

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
May 22, 2011
“Walking Together Sunday”**

Revelation 14:6,7

The Gospel is Flying!

- 1. To all people*
- 2. Through God's people*

Hymns: 382 – 166 – “Glorify Thy Name”

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

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.”

What is the license plate motto for North Carolina? You might know Washington's, since you see cars around here all the time. Washington's standard license plate says, “Evergreen State.” But what is North Carolina's?

It makes a bold, unique claim. North Carolina license plates say, “First in Flight.” If you know American history, you know what they're talking about. On December 17th, 1903 Orville Wright became the first human being to take a powered machine that was heavier than air and fly it in a controlled manner through the air. He and his brother Wilbur, bicycle shop owners from Dayton, OH, had dreamed and experimented for years, attempting to make a flying machine. The first flight, held at Kitty Hawk, NC, was twelve seconds long and covered a whopping 120 feet. That flight makes the people of North Carolina proud enough to say, “First in Flight” on just about all of their cars. It's kind of an ironic twist that a license plate for a car would take pride in flying!

It may be true that the first powered, human flight took place in North Carolina, but it wouldn't be fair to say that the Wright brothers were truly first in flight. Today, as we meet on “Walking Together Sunday,” in which we celebrate the partnership we have in our Wisconsin Synod, Scripture teaches us that God's gospel has been

flying for a long time. In fact, we could even say that God's gospel was “first in flight.” Let's see how this is true as we examine our Scripture text from Revelation 14:6,7. **As we consider the theme “The Gospel Is flying,” we will learn that this is happening:**

- 1. To all people**
- 2. Through God's people**

1 – Revelation 14:6,7 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. 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.’*”

Many of you might remember that the book of Revelation describes many events to come in the New Testament era. It also describes Christ's return to judge and the conditions of heaven and hell. Here we see God's prediction that the gospel would be flying in the New Testament era!

Yet we might ask, “Is it really so?” Is the gospel really flying throughout the world today? On Sunday morning you know very well that many people who are out of bed by this time are bicycling or reading the paper, but have no intentions of coming to God's house. We certainly remember past, memorable times when the gospel was flying to this world:

- Old Testament times, when seas were being parted, fire came down from heaven, and memorable miracles were performed by God.
- The first Christmas night, when the angel reported to the shepherds that “Christ the Lord is born!” A whole army of angels lit up the dark night as the gospel message soared through the air to the shepherds.
- Pentecost Day, when Peter preached God's message to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem. We hear that 3000 souls were baptized and added to the Church that day!

Is it still soaring? As we look back to the time when Revelation was written, we might

wonder. At the time the Apostle John wrote Revelation, he was an old man in exile on an island off of Asia Minor. All the original apostles had left this world by martyrdom, history tells us. The world had tried to silence God's message through them. Was it still flying?

Then add to that the predictions in the book of Revelation itself. The verses in front of us today are located in the fourth vision to John in the book of Revelation. The vision is called, "The Devil and His Helpers." It describes a dragon that chases and tries to devour God's people in New Testament Times. Then it describes two beasts that work with the dragon, one from the sea and one from the earth. The descriptions of these beasts reveal that they are powers in the world that the devil uses and that ally themselves against God's message, forces not only that are political by also that are spiritual as well. Reading through this vision, we get the sinking feeling that these forces are extremely powerful! Was the gospel still flying back then? And can it still fly today?

God tells us, "Yes, it is!" by showing us a vision of an angel in Revelation 14 immediately after the devil and his helpers appear. **In fact, God tells us that his gospel will fly to the whole world.** We read before, "*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!'*"

Long before Revelation was written, Jesus assured his disciples that the gospel would fly to the world. On Tuesday of Holy Week, Jesus sat down with his disciples on the Mount of Olives, talking with them about the signs of the end of the age. He told them there would be earthquakes, famines, and persecution. False prophets and false Christ's would appear. The love of people would grow cold. But in all that, he said in Matthew 24:14, "*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end will come.*" **The gospel would fly to all people!**

We see how true this is in the details of our reading:

- The angel is flying in midair. Why midair? One point is that the Lord's messenger is safe beyond the reach of

the enemies of the gospel. This message will remain! The Lord will always have messengers, no matter how determined the devil is to stifle its proclamation.

Another point is that the air is a place the message can be visible to all nations. I remember many an event I've been to outside with great crowds of people, and seeing an air banner being pulled by a small airplane. Companies pay good money to pilots to fly around with such banners, because it advertises their product in a very visible way. In the same way, we see God's gospel fly to all people in the air.

- Another detail is that the angel has the eternal gospel to proclaim. Those are two remarkable words. Let's focus on the word "gospel" first. You might be surprised to hear that this verse is the only time the word "gospel" appears in the book of Revelation. But don't let that diminish the importance of it. The word "gospel" literally means "good news." Also, the word "proclaim" is the same root word in Greek. Literally translated, the sentence says that the angel had "the good news to be good-newsing" to those on the earth.

What good news? The good news about the Lamb of God, Jesus himself, mentioned in chapter 5: "*They sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'*" The gospel announces to us that God has written our names in the book of life, for our sins have been forgiven through Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world. What good news this is. You have a place in heaven because of your Savior Jesus!

We also see that this is the eternal gospel. "Eternal" means that it has no beginning. How true this is, for Ephesians 1 says that God "*chose us in (Christ) before the creation of the world.*" Before Adam and Eve rebelled

against God in the Garden of Eden, before God even formed human beings or any other part of his creation, he knew and planned that he would buy sinners back to himself by the blood of his Son. He always planned to rescue them in the eternal gospel.

Eternal also means that these promised blessings will never end. Those who trust in Jesus as their only hope of heaven will not die eternally, but live with him forever in heaven.

- We also hear that the angel is proclaiming this gospel in a loud voice. He doesn't have it in his pocket. He doesn't keep this treasure under lock and key. No, he has this eternal gospel to proclaim!
- A final detail that makes it clear this is for all people is the way the recipients of this message are named. The angel is to proclaim this to every nation, tribe, language, and people. Throughout the book of Revelation, the number four is used to refer to the whole world. We still speak about the four corners of the world. We speak of four directions.

The gospel is flying to all people!

We see how true this is when we realize that it has come to YOU. That explains why you know and believe the truth. After all, your salvation had nothing to do with you. It wasn't because you discovered it. It wasn't because you made a decision to believe in Jesus. It wasn't because you had made such great contributions to society that you earned it. It wasn't your dogged determination. In fact, left to your own choices, you would have chosen otherwise. Genesis 8 tells us that *"Every inclination of (man's) heart is evil from childhood."* God is not exaggerating when he says in Ephesians that you *"were dead in your transgressions and sins."*

By the grace of God, the message flying to the whole world has taken root and grown in your heart.

Then we come to a paradox. The second thought in this Scripture lesson and in this sermon is undoubtedly so. A "paradox" is the situation where

two truths of Scripture seem to be in opposition to each other. For example, God tells us that he knows all things and has planned all the days of our lives. Yet at the same time, he tells us to pray and to bend his ear about our life situations. It's a paradox, truths that we allow to stand side by side without trying to reconcile them.

2 – We have a paradox in the second part of this sermon because the Lord promises to send his gospel to all people and doesn't need you to proclaim it. His will *will* be done in spite of you. Yet whom does he command to send his message out?

Ironically, we note that the angel is not God himself speaking in the clouds personally to the world. We also note that the angel is not even representative of God's holy angels as his spokesmen and missionaries. Who is the angel? The word "angel" literally means a "messenger." Who is the messenger?

Lutherans have always been reminded of Martin Luther when they read this verse. In fact, these two verses from Revelation were the sermon text at Martin Luther's funeral. Martin Luther certainly did work mightily in New Testament times to rediscover God's eternal gospel and fight against terrific opposition. Through him the gospel soared. Yet the angel in this prophecy is more than just Luther.

People today might think about called workers who publicly teach and preach. Certainly they are fulfillments of these verses. The gospel soars this morning as pastors step into the pulpit. It soars as the waters of baptism wash away sins. It soars as the Lord's Supper is given. It also soars during the week in our synod's classrooms as called teachers proclaim the gospel to their students. But the angel is representative of more than public, called workers.

We see the answer in how Jesus commissioned his followers when he left this world:

- *"Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19,20)

- “*You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*” (Acts 1:8)
- In fact, we hear in Acts 8: “*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.*”

You are an angel. I’m not talking about your cherubic looks. I’m talking about the privilege and command that our Lord Jesus has given to you to take the Word of God to the world. **It happens through God’s people.** It’s what you pray for every time you pray “Thy kingdom come” in the Lord’s Prayer. We pray that God’s kingdom of grace is extended throughout the world. This happens through God’s people. It happens through YOU. It is supposed to happen loudly and boldly, spoken in love.

Yet your own sinful nature will resist your desire in seeing the gospel take flight. This happens in many ways:

- It happens when you neglect to invite your unchurched neighbors and friends to come to God’s house. When was the last time you offered to bring such a person? Have you not done this at all in the year 2011 yet?
- It happens when your behavior and language during the week do not let your light shine, but reflect shamefully on your Father in heaven.
- It happens when your fear makes you afraid to speak up about what Christ is about in your personal conversations.
- It happens when you do not support the work and ministry of your church with your offerings and talents.

At times like that, we need the gospel to our own hearts again. We need to confess those sins and pray for God’s forgiveness in Christ again. We need to hear the sweet news that he died for us all over again.

Then we need to go to the world. But how can we do that? How fitting it is that we would be led to ask that question on “Walking Together Sunday!” How can you go to the world?

This past week we saw how we can go to the world in Call Days at Martin Luther College and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, which we support. We received a new teacher and musician for our congregation, and scores of pastors and teachers were assigned to the world. Last year we received a pastor as the rest of his class also went out to the world.

We see it in WELS Home Missions. It’s in front of us in our own congregation with our Korean Lutheran Church, which confirmed four confirmands this spring. Our WELS BHM gave them a grant of \$48,000 over the next two years for their ministry! It’s evident in our other WELS congregations on the home front. The short video our synod sent us to show after worship this morning highlights how this is true in one of our congregations in South Carolina.

We see it in our WELS World Missions. We support evangelists and missionaries as they go places we cannot go, to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. This is possible because we are part of a bigger synod.

We see it in Northwestern Publishing House, our synod publisher who prints solid, Bible-based materials including our *Meditations* devotion books, *Forward in Christ* magazine, our hymnal resources, and countless other things.

We see it as our congregation sends a portion of our offerings to our synod headquarters for all these things. We view sending this support as a privilege we can share in. We get a glimpse of the blessings happening in our synod as we view the “WELS Connection” once a month. In all these things, the angel of Revelation 14 is fulfilled. **The gospel is flying through God’s people.**

So what is our closing prayer today? “Holy Spirit, take flight!” The residents of North Carolina are pretty proud of the first flight at Kitty Hawk. So much so, that their license plate displays it. **But I pray that we’d remember that long before that time, God’s gospel took flight and is still to be flying throughout the world. This is done:**

1. **To all people**
2. **Through God’s people**

May God continue to bless our efforts to share the good news, both personally and as a congregation and synod! Amen.