

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2021
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. 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, 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.

St. John the Baptist sat in prison. He was in prison for preaching the truth. This truth was that Herod was not supposed to have usurped his brother's wife. Herodias, the wife of his brother, did not like that St. John the Baptist preached the law. This is quite often the reaction of people when the Law is preached against them. Instead of honestly looking at their own heart, and contemplating the accusation that is leveled against them, they lash out at the person preaching the Law. I am sure that this does not apply to any of us here, though.

There is just as equal a response to hearing the Gospel. Certainly, there are those who rejoice to hear what our Lord + Jesus has done for them; who rejoice to hear that their works do nothing to save them, but there are still many who that salvation is solely on account of the Christ and scoff. They do this either openly, when those who hear willingly reject the message of the Gospel, or they do this not openly, but in their heart. These are the ones who reject the Gospel by attempting to appease the Lord God by their works. They erroneously think that Christianity is all about keeping the Law. My dear friends, Christianity is all about recognizing our inability to keep the Law, and our need for a Savior outside of ourselves. We find our One and Only Savior in the Lord + Jesus Christ.

Therefore, whether the Law is preached, or the Gospel is preached, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, because those who hear choose to only hear what they want to hear. They do not take the preaching of the Lord to heart. We are to hear the preaching of the Lord and examine our own hearts; to confess our sinfulness and believe that we are saved not because of any work we have done, but solely because of what our Lord + Jesus has done for us by living a perfect life and suffering our punishment on the tree of the holy cross.

That the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence is really because the truth of God's Word is being rejected. The truth that we are poor, miserable sinners in need of God's grace. Much of the world rejects this, and instead of attacking their own hearts and rooting out the corruption in their hearts through contrition and faith, they lash out at the Church and her preachers.

This is why St. John the Baptist was in prison; because of his preaching against the sin of Herod and Herodias; because he preached against their adultery. While St. John the Baptist was in prison, however, the Lord + Jesus went about to all the towns and villages preaching repentance towards the

forgiveness of sins. We are familiar with this story because we hear it during every Advent season. On the third Sunday in Advent, Gaudete, we hear how St. John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to ask the Lord + Jesus if He was the One that was promised to come into the world, or if another should be expected. Today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew is the record of our Lord's words immediately after showing St. John's two disciples that He is the Christ, because the Christ was supposed to do the things that the Lord + Jesus was doing: healing the sick, raising the dead, opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, and preaching the Gospel to those who need to hear it. This was all promised by the Prophet Isaiah.

Our Lord + Jesus takes the opportunity after preaching this to show the crowds gathered around Him, that the preaching of the truth always has the same reaction by the majority of the world. The truth is always suppressed by those who do not want to hear it. The enemies of the truth war against the truth. They try to smash its existence. Ultimately this is prompted by the devil. The devil, the world and our sinful flesh do not want us hearing the truth. Our enemies do not want us hearing the truth, because that would lead to our repentance of our sins, and our faith in the One and Only Savior of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Our enemies of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh use those in this world who would smash the truth to do this in our midst as well.

This is why our Lord + Jesus cries out at the end of our pericope for today, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" It is a call to us to open our ears and listen to the truth. It is a call to not be like those who would violently destroy the Kingdom of Heaven by suppressing the truth. It is a call to Herod and Herodias to listen to not only St. John the Baptist, but also to the Lord + Jesus, Who was also preaching the same preaching. The Kingdom of Heaven always suffers violence by those who do not want to hear the truth. The Prophets of the Old Testament all suffered violence for their preaching of the truth, and they were beaten, abused, and some were even killed. St. John the Baptist also was killed for preaching the truth. He was beheaded by King Herod after promising his niece any gift she wanted, and her mother Herodias asked for his head on a platter.

The Kingdom of Heaven continues to suffer violence because there are those who have ears, but continue to stop their ears to the truth. They plug their ears and refuse to listen to both the Law and the Gospel. That we are few in number is proof of that in our day and age. But we need not despair, because this is what has always happened. The truth of the Word of God always has, and always will suffer violence. The truth of the Word of God that we are saved by grace alone through faith will always be attacked until our Lord + Jesus comes again and restores the Kingdom of Heaven to its intended place.

It happens in our time, it happened in our Lord's time, and it happened in the time before and after our Lord's time on Earth with the Prophets and Apostles. That we are called Lutherans is because the truth of the Word of God also suffered violence at the hands of the Papacy. Today we celebrate the Reformation of the Church, because Doctor Martin Luther chose to boldly preach the truth of the Word of God. The Papacy did everything in its power to suppress that truth. They excommunicated Luther, they called him, and his followers, heretics. We are still considered heretics by the Papist church. The penalty at the time of the Reformation for being a heretic was being burned alive at the stake. There were several priests who held to the Augsburg Confession, and the teaching of Luther, who were martyred for their preaching of the truth.

This is why the church is decked out in red today. Because it is a testimony that the true Church will always suffer violence. There will always be those who stopped their ears to the truth, and seek to destroy the preachers of the truth. The church is decked out in the blood of the martyrs who gave their life for preaching the truth. This includes not only the Lutherans who lost their lives at the hand of the evil and corrupt Papacy—at the hands of the Antichrist—but also because of the preaching of the truth by St. John the Baptist, and the Prophets and Apostles who gave their lives for the truth. The blood of

the martyrs cries out from the ground to us to open our ears and hear the truth, and confess our sins and believe on the saving works of our Lord + Jesus.

Indeed, the church today is decked out in red because we are all covered with the Blood of our Lord + Jesus through our Holy Baptism. We have been washed clean and free from sin by the shedding of our Lord's blood on the tree of the holy cross. His blood covers us and washes away our sins. We are clothed with His righteousness. Just as He lived a perfect life, fulfilling perfectly the Law and will of the Lord God, we are now covered with that perfect life of His through the shedding of His blood and the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost through Holy Baptism.

Not only are we covered in His blood and righteousness; not only is the church decked out in red to remind us that blood has been shed, but this blood of our Lord + Jesus is now our drink. The Blood of our Lord + Jesus is given to us under wine, along with His Body under the bread, as a meal which sustains us in this time of violence against the Kingdom of Heaven. When we eat His Body and drink His Blood we remember and proclaim His death on our behalf. We are remembering that our Lord Himself suffered violence at the hands of the chief priests and scribes who did not want to hear any of the truth that the Lord + Jesus was preaching, and they killed Him for it on the tree of the holy cross.

Their rejection of our Lord + Jesus, is the whole world's gain. For all those who hear our Lord's cry to "Hear!" receive into their ears the truth of the Word of God. We who have opened our ears to hear the truth of the Word of God receive the promise that even though we are indeed, poor, miserable sinners, our Lord + Jesus has suffered and died on our behalf after perfectly fulfilling the Law of God, so that we may cling to His works and merits for our salvation. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" We poor sinners have salvation in our Lord + Jesus, the Christ alone. Thank be to God! 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!