

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Who Has Ears to Hear

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 God, Heavenly Father, pour out, we beseech Thee, Thy Holy Spirit upon Thy faithful people, keep them steadfast in Thy grace and truth, protect and comfort them in all temptations, defend them against all enemies of Thy Word, and bestow upon Christ's Church Militant Thy saving peace; through the same Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

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

St. John the Baptist had been put in prison for preaching against King Herod's unlawful marriage to Herodias—his brother's wife. In prison, St. John the Baptist heard of the works of the Lord + Jesus, and he sent two of his disciples ask the Lord + Jesus if he was the "Coming One," or if they should expect another. We hear that reading from the beginning of this chapter of the Gospel of the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew every *Gaudete*, the Third Sunday in Advent. Our Lord + Jesus in that text talks about how St. John the Baptist was a milquetoast preacher. He was not a reed in the wind. Nor was he a man in fine raiment who dwelt in a king's house. Rather, he was a prophet. He was the greatest of the prophets, for he heralded the arrival of the Messiah—the Lord + Jesus, the Christ.

Ever since St. John the Baptist came preaching the Kingdom of Heaven, through the preached Word, is having a violent effect on the sinful hearts of mankind. The hardness of their hearts is being broken through the preaching of the Word. This preaching that breaks the hardness of men's hearts is the preaching of the works and merits of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. He has caused the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the blind to see, He has healed the lepers, raised the dead, and has preached to the poor good tidings. The Lord + Jesus has come from Heaven, put on the flesh of mankind, so that He could fulfill the Law of God perfectly, and suffer and die in our place on the tree of the holy cross.

St. John the Baptist preached the good news of the Lord + Jesus Christ. He preached the works of what the Christ would do: He is the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the whole world; not just the sins of the Jews, but the sins of the whole world. All those who repent and believe—who cling to the Lord + Jesus in faith—are saved by clinging onto His works and merits in faith. St. John the Baptist brought a two-edged sword and hacked in two the hard hearts of the sinful Jews so that they could hear the good news of the Messiah—the Lamb of God come into the world to redeem the world from sin, death and the power of the devil.

St. John the Baptist lit a spark in the people of Israel that prepared for the coming of the Lord + Jesus. In this sense, he is like Elijah, for Elijah stirred up the hearts of the people of Israel to live lives faithful to the Lord God. St. John the Baptist stirred up the hearts of the people of Israel to look for and receive the Messiah—the man from Nazareth, our Lord + Jesus. The people who had ears to hear,

seized upon this proclamation of the Gospel and when our Lord + Jesus revealed Himself through His works and through His preaching, the people of Israel seized upon His Word, and clung to it in faith, for it was comfort to the poor in spirit. The message of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, is comfort to our troubled souls as well. For us poor, miserable sinners are trapped in our sins and transgressions, and there is no hope to save ourselves through our good works and virtuous living. All of our attempts at such fail miserably, and often.

St. John the Baptist preached the Lord + Jesus and His coming. The works of the Messiah are the proof that the Lord + Jesus is the “Coming One.” There is no one else whom we should expect. All the prophets up until St. John the Baptist preached about this Messiah Who was to come. He was the only one who could put a name and face to the person of the Messiah. Ever since the days of St. John the Baptist only preachers who point to the works of the Christ—His fulfillment of the Law for mankind, His suffering and dying on behalf of mankind—are worthy of having the words coming from their lips be heard.

For many false prophets have arisen since the days of St. John the Baptist. Many false preachers still exist today, who lead you not into faith with the Christ, but lead men falsely into hoping in their good deeds, and good words, and good thoughts.

In the days and years leading up to the Festival which we celebrate tonight, the Papist Church had sold the Gospel by convincing people that they had a spark of goodness in them, which if they fanned enough, would earn them salvation from the Lord God. Where Christians failed, they developed the false, unscriptural doctrine of Purgatory, in which men could work off their sins, and earn Heaven. Indulgences were sold (in order to line the pockets of evil men who had claimed important places in the Church) so that you could buy for yourself, or a loved one, a means to get time off from Purgatory.

It was five hundred and two years ago that Doctor Martin Luther nailed Ninety-Five theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg to debate the use of indulgences; a practice which he, and many others, saw as an abuse of the Church. Doctor Martin Luther had discovered, through his own torments of the soul and his inability to ignite the spark of goodness in himself sufficiently, that salvation was found in the righteousness of the Christ. We are justified by faith in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ. A righteous Triune Lord God cannot grant salvation to sinful, unrighteous mankind, whose every thought, word and deed is a sinful one. In order for there to be salvation for mankind, we needed a go-between—a mediator between unrighteous man and the righteous Lord God.

Just as in the days of St. John the Baptist, and in the days of our Lord + Jesus Christ on Earth, when men heard the Gospel of a Messiah born in the flesh of mankind, and sought to lay claim to it in their hearts and in their lives, now the Church was ignited by the spark of the Gospel lit by Doctor Martin Luther. The Holy Ghost had worked on the hearts of the faithful to turn away from their works, which always fail, to the works and merits of the Christ. People clung to the Gospel, and were willing to lay down their lives for it, even as the Apostles laid down their lives to preach about the Lord + Jesus—the Messiah Who had come into the world to redeem the world from sin, death and the devil.

The true preachers of the Gospel today still preach only the Christ; salvation is found in Him alone, and not in your good works. You have salvation not because you can stop doing any particular sin. You have salvation because you have a mediator that bears your sin and credits to you His righteousness which He won for you through His perfect obedience to the Law and through His suffering and death on the tree of the holy cross. We lay claim to these gifts through faith. Faith is created in us through the preaching of the Gospel, and through our participation in the Blessed Sacraments, through which the Holy Ghost creates and sustains faith and life in us.

We are saved because our we use our ears to hear the message of the Gospel and believe the

good news which it proclaims. This has been the way it has always been, since even before the time of St. John the Baptist; to the time of the prophets of old, who proclaimed the coming of the Messiah, just like Elijah did. Therefore, let he who has ears, hear the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. He has redeemed you a lost and condemned creature, not with gold or silver, but with His blood in His innocent suffering and death. He suffered violence so that you could go free from the eternal torments of Hell, and receive a crown of glory to live with the Lord + Jesus, and all the saints and angels in Heaven for all eternity.

There is no Purgatory. There is only Hell or Heaven. For those who refuse to believe, or through apathy ignore the coming of the Messiah, there is only promised condemnation, for they must rely on salvation through their own works—something which is impossible to do. For those, however, who hear the Word of God and believe on the Lord + Jesus—who cling to Him in faith—we have the sure and certain promise of an eternity in Heaven.

The enemies of the Gospel will always try to take this comfort away from us. King Herod put St. John the Baptist in prison for his preaching. The Pharisees and Sadducees, and the whole Sanhedrin put our Lord + Jesus to death, because He spoke the truth about Him being the Messiah. The Apostles were put to death for preaching about the salvation found in Christ + Jesus alone. And the Roman Church killed the souls of many people by leading them away from the truth of salvation in Christ alone. They led them to the false teaching that mankind can save themselves through their own works. Doctor Martin Luther five hundred and two years ago lit the flame of the Gospel once again, so that those who have ears to hear could hear.

Many false preachers exist today, who would wrest the Kingdom of Heaven from us, by leading us to falsely believe that our good works can accomplish anything for our own salvation. We faithfully continue today to cling in faith to the promises of the Christ, Who fulfilled the Law for us and suffered and died in our place. He promises us an eternal home in Heaven. Let us continue to open our ears to hear the Word of God in all its truth and purity and administer the Blessed Sacraments according to Christ's institution, so that all those who come to this holy house, may hear and believe, and receive the salvation of their souls. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, Merciful Father, Who madest the light to shine out of darkness, we thank Thee that Thou hast shown mercy unto us and our fathers, and by means of Thy servant Luther hast restored the pure light of Thy Gospel: keep us, we beseech Thee, in sound doctrine, that we may steadfastly believe and worthily follow Thy saving Word, and finally, by its holy comfort, depart in peace and joy; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

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

Soli Deo Gloria!