, and being nice go much further when they come from God.

I remember when I had appendicitis and they didn’t get to it in enough time so my appendix burst, that I was very sick. A local church put little scripture verses in a box and asked me to open one each day. I cheated a couple time and opened up two sometimes when I felt I needed it. I’ll never forget how much encouragement that gave me. I know others in this world with problems far worse. Depression, thoughts of suicide, unending pain. We can make a difference and give an encouraging word. Not just a positive word, but a word from God that gives real hope.

Last Sunday I sang the hymn God our help in ages past. This hymn reminded me that God has helped us in the past and so he will help us in the future. When David was about to go up against Goliath he was reminded how God had given the Lion and the Bear into his hands. David thought to himself. “Well since God could do that, he certainly can do this.”

God has not only slayed great Giants, won wars against all odds, and calmed the storm with his Word. He has also won for us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life through Jesus. Jesus not only said he would lay down his life, he did. Jesus not only said, “I am the resurrection,” he also rose.

As Christians this is who we are and this is what we are about. Sharing the Life giving Word of Jesus. These words were written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

God’s Word is at the heart of who we really are. Let’s live it, breathe it, and do it. Instead of “activating a positive superstitious belief.” Let’s “activate a real life giving belief.” Amen.