

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2025
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald P. Dulas

He That Hath Ears to Hear

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, that is to come. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

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.

My dear friends, St. John the Baptist had been put in prison by King Herod for his preaching against his sin of adultery. He stole his brother's wife! St. John the Baptist knew that his time in this life was near at hand, and so, he sends two of his disciples to the Lord + Jesus to ask Him if He was the Coming One—that is, if He was the Messiah, the Christ—or if they should perhaps wait for someone else. We hear that Gospel pericope from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew every Gaudete Sunday, every Third Sunday in Advent. But that text informs our reading for today, for those events take place immediately before the events of today's Gospel reading.

The summation of our Lord's preaching here in this Gospel reading for today to the multitudes was that the Word of the Lord God endures persecution. “It suffereth violence.” And, “Violent men take it by force.” Those are the two things that are constantly happening to the Word of the Lord God. It is either the basis for persecution, as it was in the case of St. John the Baptist, who was put in prison, and after the events of today's Gospel, was beheaded by King Herod. Or, the Word of the Lord God is taken violently by force by violent men in order that they may corrupt the Word, so that it loses its power to be efficacious in the salvation of men's souls.

In either case, this does not mean that the truth cannot still reach the ears of those who hear its truth. The scribes and Pharisees had distorted the truth of the Word of the Lord God, and yet when our Lord + Jesus came, there were those who still believed His Word; still believed on Him. The people still flocked to St. John the Baptist, he who was the fulfillment of the promise of the coming of Elijah before the Messiah. St. John the Baptist came in the power and efficacy of the Prophet Elijah. Many came to him by the Jordan River to confess their sins and receive baptism. The baptism that was only a symbolic washing that represented the cleansing away of the sins that had been confessed.

Men can try to silence the Word of the Lord God either through violence against the preachers and prophets, or they can take it and distort its truth, so that men do not hear the full Gospel, but are left in despair that their sins are too great for there to be salvation for them. Or men distort the Word of

the Lord God so that people become puffed up in their pride, believing that their sins are not that great, and that their own righteousness is sufficient for salvation. St. John the Baptist had to preach against the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees, and he had to preach against the sins of King Herod. For this faithfulness in preaching, he received the penalty of death. Like all the Prophets before him, he too was persecuted and killed for preaching the truth of the Word of the Lord God.

Even our Lord + Jesus was crucified on the tree of the holy cross for His preaching. The final accusation leveled against Him by the Pharisees was blasphemy. How did He blaspheme? He told the truth: He was the Son of the Lord God in the flesh. The scribes and Pharisees refused Him as their Messiah, and so they rejected that He was the Son of the Lord God. For this He was crucified by violent men who took the Word by force and nailed Him to the tree of the cross.

And yet, even when all of the Lord's disciples forsook Him on account of His preaching. There still remained the twelve Apostles. They knew, as St. Peter confessed, that He had the Words of eternal life. They would go out into all the world with the good news that the Lord Who had been crucified, had also risen from the dead, and now lives and reigns at the right hand of the heavenly Father. He will come again to judge the quick and the dead. Until that day, the Word that the Apostles preached and handed down to those who would come after them, still endures violence and persecution. It still endures false teaching and false preachers. This is the way that it will be from the days of St. John the Baptist until now, and even unto the end of the world.

This is why we celebrate the Festival of the Reformation tonight. The Word of the Lord God had endured violence against it. Violent men had distorted its truth. They taught that men were saved by their own keeping of the Law of the Lord God. They had turned the gracious and compassionate Christ + Jesus into a stern judge. Keep the Law, or else, face the Lord's wrath. To escape this harsh Lord, the Church set up the sale of indulgences. All one needed to do was buy their way into heaven. Better still, they could buy their loved ones into heaven. This sale was extremely lucrative for the Church. But it did nothing to give men comfort for their sins.

Doctor Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk, was one of these individuals whose sins weighed him down with guilt and shame that no amount of confession to a confessor could ease. He was, as is often the case with men who are weighed down with the guilt of their sins, left to despair. There was no comfort found in the Christ, because He had been turned into a strict judge. And so men either were left in despair, like Martin Luther, or they became puffed up in their pride, believing that their works merited righteousness before the Lord God.

Through diligent study in the Word of the Lord God, the light of the Gospel was eventually shined upon Martin Luther so that He saw that it was by faith in the works and merits of the Lord + Jesus by which one is saved; not by their keeping of the Law. With the truth of the Gospel revealed to him he began to see all the abuses that had been placed against the Church. Therefore, on October 31st, 1517, Doctor Martin Luther nailed 95 theses to the Castle Church in Wittenberg, in the hopes that these issues might be debated. He only hoped to open the discussion. He was not looking to create a revolution. He was not even really looking to reform the Church. He just wanted to have a conversation about the abuses that existed in the Church. These abuses were not unknown to the people and pastors of that time. Luther was certainly not the first one to bring these things up. John Hus, about a century before this, tried to address these things. But he was killed as a heretic. Others had also tried to discuss these things, and they either ended up in prison, or were murdered for speaking the truth. The Word of the Lord God always endures violence against. For the devil does not want mankind hearing the truth of the Word of the Lord God.

Like it is with all things, the time was finally ripe for mankind to hear the Word of the Lord God. They certainly tried to silence Martin Luther—they tried to silence the truth of the Lord God—but too

many other pastors and theologians also saw the truth. They saw the light of the Gospel, that mankind is not saved by their works but by the works of the Christ, through faith. This is also the way it is with the Word of the Lord God. Because it is constantly under attack by the devil and the world, and even our own flesh wars against it, the truth of the Word of the Lord God is reduced to the hearing of only a few people. At the time of the Christ, it was reduced to the hearing of the twelve Apostles, and the few hundred that also believed on the Lord + Jesus, and saw Him after His resurrection.

But the Word of the Lord God, after the Day of Pentecost, spread like wildfire, so that it went into all the world. The same thing happened after the Day of Reformation, on this day 508 years ago. The truth of the Word of the Lord God spread throughout the Church of the West, so that Luther's teaching, and those who became known as Lutherans, filled the whole earth. Those who had ears to hear the Gospel, heard it, and believed on the works and merits of the Christ. They no longer clung to their own feeble works, but clung in faith to the cross of the Lord + Jesus. What began in Wittenburg, Germany spread throughout the whole world: into Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Iceland, England, Poland, Russia, India, and eventually it came to here in America.

Lutheranism spread throughout this country brought by those who heard the truth of the Lord God, who heard the Gospel, back in their native lands. But the Word of the Lord God still remains under attack. We have not seen widespread violence against the Word of the Lord God, although it seems that we are approaching that point. But the Word has had to endure the false preachers and teachers of this time and generation. The Gospel is now hidden in the false teaching that salvation is based upon faith and works. Faith has even become a work which we are to do; something we must drum up inside of ourselves, in order that we may be saved.

But the Word of the Lord endures forever. Even though it is constantly under attack, the truth still reaches those who have ears to hear. Therefore, my dear friends, let those of us who have ears to hear, hear the truth of the Gospel of our Lord. That He has perfectly fulfilled the Law of God on our behalf, and has paid the penalty of our sins by His death on the tree of the holy cross. Let us cling in faith to Him and His works, for by Him, and Him alone, do we have salvation from all our sins. Let us also not forsake our gathering together in this place. For by gathering together, even if but two or three, the Lord + Jesus has promised to be with us. He is with us in this place when we gather together to preach into our ears the truth of the Gospel, and grant us the remission of our sins through the blessed Sacraments.

From the days of St. John the Baptist until now the Word of God endures violence, and men take it by force. The Church continues to endure persecution and martyrdom, and the Church continues to have false preachers, and false teachings. Let us remain faithful to the truth of the Word of the Lord God. Let us who have ears, continue to hear that salvation is found in the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, alone. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Almighty God, be pleased to accompany Thy Word with Thy Holy Spirit and grant that Thy Word would increase faith in us; bring into the Way of Truth all such as have erred; turn the hearts of the unrepentant; and for sake of Thy Name grant succor to all heavy hearts and those who are heavy-laden, that they may through the mercy of the Lord + Jesus Christ be relieved and preserved so that they succumb not to the temptation of despair but rather that they gain the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; through the same + Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with the 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!