

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
June 24, 2018

Text: 2 Corinthians 6:1-13
Theme: “Open Wide—Today?”

Look, I have a nicely wrapped gift here, says “Do not open until Christmas.” Now that’s a long time to wait, why not now, why not today? Why wait to open tomorrow what you can open today? Maybe it’s one of those giant Hersey kisses. So here goes. No, not a kiss Hershey or otherwise. Just to let you in on a little secret, that’s not a great surprise to me. No, not a kiss, it’s a funnel. Funnels can be nice, come in a lot of different sizes. They can come in quite handy and they are quite durable.

Of course a funnel has two ends, the receiving end, and the giving end. The receiving end is made wide to gather in what is to be received and the giving end is narrowed so that it might fit into a smaller opening. The ends are not interchangeable. If I were to turn this around with the narrow end up to try to fill a jar, I would just have a mess.

You all have funnels today, well, maybe not all of you, but hopefully the great majority of you. It’s this single folded sheet of paper you have in your bulletin with the word “tomorrow” on one edge and “today” and the opposite side. Now if you unfold it and roll it up, do so with the words on the outside so they show, or at least partially. Now funnel one end out, that is, hold on to the one end and expand the other. By doing this you can make your own funnel. It can even be functional in a pinch, though card stock is more durable.

So what end is the opened wide one, the receiving one? Is it “today” or “tomorrow?” Paul is calling us to the “today.” “Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” (vs 2)

Paul’s heart was opened wide to the Corinthians. “We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, our heart is wide open.” (vs 11) ‘Our mouth is opened to you and our heart is widened.’ (perfect tense for both verbs; opening and widening have happened and such is still the case). The opened mouth and enlarged heart flow from faithfulness as servants of God, as God’s ambassadors. Paul’s aim is to always be God’s servant in “every way.” The whole list that follows that statement in verses 4-10 gives substance to that statement. Paul and his coworkers have endured many negative experiences, have done so exhibiting positive qualities through much patience and endurance. All this is so no obstacles may block the opportunity for hearing. There is a positive message, the most positive of all, the Gospel, ready to be received by opened ears for the widening of hearts.

God was bringing His message to the Corinthians through Paul and His coworkers. “We are ambassadors of Christ, God making His appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:30) “We implore you (are even “begging you”) on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:30). ‘Our hearts have been opened and our mouths have been speaking so that you might know and believe and live.’

The Gospel is the message of God’s opened heart. His heart has always been open, always desiring to redeem and to restore. There was no

time when this was not His will. When He sent Adam and Eve packing from the Garden it was always His intent that there would be a return to a better garden. The promise was for the seed of the woman to bruise the head of the serpent, to destroy his work and his power. Through the pages of Scripture He unfolds that story. The seed will be through Abraham, He will be a prophet like unto Moses, He will be the Son of David, and He will be more than a man. He will be Immanuel, God is with us.

It all opens up into fulfillment. The time had fully come and God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law. God comes in person, in the flesh. In our Gospel lesson He tells the howling wind and the raging sea to “hush” and it happens. The sea is calmed but such calming churns the hearts of the disciples. “Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mark 4:41) But He lays the use of that power aside to redeem. “In Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their transgressions against them (2 Corinthians 5:19). God was counting them against Himself in the Son as He was made sin for us. It all comes because of God’s opened heart, opened in love—God so loved the world that He gave.

It’s why Paul’s heart was so wide open to the Corinthians. The love of God in Christ had opened that heart, truly a new creation, from the destroyer of the church to the great builder, from persecutor of Christ to persecuted for Christ. He writes in chapter 5, “For the love of Christ controls us...He died for all, that those who live might no longer live for

themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.” (vs 14, 15)

Paul call the Corinthians to opened hearts, opened to receive the flow of God’s giving. Again, Paul writes that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. There were a lot of problems at Corinth. Could it be some were not converted? If so there was no battle between the old nature and the new man. It was just the old nature ruling and calling the shots. Paul calls out, “be reconciled to God.” Today! “Now is the favorable time, today is the day of salvation.” Open wide in believing! For others it is opening wide in repentance. Not all had severed their pagan bonds. From 1 Corinthians we see some were still participating at the idol temples, still tempted to and maybe falling into sexually immorality. Some had been treating the Lord’s Supper like a feast they knew from their idol days. Paul calls them out from all this in the verses that follow our text. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?” (6:14) In chapter 12 Paul speaks of those who may still have been involved in impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality (vs 21). Today, now is the time. Open wide in confession and repentance, but cleansed, walk in the light. Yes, today!

Paul’s open wide words still call to us. Today is the day to for open hearts to fully rely on God’s promises, just like yesterday, for your salvation. It’s a done deal in Christ, you have been reconciled to God. You have been reborn, a new creation in Jesus. God has you covered in

His righteousness in Christ. You have put Him on in baptism. The heart opened in faith believes and holds on to these promises.

God's Word does call out to us to repent of sin and walk in His light. If one is walking in a way darkness, the way of the world, like sexual sin, or stealing (goods, money, time), or not carrying one another's burdens, maybe compartmentalizing some areas of life as though they were off limits to God's light, God is calling out of all that. Such sin leads to unfruitfulness and produces a pretty spotty and shady light to those still in the darkness. If you are caught up in any of these things is your funnel opened wide on the today end or the tomorrow end?

Today, really today, why so soon? Maybe we are more open, opened on the today end but to the culture of today. The culture around us has changed a lot in the past 30 years and often not for the better. Jennifer Freudenburg of the Concordia Center for the Family recently shared some such changes as she reflected upon her retirement.

- Statistics show that there are more unmarried women having babies than married ones... In many of these cases, becoming pregnant wasn't an accident, but a desire of the women wanting to have a baby.
- The sports world has encroached upon our homes, squeezing out times for worship, times for family meals
- To say a prayer in a restaurant as a family is often viewed as 'showing off' or intentionally attracting attention to one self.
- When marriages starts to shake and get tough, people think it's easier to give up and walk away from each other.

Are we open or closed to God's opening our hearts in repentance? Is it just not the time for that, not today. Is it we are not quite ready for the repentance that leads to fruitfulness, more interested in the spoils of selfishness today.

For those in Corinth there were those other voices calling out to be heeded, those super-duper apostles (2 Corinthians 11:4) Paul's addresses those who were ready to put up with such pseudo apostles even though they were of a different spirit and presenting a different Gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4). They were constricting their hearts to Paul. Paul calls out in urgency. Why all these words from Paul about his devotion to the Lord's service and to the Corinthians. He tells us in chapter 12, "Have you been thinking all along that we have been defending ourselves to you? It is in the sight of God that we have been speaking in Christ, and for your upbuilding, beloved." (12:19)

But today? Isn't there yet tomorrow? You may now like what tomorrow brings. Paul writes, "For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and you may find me not as your wish...I fear that when I come again my God humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented." (12:20-21) It may appear they have received the grace of God in vain—fallen away. No, one may not like what tomorrow brings and tomorrow will not always be.

"And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut." ¹¹

Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.'¹² But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' (^{ESV} **Matthew 25:10-12**) The day arrives of no tomorrow when tomorrow does not arrive.

Today, today is the day, life today. The Spirit continues to open our hearts to God's promises. Today is the day of salvation. Eternal life starts right now. By grace you have been saved through faith. Today you are a Son of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Today you have the peace that surpasses all understanding. You have comfort of knowing that God works all for the good of those who loved Him even all that is not good. Today you, believer, have life to live to the full walking in the light of Christ. I couple of times over the years I have heard this comment, "If only I had been brought to faith earlier. Look how much I've missed. Look at how much more good I could have done." Such words are spoken by those whose hearts are opened wide to God's promises and purposes rejoicing in the opportunity to love God and love neighbor.

Today is the day. Today supplies tomorrow; tomorrow flows from today. Turn it around backwards and it just doesn't work well. Today is the day to let your light shine. Where there is darkness, repent. If you are caught up in a sin, get out. If you are embittered by hate, forgive as you have been forgiven. If you can help your neighbor, do it, today. Take your funnel home with you to remind you today to do that which God has put before you today. God's heart is opened wide to us in Jesus, an opening that opens ours to receive that we may live and give. For Jesus' sake. Amen