

“TELL ME AGAIN!”

Reformation Day

Zion Lutheran Church, Beecher, IL

Sunday & Wednesday, October 30 & November 2, 2011

Sermon Text – John 8:31-36

First Reading – Revelation 14:6-7

Epistle Reading – Romans 4:19-28

Gospel Reading – John 8:31-36

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our blessed Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. [Amen.]

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Historians, if they've said it once, they've said it 10 thousand times... **“Those who don't know history are condemned to repeat it!”** They say that, *not* because it provides a good reason for their academic pursuit, No! They say that, because it's absolutely true! And today, as we observe and celebrate the Reformation of the Church that occurred nearly 500 years ago... we see again that we all need to be historians.

If you don't know history... you're a slave... a prisoner... and you're condemned to the same situation, the same lot in life as was experienced by those who went before you!

That... *exactly*... was what Martin Luther faced as a young man. He was Baptized as a Christian the day after his birth. But, that faith into which he was Baptized had been corrupted and watered down over the centuries. Sure, there were elements of the One True Faith still present, but the essence of it, that part that gives one peace and comfort, tragically, and ever so sadly, *that part* had been lost over the years.

Luther knew that he was a child of God. But, he'd been taught that sinful man must assist God in his own salvation. He'd been taught that God had started him on the path to eternal life... but that Luther... as it was said for all Christians... Luther had to contribute to his salvation.

And here comes the rub in all of this...

The big question was... when *did*... or how *could* the individual Christian *know* that he'd done *enough* to contribute to his salvation? When did the Christian have peace of mind that... *for sure*... heaven was where he or she would spend eternity?

Such uncertainty made Luther to be a slave... a prisoner... with no real hope for his salvation. The great comfort, peace, and joy experienced by the First Century Christians when they'd come to faith in Christ... it *wasn't* possessed by Luther and those around him.

It had been lost... because the Gospel of Jesus Christ had been lost... and only *that*... only the Gospel... can take the shackles off of people who are slaves to sin and set them free.

Our Hymn of the Day (*Lutheran Service Book*, #556) was written by Luther. And in the 2nd and 3rd verses, he wrote... *and hopefully you sang*... of the hopeless condition in which he found himself.

Without the Gospel... there he was... a prisoner **“fast bound in Satan's chains”** with **“death brooding darkly over”** him. The thought of his sins against the almighty God who demanded righteousness... *that thought* **“tormented night and day.”** For he knew that... try as he might... he knew that his **“own good works”** were as nothing toward his salvation. *And*... as you sang... Luther's **“fears increased [until] sheer despair”** engulfed his very being. And in

that hopeless despair, he could only see eternal “**death**” and the “**pangs of hell**” awaiting him. (LSB, #556, Vv. 2-3)

But, thanks be to God, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ... even though the Church by and large had lost it... thanks be to God that the eternal Gospel described in our First Reading was still to be found in Holy Scripture!

Encouraged by his mentor, Luther dove into God’s Word. He read, marked, learned, and inwardly digested it... so as to find an answer from God for his “**sheer despair.**” By God’s grace... he found it!

In what is sometimes now called “Luther’s gate of heaven” he found in Romans 1, verse 17 these words first written by Habakkuk: “**The righteous shall live by faith.**” (Rom. 1:17, ESV)

Up until that time, theologians taught that this reference was speaking of God... that God (who, of course *is* righteous)... that God lives and moves by His own righteousness. But, the more Luther read and digested this passage, he came to the conclusion that the passage *isn’t* speaking about God! Rather, it’s speaking about how sinful man can have hope for his salvation!

Luther saw what God’s Word was *really* saying all along... that “**the righteous [people] shall live by faith.**” That understanding turned *everything* around for Luther! He later wrote: “**From this passage I concluded that life [for sinful man] must be derived from faith.**”

Because of this revelation, he also wrote: “**Then the entire Holy Scripture became clear to me, and heaven itself was opened to me. Now we see this brilliant light [of the Gospel] very clearly, and we are privileged to enjoy it abundantly.**”

And thus... over night... Luther’s attitude flipped 180 degrees! His despair turned into *joy*. His certainty of eternal death in hell... turned into certainty of *salvation*! He saw that what God demanded... righteousness... sinlessness... God freely gave through faith in His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

He saw that the perfect obedience that the Law demands of anyone to enter heaven was fully, completely, and eternally fulfilled in Jesus – true God and true Man – lifted up on the cross to pay for the sins of that sinful, pitiful monk, Martin Luther... and also for you... and you... and you... really... for *all* people of *all* time!

But, sadly, so many in this world are just like the Jews to whom Jesus spoke in our Gospel reading a bit ago. They don’t see themselves as in need of a Savior. The Jews then... and so many today... point to things that they’ve done... or not done... and tell themselves that because of their own merits that they’re not a slave to sin.

They’ve developed their own “truth” about how a person is saved and then futilely trust that when eternity comes upon them that they’ll be OK. In other words, throughout human history so many have trusted in themselves for their salvation. They were looking inwardly... *and not outwardly*... just as Luther had been doing.

Luther’s revelation was that sinful man *cannot* save himself, but, more importantly... such salvation is provided to him by God’s grace through Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection from the dead! And with that, Luther was “**free indeed!**” (John 8:36, ESV) His eyes were opened to the fact that not only was there nothing that he *could do* to save himself... but he also saw that there was nothing that he *needed* to do to save himself! By faith... by believing that God in Christ has opened the gate of heaven for sinful man... joy, peace, and confidence in one’s eternal status is realized.

Once that's realized, then the child of God honestly desires to live as one of God's own. He or she lives their life in repentance and faith – ever sorry for their failures and looking to Christ for forgiveness. They trust with all their heart, body, and mind... that God loves them... that He forgives them... and that for the sake of Jesus... all will be well with them when they draw their last breath on this earth!

As some of you know, I enjoy football. I played it in high school and now enjoy watching it and following my favorite college and professional teams.

A team's fortunes can change dramatically over night... but right now... the Packers, my favorite pro team, are doing pretty well. After a game is over... provided that they won... I'll watch the game analysis not only on the broadcast channel of the game... but I'll also watch it on ESPN *and* the NFL Network!

But that isn't enough... oh no! After I've watched all that, then I get on the computer and read reports on the game from several news agencies. And, finally, throughout the week, I'll depress the red button on my television remote control and to my great joy... until about midweek... the score from last Sunday's game is displayed!

To my patient wife's utter chagrin, it's impossible for me to be around the good news of a Packers win too much! I want to hear that good news – again and again and again!

But, dear Christians, all of that – fun as it might be for some of us – all of that is *nothing* compared to what we have in the Gospel of Jesus Christ! We... *who were formerly slaves to sin*... with only eternity in hell as our destiny... well... we simply can't hear it too often!

We hear it. We sing it. We tell others about it. We want to hear and tell it again and again and again! It IS *that* good and *that* precious!

On this day... *and every day*... we thank God for His Gospel through which we're saved. We thank God for using Martin Luther to restore that Gospel to be what it is... that **"brilliant light"** whereby God has made us His sons and daughters who will **"remain in [His] house forever!"**

May we who are heirs of Luther and the Reformation ever remain zealous... *not* for fleeting football glory; rather, may we remain zealous for the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ by which heaven's gate is open to us!

In Jesus' name, and for His sake! [Amen.]