

## A SUPER HEALING WITNESS TO CELEBRATE!

The Apostle Paul's healing witness from 1 Corinthians 9 really resonates with us this Super Bowl weekend: *"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable"* (1 Corinthians 9: 24-25).

Only one team will win the Lombardy Trophy; only one team will receive the Super Bowl 55 ring to wear for the rest of their lives. But we, children of God, are blessed to hear the authoritative Word of God: Only those who believe in Jesus Christ receive the **imperishable prize**. And that is Jesus and His saving grace won for the believer through His perfect life, atoning death and victorious resurrection. Yes, Jesus alone won it, so that you could have it forever. But He also won it for all those who currently don't confess Jesus as their Savior. **That's why we witness intentionally with a sense of urgency**. Jesus won salvation to give it away for free: His super healing grace which is imperishable. It's so easy to discuss all things Super Bowl, but pray for an opportunity to share the super healing witness of God's grace with someone this weekend. Accompanied by the Holy Spirit, it will make an eternal difference.

There's no use fighting it. Sooner embrace it as an opportunity to share that which is truly SUPER. Maybe you heard the story about a young man who is really in a difficult situation. He bought two very high-priced tickets for the Super Bowl far in advance. And with this COVID year, it is a significant get to be in the stands. But he forgot that he and his fiancé had scheduled their wedding for a Sunday afternoon due to the availability of reception venues. Now he realizes he can't go. It's out of the question, right? But he put out this notice on Facebook and Instagram: if you're interested and want to go instead of him, here's the relevant information: it's at St. Peter's in New York City at 5 p.m. Her name is Louise. She'll be the one wearing a white dress.

Of course, even pastors can get caught up in Super Bowl fever. I heard about one church where the time for the offering was approaching. The pastor, a true sports enthusiast, reached into his pocket, took out a quarter, flipped it into the air, glanced at it as it landed, then in typical referee fashion joyfully announced to the congregation: **"The ushers have elected to receive!"**

The Epiphany season has been a time to CELEBRATE the truth of God's grace made manifest. Each Sunday we see how God has made known His saving plan. In our Lutheran churches, we have celebrated Life Sunday and National Lutheran Schools Week. These are reasons to celebrate and WITNESS WITH URGENCY. Over 62 million infants have lost their lives due to abortion since 1976 and the passing of Roe v. Wade. Vulnerable residents at nursing homes have lost their lives due to COVID. All people's lives from the womb to the grave matter. Since every life is indispensable to God, they are indispensable to each one of us. Our Lutheran school ministry continues

to celebrate being sent out to the world to serve those in need. That witness of healing grace is integrated into the entire day of our Lutheran schools. Thanks be to God.

I remember a fictional story about a person who had passed away – and in heaven – he walked into God’s office. He wasn’t there at the moment so the man looked around and looked at what awesome things God had in His office. God also had a large window. The man looked out and saw all that was happening on the earth. He had to look away because it was so gruesome. Just then, God walked in. “Were you looking out My window?” “Yes, Lord! How can You look at these things? If it were me, I would board up that window.” “I believe that! I witnessed you doing just that while you were on the earth. But one can only look out that window through the Cross of My Son and His grace.” Are you looking at the world around you through the Cross?

During Epiphany, Jesus calls us to be “fishers of men (all people). At that time, fishermen used nets. It was impossible to fish with nets that had massive holes in them. And yet, in our sinful condition, that’s exactly what we do. The holes in our nets are things like bigotry, racism, apathy, jealousy, hatred against those different from us. Our nets have holes. But the fishermen were often seen “mending their nets.” Martin Luther put as his first of the 95 theses that our entire lives should be one of repentance (mending nets with God’s mercy and grace.)

Remember when God called Jonah? Jonah’s net had a huge hole in it due to his feelings about the people of Ninevah. He knew that God was merciful and gracious and yet he ran from God’s call to witness to them. We too know that God is overflowing with mercy and grace – for each of us has known it in our own lives. The confession and absolution during worship is the climax of worship as we are forgiven our sin – including the reluctance to engage our world with that which is imperishable – **God’s super healing grace.**

In this week’s Gospel, Jesus heals Simon Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. I wonder how many people, when they think of Peter, think about him as a married man? It begs the question: How did his wife feel about his giving up his occupation and following Jesus? But witnessing our world today – we are all compelled to give witness to what only God does – heals. By virtue of Jesus’ wounds, we have the healing salve of God’s grace to apply to the world in need.

There couldn’t be a better time to serve - the world is in need of the Gospel - and we, the Church, have it! The imperishable in the face of all that is perishing. Just consider all that has perished in the United States this past year - over 420 thousand. And consider the world in fear of the new virus strain. The world is perishing in front of our eyes. So many other things have perished - lost jobs, lost income, lost graduations and other celebrations - and the list goes on and on. In the face of all this, we have the imperishable, saving truth in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The witnesses in our Gospel lesson didn’t communicate by Facebook or Twitter or Instagram. They had to do it the old-fashioned way, **person to person.** (Thus, “Every

One His Witness”) And it worked. The whole town gathered at his door. **Everyone wanted to see Jesus.** For He is not **just** God who has come to save the world - Jesus is God who has **come to save every individual we lay eyes upon.**

As the prophet Isaiah bears witness to in the Old Testament lesson, even those in the prime and strength of life are not unaffected by the struggles and burdens and troubles of this world and life - things like COVID, new variants, jobs lost, fears concerning whether to take the vaccine or not, our government leaders, and so on. What’s your burden today? What burden are those around you facing? Can you ask them, **“What is the one thing I can pray for you today?”** Sure, you can!

But here’s the Good News: they who wait for the Lord - those who hope in the Lord - shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint. Or in other words, there is a restoring grace given for those who hope in the Lord. Jesus gives a glimpse of that with **His super healing.** Jesus points us to the victorious blessing that is ours – which is far better than any sports trophy or world championship. This super healing grace points to the imperishable blessing found in Christ when all weakness, all illness, all faintness and weariness, and then even death itself will finally be ended. In Jesus, the God of all life has come to provide that which is truly super - the imperishable!

Which one of us, on our best day, doesn’t try to do the very things that St. Paul speaks of - to be as best he can - all things to all people. We think of the what and the how and then get caught up in the time, the effort, the energy, the cost and think we cannot do it. And then, unfortunately, we don’t do it.

Our witness may be as simple as a phone call, fixing a meal, asking if there is one thing we can lift up to the throne room of God’s grace. The witness will be different for each person and varying circumstances. But please begin by listening and paying attention to the needs of those in your circle of influence. We live and move and have our very being (Acts 17:28) focusing on Jesus and His **super, healing grace for you, for all those around you, for the world God loves - personally.** Jesus came for all, the Apostle Paul goes to all to be all things for all people, and likewise we are called to serve the world. **Like an athlete, he says.** On this Super Bowl Sunday - we love and marvel at our athletes. However, the prize we seek is so much greater, should we not run that we may obtain it as well? May God’s super healing grace and the empowering of His Spirit direct you to share this **spoiler alert: the greatest and only imperishable trophy is already yours and theirs in Christ!**

The Evangelization Team meets this Tuesday, February 9 at 1:30 p.m. Eastern time. We encourage you to join us to share ways we can encourage, empower, equip the saints to share the super healing grace to a world in need. If you are interested, please just email your request to join to [gracelc.pjd@gmail.com](mailto:gracelc.pjd@gmail.com) Also, please share your witness stories. We would love to hear them and share them with our District. Enjoy all things “super” this weekend – especially God’s super healing grace!