Since I'm a pastor, sometimes people want to talk to me about church. And sometimes people give me the impression that there is something wrong with a lot of the sermons that you hear in churches today. Since this is a topic of interest for me, I usually try to figure out what this person thinks is missing from the preaching.

Though most of them probably would not say it this way, but usually the complaint can be summarized like this: I wish the sermon would be more about me. Tell me what to do, they say. Get me excited. Make me feel good. Be more practical.

What can we learn from the Apostle Paul about this? He is largely regarded as one of the greatest missionaries who ever lived, so certainly we can learn from his sermons, like we have in this section of God's Word. On the one hand, Paul shows us that it is true. God instructs us how to live lives of thankfulness and comforts us in our sorrows.

On the other hand, we learn that it is not all about us. If you look at Paul's sermon to the people of Antioch, you can see that he does not give them a set of rules or tell them to do something. He tells them about a person and a promise. The person is Jesus Christ. The promise is that everyone who believes in Jesus has forgiveness of sins. So, no, it is not all about us. IT IS ALL ABOUT JESUS! Our message is all about Jesus and our lives are all about Jesus.

The apostle Paul was one of the greatest and most successful missionaries ever used by God. In our text he received an invitation from the synagogue leader in Antioch: Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak. And the sermon he gave was so compelling that when he was done, they said: We would like to hear more. What was his secret? Was he a powerful speaker? Did he have a special way with words? Actually, Paul says that he was not a very great public speaker. And in his sermon in Antioch, we do not find him telling a bunch of clever stories or using attention-grabbing visual aids. The thing that made people say, We want to hear you speak again, was that Paul simply told the story - the history - of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. He told them all about Jesus.

Here is his sermon: The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead. Nothing fancy there! It is not much different than what we say in the Apostles' Creed: He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. On the third day he rose again from the dead.

When we listen to preaching, it is very easy for us to try to judge the message by outward things. We may be impressed by a person's speaking gifts or strong personality. It might feel good if the message is all about me. But the message I need to hear is not all about me. The message I need to hear is the one that is all about Jesus.

Well, we do have to hear some things about ourselves, but I'm afraid that those things do not make us feel good at all. We need to hear that we're sinners who do not have a chance of saving ourselves. That is why Paul told the people in Antioch: You could not
be justified by obeying the law.

Actually, one of our biggest problems is that we think it is all about us. We would like
to think that the good things we do make us good in God’s eyes. But God’s Law makes it
clear that we are not good enough to be justified by our own works, because our works and
actions are never good enough to get a thumbs up from God. This means that you cannot
be saved by the things that you do. You can only be saved by what Jesus did. That is the
message that was proclaimed from the pulpit in Antioch that day, and that is the message
we need to keep on hearing, too.

Yet although the message Paul had to share with the people was not all about them,
the message about Jesus had a huge impact on each of them and on each of us. That is
because Jesus promises forgiveness to all who believe in him. He says: I want you to
know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him
everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by
the law of Moses.

That is why Christianity is not all about a set of rules or the things that we do. We
cannot be justified – that is, declared not guilty, forgiven and approved by God - by the
things that we do. You will not be justified – forgiven - by loving your neighbor. You will not
be justified by going to church, or even by telling other people about Jesus. Because
nothing we do is good enough. We do not meet God’s standard of perfection.

But Jesus did. And he gives us who believe in him credit for it. And Jesus died to pay
for all the imperfections in our lives, even the times when we did not think we needed him.
And Jesus rose again on the third day to show beyond any shadow of a doubt that he has
defeated death and paid for the sins of the whole world. That is how we know that God is
not lying when he says: Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
This promise of forgiveness through faith in Jesus is what it is all about.

That is why our lives are all about Jesus. That is why everything that we do - as
individuals and as a congregation - is about Jesus. Some people think the Christian church
is all about loving your neighbor, or the golden rule. And it’s true that Jesus himself taught:
Love your neighbor as yourself. And that is what we strive to do, but this does not show
what great people we are or earn favors from God. We could never do that. Rather, we do
it because we want our lives to be living sermons that show by acts of service and
unselfishness that it is not about us; it is about Jesus.

Other people think Christianity is all about making changes in society - fighting
against the evils of abortion and sexual immorality, lobbying the government to make laws
to protect marriage and family. And certainly Christians are concerned about those issues
because they are connected to our faith in Jesus. But Christianity is not really about these
issues. It is about Jesus.

Still others think Christianity is all about a set of rules. They think the Christian
Church just wants to tell you what to do and not to do. And it is true, Christians want to
follow God’s commands in their lives to thank him for forgiveness. But Christianity is not
just a bunch of rules for living. It is about Jesus.

Still others think that Christianity is all about the institution of the Church, as though
our purpose here were to keep the building standing, to keep people in it, and keep the
institution financially healthy, so that this institution may keep on going and thriving, or to
preserve the WELS as an institution and Church body. It is true that we work hard to
maintain this building and keep our church and Synod going. But it is not because we have
to preserve the institution. It is because this is how Jesus is proclaimed and preached.
So let's ask ourselves, **Why are we here in church? Why does this building exist? Why is there an organization of people known as Trinity/St. John Ev. Lutheran Church? What is the Christian church all about?** If the answer does not include the name Jesus, we have the wrong reason and purpose. If we are working to keep this church going simply because it is our church, we have the wrong answer.

On the contrary, everything we do, as an individual or as a church, is not about us, but about Jesus. The message we proclaim and the things we do have the same purpose: to shine the spotlight on Jesus, to proclaim his Word and let everyone know what he has done to save us from sin and give us eternal life. That is what we are all about. That is what our sermons are all about. The Christian Church - and individual Christians - are all about Jesus - that Jesus died, and Jesus rose, and Jesus promises forgiveness. May everything we do serve the purpose of knowing Jesus and making him known. Amen.

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