

**St. Paul Lutheran Church
Grant Park, IL
Reformation, October 28, 2018
Revelation 14:6-7**

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”

I think most of us have heard the Christian hymn, "Abide with Me." It is a hymn which was written by an Anglican priest named Henry Francis Lyte. He wrote this hymn a short time before he died of tuberculosis. We have it in our hymnal. It is hymn 588. This hymn is a hymn of Christian comfort in the midst of trial and tribulation. It is especially comforting to those who are sick and dying because they are the words of a dying man who looks to his Lord for comfort and strength.

I want to share with you the words of the second verse. This verse highlights a key difference between the world in which we live and the eternal gospel which is the subject of our sermon today. It says, **"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see; O thou who changest not, abide with me!"** Did you figure out what the key difference is between world around us and the eternal gospel?

The world in which we live is constantly changing. The hymn verse stresses this when it says, **"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see."** It doesn't take much digging in our world to be reminded about the truth of this statement. Look outside. We are in a time of year where change and decay are all around us. The trees are changing color and dropping leaves. Crops are mostly harvested. Birds are flying south.

Our lives are undergoing constant change too. Children keep getting older. Our bodies which were once strong and vigorous grow weaker with age. Our energy which once seemed boundless has waned and gone away. Friends we love and cherish come and go. Family and friends who we love and hold close to us get sick and die. Change and decay seem to be our constant companions during our lifetimes on earth. It is a sad and dreary reality we face in our world.

Compare this reality to the reality of the eternal gospel mentioned in our lesson. John says, **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people."** Our reading comes from the book of Revelation. This chapter gives John a glimpse into heaven where he sees an angel flying in midair carrying the eternal gospel.

The first thing we notice about this gospel is that it is eternal. This means the gospel is without beginning and without end. Compare this fact to the world we live in. The world we live in is temporary. We've talked about the fact all we see in this world is change and decay because everything in it is passing away. The eternal gospel does not change. It does not decay. It does not pass away because it is without beginning and without end.

How can we be this certain about the eternal gospel? How can we know it doesn't change, decay or pass away? Listen to who it is for. **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people."** The eternal gospel is for every nation, tribe, language and people. It doesn't matter what color your skin is. It doesn't matter what language you speak. It doesn't matter where you live. The eternal gospel is for all.

What makes the eternal gospel for all? The eternal gospel is for all because of who is at the heart of the eternal gospel. Jesus Christ is the living and beating heart of the eternal gospel. The eternal gospel

declares Jesus is the savior of all people because he came into this world to die for all people. He came into this world to die for your sins and mine. His death has paid for the guilt of all sins: from the first sin in the Garden of Eden until the last sin ever committed on earth.

Jesus' perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection from the dead are the heart of the eternal gospel. The truth of this message is eternal. It doesn't matter where you live. You can live in North America or Australia. You might be able to recite this truth in five languages or in one. You might have lived 5,000 years ago or you might live 5,000 from now, but the fact remains in all of these situations: Jesus Christ is your savior. Nothing can change this fact. Period. End of story.

Compare this changeless message to the reality of the world we live in. Our world is in a constant state of flux. Our society no longer deals in absolutes. Truth is like putty which can be twisted, molded and shaped in our hands. Truth becomes what the majority think and feel is right. It is no longer absolute. It is no longer universal. You might consider something to be true, but I don't. It doesn't feel right to me or it feels so good to me that it has to be true. This is the world we live in.

You work with people who think like this. You have neighbors who think like this. You have family members who believe this. Your television brings this reality into your home. It can be confusing and throw us off base. It can leave us doubting and uncertain. It can leave us asking, "How can I be sure the eternal gospel is absolute truth? Nothing in this world fits this mold. Everything in this world is changing and decaying. What makes this gospel truth different?"

Do you ever feel this confusion roaring in your heart? Do you have a son, daughter, grandkids, friends, neighbors who have these thoughts racing through their mind? Is your heart filled with worry and dread because Satan is behind these thoughts and he is waiting to pounce to drag away the unsuspecting soul? Where can we turn? **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people."**

We can go to the truth of the eternal gospel because the eternal gospel is the only thing which can clear up the confusion in our minds. The eternal gospel will remind us there is an absolute truth in this world. This absolute truth is the fact Jesus is our savior from sin. It will remind us Jesus was willing to sacrifice himself on our behalf and nothing in this world can change this fact. The eternal gospel will always remain because it has always existed and it will always exist.

We can look at history as a guide to remind us of the truth of this promise. Our first parents Adam and Eve fell into sin. They had sinful children. One of them, Abel, was a believer who put his hope in the eternal gospel. Another, Cain, was an unbeliever who rejected the eternal gospel. Cain murdered Abel, but truth of the gospel was passed on. Elijah the prophet thought he was the only believer left on this earth, but the Lord promised him that he was not alone. 7,000 people still clung to the eternal gospel.

The Apostles and many people in the early church were persecuted and put to death, but the truth of the eternal gospel carried on. The eternal gospel was buried in the middle ages, but the Reformation brought its light back and it carried on. The church looks like it is failing today. Church bodies reject the

truth of God's word. The number of true believers in this world seems to be shrinking and our synod and our own church aren't excluded from this decline. Yet, the truth of the eternal gospel is still proclaimed.

Why has the eternal gospel survived and how do I know it will continue to survive? It is because its message is timeless and unchanging because it promises Jesus Christ is the savior of the world. This timeless and unchanging message is what pulls people in. It is what encourages us and strengthens us when we feel like all is lost. It is a beacon of hope and comfort for the hurting and dying. It is the one constant in a world of change and decay. Its unchangeableness is what makes it beautiful.

"Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day; Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see." These words of Henry Francis Lyte's hymn "Abide with Me" are fitting words for our world. We experience change and decay in everything we see. The joys of this world often grow dim and its glories pass away. These changes are hard. They leave us broken and hurting because they are so painful. It is normal to hurt in this world because of these changes.

Yet, Lyte was still able to say, **"O thou who changest not, abide with me"** because he recognized the beauty of the eternal gospel. The timeless nature of the eternal gospel comforted him and reassured him that his salvation does not change. It offers us the same comfort to us too. It reminds us Jesus forgiveness is eternal and for all. **"Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people."**
Amen.