

The Festival of the Reformation of the Church
St. Matthew 11:12-15
October 31st, 2024
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Men of Violence Take It by Force

In Nomine Iesu!

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

Sermon Text:

“And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.”

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, it should really be no wonder to us that there is evil in this world. It can be readily seen in TVs, movies, journalism, and pretty much every other form of media. People in our society have no care for the rule of law, and promote a laissez faire attitude toward morals. Corruption abounds everywhere! It is no more evident than on this day on which we find ourselves. This day has become a day for the expansion of every sort of evil. It was quite evident to me last night when I was searching for something to watch. The choices offered as “suggestions” were all of the horror and gore variety. Many of them just vessels to glorify demons and Satan. The saddest part, everyone just takes this as normal. There is no backlash, no warning about “playing with fire.”

I cannot but think that society’s emphasis on Halloween has grown in recent years. And with it all the evil and corruption we see at this time of year. Now to be clear, dressing up in a costume, and eating candy is not evil (except for perhaps one’s waistline). But why do these things have to be coupled with all the emphasis on horror and gore? It is because since the time of St. John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force.

The evidence of this is that all of the Halloween activities (trick or treating, parties, and the like) have overtaken the original intent of this holiday. All Hallows Eve was the night before All Saints’ Day (All Hallows Day). In other words, it was a church Service. It was a time for the Church to gather together as the people of the Lord God and give thanks for all those who have gone before us in the faith. Now, churches are empty on this night. We would not want church to interfere with the truly important events of this night! Many people who espouse to be Christians choose to skip worship on this night in order to participate in the worldly activities of our society. Many churches have even acquiesced to society by moving this day away from the festivities of Halloween to either the previous Sunday, or some other time which will not interfere with these activities.

Who loses in the end? All those who do not even get to hear our Lord’s words from the Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” This is

just what the devil, this evil world, and even our own sinful flesh desires. They desire that we remove ourselves from hearing and receiving the Word of the Lord God. Since our society and world so freely rushes away from the church, and from the gathering together of the saints, this push by the forces of evil is not accompanied with violence; with the killing and martyrdom of the saints.

It was similar in the Middle Ages. The Church has become so corrupt that there was no need for the forces of evil to physically harm the Church. It was doing a good enough job all on its own. Good works were put forth as the means of one's salvation. And if you felt you, or your deceased loved ones, had not done enough good works to inherit eternal life, well then you could buy your, and their, way out of heaven through the selling of indulgences. The head of the Church, the Pope, not only went along with this, but he was a willing advocate for such things, for he used the money to build a church in Rome. St. Peter's Basilica stands to this day as a witness of the use of indulgences.

Many had in times past complained and grumbled about the introduction of indulgences, but nothing ever came of it. Those grumbings were either put to rest quickly, or quashed by the authorities. It was not until this night five hundred and seven years ago, October 31st, 1517, when an Augustinian monk known as Martin Luther, a Doctor of Theology at the newly formed Wittenburg college, began what would become a turning away from these abuses. It would spark a re-formation of the Church. The Church would seek to return to the time when corruptions and abuses did not abound within her midst. His intent was not to start a revolution. It was not even to start the Reformation. He simply wanted to discuss the abuses that existed. He wanted to debate the issues at hand. Therefore, he posted on the door of the castle church, St. Mary Magdalene Church, ninety-five theses that refuted the validity of the use of indulgences, and how they served to drive people away from the church.

Because the sentiment against the use of indulgences, and other abuses, had secretly grown by those who were paying attention to how these things had corrupted the church, when Martin Luther nailed the ninety-five theses to the castle church door, many also took up the mantle to speak out against these things. The Reformation of the Church, the desire to remove from the Church the abuses and corruptions that had infiltrated it throughout the Middle Ages, would eventually endure not only verbal vitriol, but also men of violence tried to retake the corrupt Church by force. There were priests and monks who sided with the side of the true and pure Gospel, who were killed and martyred for their belief. Indeed, as history bears it out, Emperor Charles V even waged war upon the Protestant Estates who believed, taught, and confessed the teachings of the Unaltered Augsburg Confession. Many of the faithful suffered violence from violent men who would take it by force.

I do not really know who had it worse, those of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries who endured murder and death, or our society today who uses the apathy of the saints to infiltrate it with corruption and abuse.

But, my dear friends, this is what Satan, the evil world, and our sinful flesh desire. They hate the truth. They do not want anyone to hear the truth. Therefore, since the days of St. John the Baptist, and even until today, they openly and secretly attack the truth in any way that they can to drive men away from the truth. When men have the truth, the pure preaching of the Gospel and the right administration of the Blessed Sacraments, taken from them, it is easy to drive them down the pathway to Hell. Therefore, the forces of evil, the forces of violence men who take the truth away from us by force, will continue until the Lord + Jesus comes again in power and might and judges both the quick and the dead on the Last Day.

Until that Day our Lord + Jesus continues to send out His holy Word to us. He has sent Prophets and Apostles. He has sent Doctor Martin Luther and the Lutheran Reformers. He sends Bishops, Pastors, and Deacons, His holy Ministers, to us to preach into our ears the truth; to preach into our ears the pure Gospel of our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ, and to administer to us the Blessed Sacraments

according to His command and institution. For it by these means of grace by which He defends and protects His holy people from the men of violence who would take the truth from us by force.

For, they attack the truth because the truth reveals the One, True Savior and Redeemer of the world. The truth reveals our Lord + Jesus, the Christ as the One Who suffered the ultimate violence of the tree of the holy cross. They tried to take His life from Him by force. But He willingly and lovingly gave it up for us on the cross, so that all those who cling to Him in faith may have the forgiveness of their sins, and be granted an eternal life in heaven, and be saved and rescued from the forces of evil who would take our faith away by force.

Therefore, my dear little flock, fear not the Foe. For his subtle crafts and assaults, his deluge of horror and gore that abounds at this time, does not change the gifts that our Lord + Jesus won for us on the tree of the holy cross. The Church still remains, even if those in the pews are few, and apathy among the Church at large abounds. For the pure preaching of the Word of God continues in all those churches of the Reformation who call themselves "Lutheran" and desire to remain faithful to the truth of what the holy Scriptures teach about grace and life. In these faithful churches the Blessed Sacraments are still administered according to Christ's institution, so that we may receive the forgiveness of all our sins.

Let us therefore, my dear friends, continue to not neglect the gathering together around the Word and Sacraments, for this evil world would desire to take it from us. However, every year on this 31st day of October we are reminded of the faithfulness of one man who sought to protect us from the abuses and corruptions of his day. Martin Luther nailed ninety-five theses to the castle church door in Wittenburg, so that we may this day celebrate that Satan has not, nor ever will, win. The world will never conquer, and our own sinful flesh will be silenced. For the truth of the Gospel will endure until our Lord + Jesus comes and takes us out of this vale of tears into our eternal home in heaven. May the Lord God Almighty grant this unto us all. 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!