

“Hear...and Believe”

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Series: *Romans*

Bible Text: Romans 10:14-21

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Let me invite you to turn to the book of Romans. We are in chapter 10 today, verses 14 through 21. We are continuing our series through Paul's letter to the church in Rome, and I would gently remind us that we've only been in it for, what, two semesters, going on three. Martin Lloyd-Jones, British preacher in the previous century, spent seven years, I think, on Romans, so we're doing great. We're just really breezing right through it. The passage is printed in your bulletin. If you don't have a Bible with you, let me say just a free plug here. I'm going to start saying this more often, I think. Let me urge you to try a phone-free sermon, possibly a phone-free worship service. I had the experience recently of listening to a sermon and I was following the passage on my phone, and guess what? I got really distracted by everything that was popping up on my phone while I was trying to listen to a sermon. We try to actually make this easy. We try to print the passage if you don't have a Bible with you, but let me just put that on you. Give it a shot. Make it through a sermon, a worship service without a phone.

We are in Romans 10:14-21. Over the past few weeks, we've seen Paul talking about the sovereignty of God in our salvation. We've been in the depths of theology. It's all up to him. We've seen what this looks like from our perspective. What we observe is that people believe the good news and all kinds of different people believe the good news. In fact, we saw the last time, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How does that happen logistically? How does someone get to the place where they would ever call on the name of Jesus? That's in our passage today. Let's read and remember that this is God's word.

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

19 But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

21 But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

Help us now, our Father, as we look at your word. Give us the illumination of God the Spirit so that we can understand with our minds and our hearts what you have given us. Lord, give us the ability to focus on your word. And would you speak and apply your word to our lives? We ask you to do that for us. In Christ's name. Amen.

All right, have you ever heard of heliophobia? You can probably work that out. Fear of the sun. This is a real psychological condition that's out there. There are occasions where it's associated with a medical condition. There's some people who, going outside and seeing the sun causes severe irritation to their sight, their eyes, there are others who go outside and just a very brief contact with the sun causes severe burning. That makes sense, right? If the sun is going to hurt me, I might find myself a little bit afraid of it. I might try to stay inside relatively often. Actually most of the time, people who deal with heliophobia are not suffering from a medical issue. It's a psychological issue that comes from disordered or inordinate fears. A lot of what ifs. What if I get burned? What if this hurts my eyes? What if I get skin cancer? What if I could go down the list? There are any number of sort of OCD reasons why someone might develop an irrational fear of the sun and cause them to stay inside. But you know, we need the sunlight and we need it for a lot of reasons. Some of you, it's February, so some of you are in the middle of your yearly struggle with seasonal, affective disorder. The world cat kind of dark because it's, as Steve says, the Tuesday of the year. It's February. It's dark. We need the vitamin D that sunlight helps produce in us. We need to be outside. We need brightness and people and folks with heliophobia stay inside and have severe vitamin D deficiencies and they deal with agoraphobia and severe isolation and what is the thing that they need the most? Sunlight. What is the thing that they will not allow themselves to have under any circumstance? Sunlight. That is by definition irrational. That's what an irrational fear is. It's not letting myself have the very thing that I'd so desperately need and we hear that and we think, why would anyone do that? Why would someone be so irrational?

Well, it's kind of the nature of phobia is to be that way. But I would argue that this is kind of part of what it means to be a human is to have irrational fears and to know the thing that would really help me the most and then for some strange reason not to subject myself to it. And we do it in small ways. We do it in big ways. I would argue that heliophobia is a big one. We do it at the macro level.

If you read the Bible, you would be confronted with a God who made you and who made you for himself and who promises that he has done everything necessary to save you from the worst things about yourself, your sin, save you from death, save you from hell, save you from the devil, save you from all of it. And the only thing that you need to do is believe it. Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved from all of those things. Why would anyone not believe that good news?

And yet, we continue on in unbelief.

Paul here is talking about the good news. He says we have to hear it. We have to receive it. We have to go outside, not stay in. And yet plenty of people miss the good news. Let's talk about how the good news goes out and then let's talk about how somebody might miss it. That's the outline.

How does the good news go out?

His last phrase in verse 13 was, *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*

That brings up a lot of questions and you can see them right there in verse 14 and on. *How can they call on someone if they haven't believed?*

In other words, you can only call on someone for help if you actually have become convinced that the person can and will give you the help that you need. They have to be able to do it and willing to do it. Okay, but how can you believe that someone will give you help if you've never even heard of them? That's his next question. You can't believe that someone will show up and help you if you've never even heard that they exist or that they are trustworthy. How are they to hear without someone preaching? In other words, somebody has to come and tell you about the one who can give you the real help that you need. How are they to preach unless they're sent? The preacher who can tell us about the one who will help us has to be sent out to us to tell us. That's the train of his thought here.

He's laying out the logistics. See, for someone to actually pray and call on Jesus to save them means that all of these things have been spun into motion from a human perspective. This all happens under the sovereignty of God as we saw in chapter 9. From a human perspective, God not only ordains the ends that whoever's going to be saved, he also ordains the means to the ends. This is how it happens. From the human perspective, a preacher is sent. The preacher preaches about Jesus, who he is, what he came to do. People hear that with their ears and they become convinced and from the heart they believe and then they actually call on him. Then you have somebody who wasn't a Christian who becomes a Christian. This is how it works.

This is actually one of the best places to see the necessity of churches and preachers sending out more preachers and churches in the work of the gospel. There's an implied, the theologians call it ecclesiology, the doctrine of the church.

In verse 17 he says, *faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.*

When you became a Christian, what did you hear? At some point through a preacher or a person, usually through a person, someone told you the basic components of the good news. It's the voice of a preacher faithfully preaching the word of Christ. Preachers are critical if faith comes by hearing. Of course that means a preacher has to preach the truth and not just whatever he wants to preach. Brandon shared with the other pastors a couple of weeks ago a quote from John Calvin who said, this then is the fountain of all evils, the most hurtful of all plagues, the deadly poison of all churches, when ministers seek their own interests rather than those of Christ. That is true.

A preacher who wants his own glory and preaches something besides Jesus is actually poison in the life of a church.

A preacher who loves the word of Christ more than anything else is a gift and who offers the word of Christ is a gift.

A preacher who offers his own opinions is just some guy offering his own opinions and the internet has given us plenty of that. We don't really need any more of it. This is how God set it up.

How are they to hear without someone preaching?

Let me just say this. Paul elsewhere says that preaching from the perspective of the world, you remember the word he uses to describe it? Foolishness. Foolishness. And that checks out. There are so many slick ways of communicating in our world. And yet God has said that, you know what, let's make it the most effective way of getting the gospel to the nations is through people standing up and preaching. We have articles and books and digital and video media and those can and are used by God in a lot of places in the world. But the bread and butter of how this works, strangely enough, is something so foolish as preaching.

And the other thing that this passage brings up is that a preacher can't just take up this responsibility himself. He has to be sent. And that means that someone is doing the sending. And in the context of the rest of the New Testament, after the apostles, the people doing the sending is the church. Sending involves all the things that we do here and other churches have their own versions of this laying on hands, ordinations, setting people apart for this work called being a pastor or an elder. They walk around with the derivative authority of Jesus operating in the life of the church, meaning somebody can't just decide to be a preacher and start doing it. And if we see someone do that, we're right to be suspicious. See a person can have the internal desire to be a preacher, but the church has to affirm that they should be a preacher. And that doesn't just mean that they might have the ability to speak in public.

The New Testament gives the qualifications for somebody who God is calling to do this. Except one line, the qualifications are all character. All character. And it's the church's job to look at a

person and say, okay, there's gifting and yes, you're not a criminal, like you are growing into conformity with Christ. That's not the baseline, by the way, not a criminal. But growing into conformity of Christ, and then they send the person out and they say, we see it, we'll send you. If that doesn't happen, the credibility of the preacher is diminished, and the credibility of his message is diminished, and the gospel witness is tarnished, and then we start to see abuses and crazy. Abuses and crazy can happen even when it's done right. But when it's done wrong, it's very, very possible to see abuses and crazy.

I was thinking of one of my favorite movies that I'm not recommending that you watch with your entire family, okay? The Apostle, my favorite actor, Robert Duvall. I watched this when I was a new Christian in college. Robert Duvall is a Pentecostal preacher, large church, but he gets into some moral trouble, and he goes on the run from the law. And yet he is a preacher, and he can't escape this gnawing sense that God has called him to preach. And so there's this scene where he goes down into the river, somewhere in Louisiana, and he rebaptizes himself, and he redubs himself an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he goes and starts a church somewhere, and they have no idea who he is. And I remember watching that as a new Christian thinking, this is a great movie, but something's horribly wrong with that. And I'd like to go back to my 18-year-old self and say, you were right. That was a good intuition. You can't just go and reformulate yourself as a preacher. Somebody should have said something. Somebody should have checked in, of course, by the end of the movie they have. When this is done well, it's a wonderful thing. When this is done poorly, it does damage to the kingdom of God. The church is to send out preachers to other places so that people can hear the Word of Christ and believe and call on Him.

This is why we plant churches, by the way. That's why our church is committed to doing this. We want to send out preachers, and with some of you, to go and start churches in other places, because this is how it was intended to go. There's a reason why he quotes Isaiah here in verse 15. It's Isaiah 52.

how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.

In context, that's a reference to a proclamation to Israel that their captivity is over. If you remember, the northern kingdom was taken captive by the Assyrian Empire. The southern kingdom was taken captive by the Babylonians. Isaiah is picturing, what if you were a captive, say in Babylon? You see the messenger running over the hill. The messenger is crying out to your little group of essentially enslaved refugees, if that's a thing. He's crying out, your captivity is over. You can leave. You can go back home now. Even the feet of that messenger would be beautiful to you in that moment, because that person has just proclaimed your freedom. He's just proclaimed, you can go home now. He's just proclaimed that everything that you have longed for, everything that's crushing you, the thing that's crushing you has been defeated, the things you long for are available to you, go. Which is what a faithful preacher offers in the gospel. We show up and we preach that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died under the wrath of God in place of sinners like us, that God raised him on the third day. People saw him. They talked to him. They touched him. He ascended back to the Father.

He'll come again and make all things new. If you call on him, he'll save you from sin and death and hell and the devil and yourself. He'll save you. That's freedom and it's life and it's eternal joy.

This is how the gospel goes out. The church sends preachers who proclaim the word and people hear and believe and call on him and are saved. That's still the mission of the church. That's still our job. It's still the call for us to take that message to the world. We still need to send preachers so that people can hear and call on them.

If you're new here, we just sent out a church plant to Toccoa to do this very thing. We hope to do the same in Cleveland very soon, Clayton as well. We do that together. It's not just the work of the pastors and elders. It's the work of the church. We pray for them. We give money. We encourage, some of you are called to be sent to go. We do this together and this is how it's supposed to work. Let me just, as a caveat here, let me say there are other ministries that God raises up to help out with that mission. There are mission agencies that are part of this. There are paratroop organizations that are part of this. There are seminaries that all play some form of supporting role in the mission of the capital C church in sending out preachers of the gospel to take the good news to the nations. But sort of the main river through which the gospel goes forward is the church. And we're all called to take part. There are capital P preachers to be sent out. And you're right to read this and wonder, okay, in what way am I sent? Because there are lowercase P preachers to be sent out to. And that's everybody in this room.

So sort of a two-fold application. If you're part of this church, how are you participating in our mission together of raising up and sending out preachers with church members to plant churches in other places?

Are you committed to pray for Providence Presbyterian, and for Brandon, we just sent him from our own staff?

Are you praying for the Cleveland church plant, the Clayton church plant?

Are you thinking about if you need to be sent out?

Are you thinking about what if God calls my children to full-time ministry?

Are you committed to supporting that work with your money?

All the different ways that we have opportunity to partner. And of course, are you participating in the mission by understanding that you yourself, lowercase P preacher, every single week are sent out to your home and to your workplace and to your neighborhood and to your friend group, all the places where you live, work and play, that God is actually sending you to do this very thing, to give them the gospel? Yes, the church raises up preachers, and plants churches, and the church is filled with people who are sent out each week.

Let me say this too. It's a spoken message.

Do you know how to share the gospel?

Do you have an outline of the gospel in your head on the ready? And you know how to take it and insert it into conversations as appropriate.

Are you equipped? If you're not, it's time to get equipped to be able to speak the good news with the people that you love and that God brings into your life. No one calls on the Lord through some form of osmosis evangelism. It doesn't work that way. It has to be spoken. Whether it was St. Francis of Assisi or somebody else and he got the bad quote attributed to him. You've seen the quote, *preach the gospel, use words if necessary*, no, I'm sorry. That is absolutely dead wrong. If you go and you live a perfect holy life before the people around you and you just look exactly like Jesus, guess what?

No one who sees your life and doesn't hear about Jesus is ever going to call on the name of the Lord.

They're going to think that you're a good person and they're going to be impressed. Lord willing. If you're lucky, they'll ask you, why does your life look so different from mine? But they're probably not going to. They're probably just going to feel guilty all the time. It is a spoken message.

So I want to press this on you. If your default is, well, I do evangelism by letting people see my life. That is not a biblical category that you get to have. The Lord doesn't allow that and it's time to repent of that. We have to open our mouths and speak the truth. Now, not like a jerk, right? There are plenty of jerks who like to talk about Jesus and we don't do it in ways that are foolish or cruel or, what's a way to put it, scratchy, you know what I'm saying? We're like, you talk about Jesus, but it's in such a way that he just sounds awful. We're not called to do it that way, but we're called to open our mouths and lovingly, winsomely tell people about him so that they can repent and believe.

How does that factor into your sense of your vocation? How does that factor into your sense of being sent out? Do you understand that this is what God calls you to do just as much as he calls me and Steve and Jimmy and Brandon to do as well? It might look different, but we're all given that is our mission and vocation. And you might happen to be a teacher or you might happen to be retired or you might happen to be whatever your vocation. Let's hold each other accountable to that.

The gospel goes out because God sends preachers, capital P and lowercase p. Let's commit to be in that. Major part of what Paul is saying is that even though God sends out preachers, some people miss it.

How do you miss the good news?

Well, let's get into this. Second point, the major premise is in verse 17,

faith comes from hearing, hearing through the word of Christ,

meaning that saving faith only happens when we hear the word of Christ. That phrase there seems all inclusive. It's the word about Jesus, his life, death and resurrection. It's all the New Testament teaching on him, but it includes the backstory, which is the whole Old Testament, which sets everything up and points forward to him, meaning it's the word of God, Genesis to Revelation. We say it every week that the Bible is one story with one main character, and it's not us. It's the triune God working out salvation through the person in the work of Jesus. Paul asks, he says, those who won't believe is the problem that they've never heard. You can see that there in verse 18. Is the problem that they haven't heard about God and his salvation?

In context, he's definitely thinking of folks that have a Jewish background, remember? That's one of his big questions here is, what do I do about all of my kinsmen? He's a Jewish person too, who refused to receive their Messiah, but the application is broader than that. Look at his answer. He quotes Psalm 19. He says,

their voice has gone to all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

If you read that Psalm, the whole point of it is that God has made himself known. The first half is all about creation. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the second half is all about the law of the Lord, that he's made himself known in his redemptive acts and in the law, and that, as Paul said in Romans 1, the whole world is without excuse. Everybody knows enough to know there is a God and I ought to worship him. The problem is what we do with it. So in a sense, it can't be said that even though we still have gospel work to do, we're still taking the gospel to the nation so people can hear about Jesus. That's true. It's not as though no one has ever heard about God. Everybody, as they observe a grain of desert sand and the sky and the water molecules of the ocean and the trees and the grass, they know there's a Creator and he should be worshiped. The problem is what we do after that. So it's not a lack of information that's the main problem. We don't have an education issue. We just don't know enough.

So that brings up another question from Paul. He says, okay, if they've heard, did they just not understand? You know, did it not connect? Did it not get through? Look at verse 19, specifically Israel here. He says, do they not understand who God is and what he's doing? He's already charged that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge in verse two. So what's the problem? He answers that question with words from Deuteronomy 32, which is where God tells the nation of Israel. He tells them, if you reject me,

I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation. I'll make you angry with a foolish nation

Which means that from the very beginning, the people of God knew if we turn away from him, he will go to others. If we turn away from him, he will make us jealous and angry by going to our enemies even. So it's not that they didn't understand. From the beginning, they've understood that they need to hear and believe. They need to believe all that God promises them.

So if they've heard and they've understood, what's the problem? Look at verse 21, then verse 20. In verse 21, he shows God's posture toward Israel.

All day long, I've held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.

That's a quote from Isaiah 65, where God begins to tell Israel he's going to bring gentiles into the kingdom. The problem with Israel is that he keeps welcoming them with open arms. He's beckoning them to come in, and they keep disobeying and refusing to believe. So what's the problem? It's not lack of information. It's not lack of understanding.

The problem is unbelief.

The problem is hearing and knowing and digging in your heels and refusing to buy into it. The problem is knowing what I need most is to go outside and to experience the sunlight, but I'm going to stay inside and nobody can make me go outside. It's unbelief. Those who do believe recognize that it's the grace of God that compels them. Look at verse 20, again, he's quoting Isaiah 65,

that there would be a day when God would be found by those who did not seek him, and he would show himself to those who weren't asking for him.

This is what happens when his own people, his own nation, refuse to believe in him. He showed them grace upon grace. Their very existence was all of grace, but if they refused to believe, as Jesus said, out to the highways and the hedges, go out because the banquet hall has to be filled, and it will be filled with people who they didn't even know that they were supposed to be seeking God, and yet here he is. They were found by him. People walking in darkness would see a great light.

The difference comes down to faith versus unbelief. That's the key. It doesn't matter if you're Jew or Gentile, do you believe? If you're male or female, do you believe? Child or adult, do you believe? Skin color, language, culture, doesn't matter. When you hear the good news with your ears, and it makes its way into your brain, do you with your whole person from the heart believe it and throw yourself on the Lord Jesus? Or do you absolutely refuse? This was the problem in Romans 1. Everyone was without excuse because Paul says *we suppress the truth and unrighteousness*. We hear it, we know it's true, and we just shove it down. This is what humans do. We hear, we understand, and we still refuse. Let me just ask this in a room with this many people.

What about you? You're here. You've heard the good news this morning from the sermon. You've heard it in the singing. You've heard it throughout the service. Jesus lived, died, and rose to save sinners. If you call on Him, He'll save you from the wrath of God that is coming to you because of your sin. If you've never believed, will you continue to be the disobedient, contrary person who just knows better? The person who sees through all of this, the consummate cynic, nobody can tell me anything because I just know better. That's just unbelief. That's not being a modern person. It's very old. It's cynicism, and it's just unbelief.

Could you look up and see the grace of God in the person and work of the Lord Jesus?

Could you realize that maybe you weren't seeking Him? You weren't asking for Him, but He could be found by you anyway?

What if He is seeking you?

That's the irony, is that if you find Jesus, you kind of wake up and realize that He found you first, which makes it even better news. If you haven't believed or profess faith in the Lord Jesus, let's talk about that. Believe on Him, and you'll be saved. You've now heard, and God holds us responsible for what we hear.

For those who believe already, my guess is this passage makes you think of the people in your life who have not believed yet, the people who you love. Maybe they are disobedient and contrary. Maybe they're just in the season of rebellion. You might have a prodigal child. You may have unbelieving parents. You might have an unbelieving spouse, friends, neighbors. To say one thing that's obvious, though you wish you could, you cannot make them believe. You cannot do it. Though we wish we could, we can't do it. That is impossible. It's not our job. But God can. It is His job, and He does it regularly. He is constantly waking people up from their sleep, giving people life from their death. He finds those who weren't seeking Him. He sends a preacher that you've never even heard of to somebody that you love, and they hear the gospel, and they believe it. It feels like you didn't even have a hand in that, and He just did it. Just to show you that He could, He does that kind of thing. Two questions.

Are you asking God to find the people that you love?

Are you asking Him to do what only He can do to save them, open their eyes, bring them to faith, help them believe? In other words, are you praying? That's our job. He calls us to pray. And He might answer your prayer after one prayer, and He might answer your prayer after you're dead and have prayed a million prayers. We just don't know. He doesn't tell us that. He does tell us to pray and to trust Him. The other thing He tells us to do is to speak, and that's the second question.

Are you speaking? Again, not angrily, obnoxiously, judgmentally, but truthfully and compellingly.

Are you willing to love the people in your life who don't yet believe in such a way that they know you love them, and are you willing to speak to them in such a way that they know, they know there is one way to be rescued from sin and death, and it's by calling on the Lord Jesus? Tell them the truth. Speak the good news into their ears.

Let me say this. Argue with them. I know you can't argue anyone into the kingdom. That's true. No one's asking you to argue them into the kingdom, but our brains operate on the basis of arguments. And some people believe crazy things, and it's a loving thing when you go to somebody who believes crazy things, and you poke holes in it, and you try to help them see your life is built on a bad foundation, and it doesn't have to be this way. And you do that in appropriate ways, but argue with them, compel them, help them to see the beauty of Jesus, and that Christianity is better. It makes sense. It holds up. There's history.

Plead with them. We pray, and we speak, and we trust the Lord, and He will call many people to Himself. And some people will still miss it.

The famous Great Awakening preacher, George Whitfield, was really close friends with Benjamin Franklin. Yes, that Benjamin Franklin. And it began as a business relationship, but it continued into a lifelong friendship. Franklin was a deist. That's kind of the God as a clockmaker, made the world, wound it up, let it go, doesn't have anything to do with us. Can't really know him. That's a deist, kind of. Whitfield and Franklin partnered together in publishing news of the revivals. They were so close that at one point they started plotting whether they could start a new British colony somewhere else in the continental, what is now the U.S. Franklin built a preaching chapel for George Whitfield, which became the first building of the University of Pennsylvania. Many written letters between the two. And in most of them, Whitfield begs Benjamin Franklin, believe the gospel. You are so smart. You have investigated electricity. How about you investigate the new birth, he would say. And you would think that it would have been annoying to a guy like Benjamin Franklin. You would think that he would have just cut him off. But after Whitfield died, Benjamin Franklin said, I knew him intimately upward of 30 years. His integrity, his disinterestedness, which means he loved people without expecting a return. We don't use that word these days. His zeal in prosecuting every good work I've never seen equaled and I shall never see exceeded.

The good news came to Benjamin Franklin through a preacher, loving, compelling, based on trust and a long-term friendship. But based on his own writings, there's reason to believe that Benjamin Franklin missed it due to unbelief.

Don't let that be said of you. Don't let it be said of you that you missed it because you absolutely refused, in face of all the evidence, that you refused to believe the one message that could save you. Don't let it be said of you. God sends us the good news. Faith comes by hearing. Hear it and believe it and for those people that you know and love, you keep praying and you keep speaking and you keep arguing and you keep compelling them to come in. The Lord Jesus continues to hold out his arms to sinners. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you that you tell us that faith comes by hearing and hearing through the word of Christ and that while some of us are called to be preachers in churches, that all of us are sent out with the good news on our lips. So help us to love our friends and family members and coworkers who don't yet believe. Help us to open our mouths. Give us the ability to know what we believe and to speak it convincingly. But help us to call on you, O Lord. You're the only one that can open blind eyes. You're the only one that can give a new heart. You're the only one that can give life where there's death. So for those that we love, we ask you to give life where there's death. For anyone in this room that doesn't yet believe, we ask you to give life where there's death. And for all of us, O Lord, help us to hear your word and to believe it. We pray in Christ's name, amen.