

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

From the Days of John the Baptist Until Now

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 temptation, defend them against all enemies of Thy Word, and bestow upon Christ's Church militant Thy saving peace; through the same 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.

The Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew records the words of our Lord + Jesus Christ in the Gospel reading for today. Our Lord + Jesus says, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force." Our Lord + Jesus is referring to Himself. He is the One Who has been preached by St. John the Baptist and has been preaching the same proclamation that St. John the Baptist preached: "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand" as St. John the Baptist preached in chapter three of St. Matthew's Gospel and our Lord + Jesus preached in chapter four of the Gospel. Both men preached the same message that the Kingdom of God was at hand. In other words, the Messiah, our Lord + Jesus, the Christ had come into the world.

God was made man. He took upon Himself our flesh and was incarnate of the Holy Ghost and born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Savior of all mankind had come down from Heaven to dwell with His people. Both St. John the Baptist and our dear Lord + Jesus preached the same message: that the Messiah, the Savior of Mankind—the Kingdom of God—was at hand. He had come to be with His people to redeem His people and all mankind from their sins. He came to atone for the sins of the whole world. This is the message that St. John the Baptist preached, and the same message that our dear Lord + Jesus continued to preach after St. John the Baptist was put into prison and beheaded.

He was put into prison and eventually beheaded because of the message that he proclaimed, for there were those who did not want to hear the message that St. John the Baptist had to preach. They did not want a Messiah. They certainly did not want the Messiah that had come. And so, the Kingdom of Heaven suffered violence. St. John the Baptist suffered violence for his preaching of the Christ, and our Lord + Jesus also suffered violence because He preached Himself. The Jews—even the whole world—did not want the Messiah that came for them—for us even.

Our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, the Anointed One of God, came to free us from the bonds of sin and death that was our wages for our daily and often breaking of the Law of God. He came to free us from sin, death, and the power of the devil who all held us slaves to sin on account of the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. We were, and are, unable to obey the Law of God perfectly. We are deserving, therefore, of God's eternal wrath and displeasure. We only merit violence and suffering on account of

our manifold sins and transgressions. But this is why our Lord + Jesus came down from Heaven to us, in order that He might redeem us from sin, death and the devil. He came to us so that we might be clothed with His righteousness through the waters of Holy Baptism. He came that He might feed us with His very Body and very Blood in bread and wine, so that we might receive from Him forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation.

He came to give us life and hope. But the world rejected Him. The scribes and Pharisees continually tested Him and disregarded all of His teachings, just as they did to St. John the Baptist when he was preaching. They wanted a salvation that was based upon their works. They wanted salvation through their keeping of the Law of God. Our Lord + Jesus gave them Himself and His works and merits as the only means of salvation, and they refused Him.

This is how it is with people who are secure in their way of life. This is how it is with people who think they are basically good people; that if they only fixed a few minor flaws then they could live holy, god-pleasing upstanding lives; then they could find favor with God and man. In truth they will only find favor with man, if they find favor at all. For our Lord God requires perfect obedience to His Law and will. This is something that we are incapable of doing. But those who do not realize the corruption that infects them, only see the minor flaws that they need to improve upon. Or worse, they mistakenly think that there is nothing wrong with them—they are good people—they have nothing to confess; no sin that needs to be confessed on their knees, so that they might receive absolution.

This is the way it has been since the days of St. John the Baptist. The Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence because people continue to reject the Lord + Jesus as the only Lord and Savior of mankind. There are those who are so crass to enact violence against those who would preach a salvation in our Lord's works and merits alone. There are those who violently take the Kingdom of Heaven away from people by teaching people that salvation is found in our works and merits; in our being good people. Faith clings to the works and merits of the Christ, for salvation is found only in Him.

This is the message that St. John the Baptist preached as He pointed his finger at the One Who stood among them Whose sandals he was not worthy enough to untie. He pointed His finger at the Lamb of God Who has come to take away the sins of the whole world by His death on the tree of the holy cross. St. John the Baptist was imprisoned and beheaded on account of his preaching salvation in the Christ alone. Our Lord + Jesus also suffered violence at the hands of evil men—men who wanted no part in the Lord God Who fulfills the Law for them. They wanted to continue to trust in their works, for in truth sinful mankind praises those who lead so-called good lives. They did not want the Lord + Jesus, for they desired the praise of men, more than the praise of the Lord God. Therefore, they seized our Lord + Jesus and beat Him, mocked Him, spit upon Him, and crucified Him on the tree of the holy cross.

They desired to take away the Lord + Jesus and His Gospel preaching through violence for they did not want a salvation given by grace through faith. They wanted to continue to trust in their works and merits, and had no need for the works and merits of the Christ.

From the days of St. John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven still continues to suffer violence, and those who want to be saved by their so-called good works continue to violently take away the Kingdom of Heaven from those who would trust in Christ alone as the Savior of mankind. They take away from people our Lord + Jesus—they take away His works and merits—and leave us with only our paltry keeping of the Law as a means of salvation. But there is no salvation in our works and merits. There is only salvation found in our faith and trust in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus, the Christ.

The Church at the beginning of the Reformation, when Doctor Martin Luther nailed his ninety-

five theses to door of the castle Church of Wittenberg falsely led people to trust in their works and merits as the means of salvation. Our works and merits only lead to despair when we realize how much we fail to perfectly keep the Law of God. There is no salvation in our works and merits. Doctor Martin Luther began to teach again what our St. John the Baptist, and our dear Lord + Jesus taught, that salvation was found in faith in the Messiah Who had come down from Heaven to be a man and dwell with His creation; Who came down to fulfill the Law on our behalf, and suffer and die in our place on the tree of the holy cross. Doctor Martin Luther began to teach again what the Apostles and St. Paul and all the Early Church Fathers taught, that we are saved by grace, and justified by faith in the Christ.

The Kingdom of Heaven continues today to suffer violence for there are those who continue to preach that we are saved by our works. They violently take away the Christ—our Messiah and Savior—away from us, and lead people into believing that they are saved by their own keeping of the Law. This is why we continue to preach the same message that St. John the Baptist and our dear Lord + Jesus preached, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Our Lord + Jesus has come into the world to redeem mankind from all of his sins and trespasses. He has perfectly satisfied the Law and will of our heavenly Father by keeping it perfectly, and He has paid the price of our sin by innocently suffering and dying upon the tree of the holy cross.

This salvation is for you. This salvation is for your children. The Kingdom of Heaven will continue to suffer violence until our Lord Christ’s return on the Last Day when He will take us all from this vale of tears to Himself in Heaven. For the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh desire to violently take away from us our salvation in the Lord + Jesus alone. They do not want us to remain steadfast to the pure light of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ. For they would have us to remain in the darkness in which they dwell, so that we end up with the same fate that has been reserved for them.

Therefore, my dear friends, continue to cling in faith to the Light that shines out of the darkness. For that Light illumines the sin-filled darkness of our souls and shines a light on our sin, so that we might realize our error and confess our sins to God our Father, and receive from Him forgiveness for our sins on account of the works and merits of His dear Son, our Lord + Jesus. May the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus continue to illumine us so that we remain steadfast in the One, True faith, and cling in faith to our Lord + Jesus until He calls us to our eternal home in Heaven, where we will rejoice forever with all the saints and angels as we sing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in Kingdom which has no end. 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!