

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

The Prophets and the Law Prophesied

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Lord + Jesus in the Gospel reading tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence. It has been this way from creation until now. The Church is under attack. The devil, the world, and even our own flesh war against God's Word; creating doubt about what God says; making us question His ways and His will. It has been this way since the serpent tricked Eve in the Garden and Adam willfully sinned by listening to his wife instead of the Word of God. This prompted our Lord God to promise a Savior to rescue mankind, He prophesied of our Lord + Jesus Christ was coming into the world to atone for the sins of the whole world, and justify all those who believe on His merits. Ever since creation and the promise given that He would send His Son to enter into our flesh and become man, the devil, the world, and our flesh has increased their enmity against the Church, and all those who are under her watchful wing.

This is why today, the Church celebrates the Reformation of the Church, for the attacks of the devil upon the Word of God successfully hid the Gospel—that through faith in the merits of Christ we have free forgiveness through our Lord + Jesus Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice for us, and not through our works—it was hidden under man made regulations and self-proclaimed works that were supposed to merit righteousness apart from faith. The Church at the time of the Reformation, did not know the Gospel. They believed that a man could save himself by his outward acts of contrition and satisfaction. Perhaps if they prayed the Lord's Prayer, or said the Hail Mary, or did the rosary enough times, God would look favorably upon them, and give them forgiveness and salvation.

But this belief led many people down the path of pride—believing that they were actually doing a good enough job of keeping the Commandments; thereby giving them the right (in their own minds) to thumb their noses at those they thought were less successful at keeping God's Commandments—and men were also led down the path of despair—realizing that the weight of their sin could never fully be satisfied by their own striving and doing.

But the Light of the Gospel never completely burns out. Even when it seems that this dark world has finally overcome and won the victory. Even when it seems that the devil, the world, and our own flesh have finally succeeded in extinguishing the Gospel, God reveals to us that the Light of the Gospel is still lit; that we still have a Savior in our Lord + Jesus Christ alone. And it was into the dark world of

the sixteenth century that our Lord + Jesus Christ revealed that Light of the Gospel to His servant Dr. Martin Luther.

Dr. Luther, led into despair and shame over sins, had revealed to him by God that his sins were forgiven, not by any works that he had done, or could do, but by the Lord + Jesus Christ's perfect obedience to the Law, and His suffering and death in our place upon the tree of the cross. It was and is our Lord who saves us from sin. We could not and cannot save ourselves by our obedience of the Commandments; for we daily sin much, and daily transgress the Commandments, even when we are not aware of it, even as we pray in the Lord's Prayer in the Fifth Petition, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." It was his belief and laying hold of this promise of salvation in Christ's merits alone by Dr. Martin Luther, that led to the Reformation of the Church.

This Reformation began with Dr. Luther questioning the current practices of the Church of Rome, regarding indulgences, the belief that one could pay their way, and the way of their loved ones, out of purgatory and Hell. Not agreeing with the practice, Dr. Luther nailed 95 theses to the door of St. Mary's Church in Wittenberg, which he placed there intending to have these theses debated by the clergy of the time. But our Lord had better and greater plans, for the dim Light of the Gospel, which at that time appeared to be barely flickering from all of the preaching and teaching of works righteousness, suddenly burst into full flame. For Dr. Luther was not the only one who questioned the practices of that day. Dr. Luther was not the only one who had heard the Gospel of free forgiveness for Christ's sake through faith. There were others who, also in doubt and shame over their sins, were waiting to hear that the Lord + Jesus saves them account of His works and not their own. And therefore, the Light of the Gospel shown forth in all its glory, illuminating the whole world, bringing salvation to all those who struggled over their sin, and comfort to those who were sorry for their sins. For, they held onto the promises of Christ found in His works and merits.

Throughout history since the fall of Adam after creation, our Lord God prophesied through His prophets and His Law of the coming of our Lord + Jesus Christ, Who would redeem His people from their sins by His perfect obedience to the Law and will of God and His suffering and death in our place. So too, our Lord God sent His preacher Dr. Luther into the Church of the sixteenth century to open up the eyes of the world to the Light of the Gospel; to dispel the darkness that had enveloped the world in a dark cloud of works righteousness.

Today, the Kingdom of Heaven still suffers violence. It appears that the Light of the Gospel has once again been hid under a bushel, for the world has once again forsaken the Lord God. There is a prevailing philosophy in the world that strives for all religions to be recognized as the same; as if the free forgiveness through our Lord Christ is just another expression of the other false religions in the world; as if Christianity were no different than Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or Hindi or any other false religion. There is a prevailing philosophy in the world that truth does not matter; that there is no such thing as absolute truth; and that for any one or any religion to claim they have absolute truth is unloving and a lie. There is a prevailing philosophy in the world that God's Commandments do not matter; even to the point that things that our Lord has pointed out as sin, are no longer sins; that it is just another way to live one's life if they so choose; that morality—knowing right from wrong—is a thing to be disdained and that people can make up their own set of morals by which to live according to the evil desires of their own impenitent sinful hearts.

Sadly, there are even church bodies which claim to be a part of the Christian Church, which have accepted these philosophies and are openly promoting them as teachings of the Church. Of course, this is all driven by numbers—the need to be a large church body—for the Church of today believes that success is gauged by the size of one's church body; by the number of butts in the pew during any given church service. There are even church bodies who, even though no repentance will be preached or required by her members, go on thinking that they are doing the Lord's will.

Yes, my dear friends, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence from the day of St. John the Baptist—who preached the same message promised at the fall of Adam after the creation—until now. But the Light of the Gospel never goes out, even when it appears to be that way. For just as the Lord sent His preacher St. John the Baptist to preach repentance towards the forgiveness of sins, He has sent out His preaches into this dark world with the Light of the Gospel. To preach to this dark world that men are not saved by their works; that what God actually calls a sin, is a sin; that not all religions are the same; that those who are in religions outside of Christianity will not enter into Heaven, but be condemned to Hell, because they are led to believe in things that will not save them; also the prophets and the Law preach, and even preachers today, that true fellowship only exists in church bodies where men are held accountable for what they preach and teach; that repentance of sins can only happen when men are called to account for their actions; that there is only one set of morals—a set of rights and wrongs—and that is what our Lord set forth in the Ten Commandments.

What Dr. Martin Luther began in 1517 by the nailing of 95 theses on the Eve of All Hallows, continues today, some 501 years later. So that even though the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence continually, the Light of the Gospel is preserved by our Lord God through His faithful servants. Who proclaim to us that we are indeed sinners in need of God's grace, and that our sins are forgiven on account of our Lord + Jesus Christ, and His fulfilling of the Law perfectly, when we could not; and His suffering our punishment, so that we do not have to suffer it. Our faith clings to this promise of love that the Lord has for us, and for the world. And it is this love that will continue to let the Light of the Gospel shine in this dark world, for our Lord does not want anyone to perish, but that all might be saved, and come to the salvation that is found in Him alone through faith in the promises found in His works and merits. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!