



“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” St. Matthew 28:19. Jesus tells the disciples what they are to do after His Ascension to the right hand of the Father. This is the work of the Church today, to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all people. This is our work in the church in this time and this place at the command of Christ.

We live in times of upheaval witnessing things we would not have expected. True, the world has been a sinful and selfish place for a long time, Yet, we also realize that much of the animosity to God and other people is a sign of the end of the age. In these times, we might wonder what our role is as members of Christ's Church on earth and how do we recognize the Church when so many (false) religions exist in the world with a great number of different interpretations of Scripture by churches that call themselves Christian.

As Christians, we should hear God's Word and take the opportunities for worship together, as a Christian community, as often as it is offered. **Jesus says, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” St John 8:31-32.** We are called in Holy Baptism to recognize what our church teaches, knowing what comes from God's Word and make ourselves familiar with it. From this we should belong to congregations that confess and teach God's Word in its purity. **“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God” Colossians 3:16.** Remember the Berean Christians were studying God's Word on a daily basis to know and learn God's Word, thus through the Word their faith was strengthened and was growing (**Acts 17:11**).

To recognize and avoid false teaching, we are to be in the Word, so that we are better equipped to recognize such teaching. Jesus warned in **St. Matthew 7:15-16 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”** Certainly to recognize the false prophets, it is necessary to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest God's Word on a regular basis as we pray in the Collect for The Word.

We are also called to tell others about Jesus and take part in the acts and works of mercy for those who are in need, thus, becoming faithful witnesses to God's mercy in Christ. **Jesus says “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you” St. John 20:21.** This is also a Third Commandment responsibility as we are to support the work of the church not only with financial gifts but also with our time and our talents; our gifts and abilities always given to the glory of God for the furtherance of His Kingdom, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ would flourish. As we serve the Lord with our gifts, abilities and resources, we also remember that God will provide for our needs as we work in His Kingdom trusting that He will take care of us. In **Philippians 4:19** Paul writes, **“And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”**

Through all of this as we serve our Savior Jesus Christ, we recognize the identifying characteristics or “marks” of the Church that point us to the truth of God's Word in that time and place. We recognize the presence of Christ's Church where the pure proclamation of the Gospel is present in preaching and teaching as we learn and know from God's Word itself. **“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it” says the Lord, in the book of Isaiah 55:10-11.**

As the Church preaches the pure Word of God that accomplishes the purpose for which God has sent it, so also the indentifying “marks” of the Church are the proper and right administration of the Sacraments according to the institution of Christ Himself as we hear in **St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. Paul in 1 Corinthians as well.** Where these indentifying characteristics or “marks” of the Church are found and administered according to God's Word in its truth and purity, there the work of the Holy Spirit creates faith and sustains that faith. God's Word of promise is sure and certain and does what it says. From the Word we receive the comfort of our Savior Jesus Christ in His Word and Sacraments to strengthen our faith and carry us through till we see our Savior when He returns in glory!

*Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.*

LSB 655 “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word” stanza 1