

REFORMATION DAY

October 31 2020

Revelation 14:6-7

Romans 3:19-28

John 8:31-36

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

The echo of the hammer can still be heard...

as it was used to hang Luther's ninety-five concerns about Church abuses.

Luther, of course, as an academic, wrote these abuses in Latin

not thinking the common people would take notice,

but hoping instead other theologians might want to debate him.

But like a wild-fire,

these ninety-five concerns were distributed to all of Germany within two weeks

and all of Europe within two months.

With their posting,

Luther didn't intend to start a church, or a movement.

They came from heart of a Pastor—

a Pastor who didn't want the people of his congregation or students, led astray.

A pastor who didn't want money and indulgences

to replace repentance and Christ.

Martin Luther wanted to see his beloved Church reformed,

cleansed...for the state of the Church in his day,

was a hot mess,

inside a dumpster fire,

inside a train wreck.

For example, within the Church, salvation by works was being taught.

This was something Luther whole-heartedly believed

until he realized he couldn't do it.

Luther's question of, "How can I find a gracious God?"

remained elusive...no answer was given...

and as a result,

despair...

it almost gobbled him up.

Something else Rome taught was that “saintly” men or women,
 like the Blessed Virgin Mary for instance,
 could share some of their merit—merit they earned by living a righteous life.
 One could receive the merit of these saints—
 if they were venerated and prayed to,
 which lead to idolatry.

Purgatory seemed to be invented out of thin air.
 And papal authority was placed over Biblical authority.
 And then, if all of this wasn't enough, indulgences were being sold.
 Forgiveness in turn for money.

Now, these abuses didn't spring up overnight.
 The Devil takes his time in sowing tares amongst the wheat.
 Time is on his side, as the song goes.
 And even though there were others before Luther
 who pointed out the tares of Rome's false doctrine,
 God used Luther, more than any other,
 and his half-baked list of 95 concerns
 to forever change the world
 and bring the Gospel,
 in its purity to your ears.

See, that's what the Lutheran Church is,
 it's the Church cleansed by the Gospel—
 cleansed by the teaching of justification by grace through faith.
 What?

I don't have to trust in a piece of paper,
 even though it's signed by the Pope?
 I don't have to trust in how much money I give?
 to others or to the Church?
 I don't have to trust in my resume of good works
 or pious deeds? No.
 For salvation is not something to be earned,
 merited, or achieved.

Luther learned that if salvation depends in any way on his doing,
 then it's a work of the law and by works of the law no human being
 will be justified in God's sight.
 Beloved, eyes set on yourself, find only sin and damnation.

But eyes set on Christ,
only find forgiveness, life and salvation.

When God the Holy Spirit led Luther to this ancient truth, he couldn't contain himself.
The chains started falling off, and dropping to the floor.
And when Luther saw the Pope pulling one way
and the Gospel pulling another,
the Reformation began.

But let's be clear, the Reformation is not just about
a German monk in a remote cow pasture of Wittenberg
nailing 95 church concerns to a church door...in hopes of a debate.
It's about a Man—a God-Man who came from heaven,
who has the power to create anew.

Because of this God-Man's living,
bleeding, dying, and rising in your place, you have been transferred
from condemnation, damnation, and guilt under the Law
to freedom and forgiveness under the Gospel,
where your sins are utterly, entirely, and completely forgiven.

So, no more working or climbing to acquire righteousness;
rather we receive righteousness by grace through faith as a sheer gift.

No more seeking assurance on the basis of your works in relationship to the Law,
but rather receiving assurance in Christ and His relationship to you.

No more looking within ourselves for certainty,
for certainty does not lie within you,
but lies outside of you in Christ's Word and Sacraments.

Moreover, no more fear of death,
for death is safe for those who trust in Christ, because Christ tasted death for you.

See, forgiveness salvation and eternal life are all His gifts to you.
And His Cup, that He puts to your lips,
that's His gift as well.

Beloved, this has been the plan of God all along,
to give to fallen Mankind a right relationship to Himself

by grace through faith
in the reconciling work of the Savior's death on the cross.

And so, for those of us who have been given the treasure of the Gospel and
have been given entrance into the kingdom of heaven,
let us give thanks to God tonight for giving us these gifts.

And may we not take this treasure for granted.

But rather, may we stand upon it as Luther once stood,
powerfully proclaiming it,
and steadfastly believing it.

Happy Reformation Day, Amen.

And now may the peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in
Christ Jesus, Amen.