

## Sermon Transcript for Reformation Sunday, October 31, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you were paying attention to verse four, you know why we can't just stop on verse four and just go on from there. "From sin our flesh could not abstain. The sin held its sway unceasing. The task was useless and in vain, our guilt was e'er increasing. None can remove sin's poison dart, or purify our guileful heart, so deep is our corruption." Blessed be the name of the Lord. We do not want to end a hymn like that, so we have to move on and sing the rest of it. But there's no verse in this hymn, Hymn 555, Salvation Unto Us Has Come. This is, as much as we love A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, and we just, I mean, it was so beautiful to hear everybody singing that hymn together.

The truth of the matter is, Salvation Unto Us Has Come goes through the message of the Gospel much more clearly and distinctly and step by step than any other hymn in our entire hymnal. And what is it talking about? Salvation Unto Us Has Come. The whole point... Last week we talked about the idea that this world has, that the physical is bad and evil and the spiritual is good, and so therefore we can just imagine ourselves however we want to be, our gender, our religion, our faith, our wellbeing, whatever, we can just imagine it and it is so, without the understanding that the flesh and blood is real and it, according to God, is good. Now, unfortunately, that good has been corrupted. As we see, as we look around the world, the wars and rumors of wars, the famine, the disease and everything else that is wrong in this world is a result of the sin that came in through Adam and Eve.

And yet, even with that sin, we can still see, if we look at our creation, it still is working pretty well. We wake up in the morning and we don't question, "I wonder if the sun's going to actually come up today." No. We just assume that the sun is going to rise, because we know that God has set it all into motion and it still works. And He still gives all of His gifts, the sun and the moon and everything else, to us for our benefit, so that when we look at the world around us, we don't just see the chaos and the sin and the heartache, but we also see the good and the blessing of God. And we are called to look at creation and say, and see, the God of the world who has created all things, created all this to work for our good, and then that should drive us, then, to the Word of God. And that's where we're going to get into with this Reformation Sunday.

The Reformation, it was about nothing other than the Word of the Lord, the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, but not just the Gospel as in the narrow, "God loves you and forgives you," although that is an important message, but a balance of the full counsel of God, which informs us that we are sinners.

Now everybody, if they're honest with themselves, knows that they're not quite good enough. I've talked to us several times about this, but it bears mentioning again. I had a conference I went to two or three years ago. It was all about how our society is trying to find something, anything, that will make them feel good enough. I mean, products are marketed that you might be right and good or forgiven or holy, I mean, secular products. I went to a movie theater the other day and they had one of the actresses come and she was talking about how we find in the movies, whatever movie it might be, however heinous or uplifting it might be, we find in the movies an expression of the best of ourselves, and we find healing and comfort in the ideas and the images that we see. And I'm going, "Have you watched any movie recently?" There's not a whole lot of uplifting content in most of the movies that we see. It's hard to find a movie that we can show at church and say, "Yeah, this is worth coming to because it actually has a good message," or at least it doesn't have awful message when you talk about it. But they were lifting up the movies as if the experience of making a movie was somehow a spiritual experience and exercise. And I thought, "My word, how desperate are we getting?"

But the truth of the matter is, people want to find their fulfillment, their "good-enoughness", in anything but the Word of God.

And unfortunately, the reason being is because nobody, none of us, really want to face up to the fact that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. You see, that is the message that Luther hammered, literally, hammered home to the people of his day and to our day as well. The reason we celebrate Martin Luther is not because he reformed the church and he reformed Europe and he created education for all kids, sons and daughters, and that he created a sense that we all can come to God. All of that was important. He created the modern nation of Germany, in essence, the modern German language. I mean, he set up a lot of things and he changed by definition what Western culture is all about. It used to be that we taught that Martin Luther was truly a pivotal man in the history of Western civilization and without him, we would not be Western civilization. And while that is absolutely still very true, it's not the point.

The point that Luther had, and the point that we need to remember, is exactly what the angels were talking about in the Book of Revelation. They're flying around with an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation, tribe and language, and people. "Fear God and give Him glory. Fear God, and give Him glory." Now, it's very easy if you know your sin and unfortunately at the time of Luther, the sin of mankind was about all they could figure out and know and that's what was kept on being hammered home to them. The fear of God did not lead to the comfort of the Gospel. It just led to more fear, because the Gospel had been clouded and covered by various different teachings and doctrines and practices that made it almost impossible to hear what the Word of God actually said, partially because, not only did the people never really learn the Word of God; unfortunately, neither did any of the priests at the time.

It was a real failing in the church of the time, and so Luther had the opportunity. Again, we see God working throughout the course of history. With the Renaissance coming about and the resurrection of the ancient languages, Luther and many other people of the day were able to actually dig back into the Greek and the Hebrew, go back to the original source, and when they went back to the source, they discovered that what had been proclaimed for many hundreds of years had been lost. And the rediscovery of the truth of the Gospel is what we celebrate.

We don't celebrate being good Germans and "We got it right as German Lutherans." We don't celebrate that. We're proud of our heritage, but it's not perfect, obviously. And we need to remember that. We don't celebrate because we got it right. Well, we did get it right, but that's not the point to celebrate. The point to celebrate is that God gives it to us and if we hold fast to it, we have no fear of anything that happens in this life or the next.

Everybody wants to be good enough. Everybody wants somebody to tell them, "You're okay. It's going to be all right." But the Gospel, the true full counsel of God, says that, but He says it in a very strange way, starting out with, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and that none of us are justified by our own efforts, our own merit, our own strengths, our own decision, our own abilities, our own skill, nothing. See, we start out the comfort of the Gospel by saying, "You bring nothing to the table."

Okay. Explain to me how that is good news? I bring absolutely nothing. Well, I take that back. I bring my faults. I bring my sin. I bring my rebellion. I bring my blasphemy. I bring my disobedience. That's what I bring to the table. In other words, I don't contribute a whole lot. Absolutely nothing, in fact, and Scripture tells me that in those sins and disobedience, that I am dead. Now, initially that does not sound like a great place to start for me to feel good enough and okay. But I got to be torn down and shown my place, shown where I truly stand,

before I understand the price that was paid to pick me up and to carry me and to grab me out of the kingdom of Satan, hell and death and sin, to grab me out of that and to carry me into His Kingdom and His family. He did that by coming down to be with us and to be like us.

Another thing that was lost during Martin Luther's day was the idea that Jesus came to love us. When people saw Christ on the cross, all they saw was a judge. "You put Him here and now you need to try really hard to earn your place to be next to Him." Truth of the matter is, we did put Him there. We did put Him on the cross. Our sin is the reason why He's there, but He didn't do it so that we might feel guilty. He didn't do it so that we might try harder to be better people. He came; He died, so that we might be able to confess that we are sinners, poor, miserable sinners that deserve nothing, deserve nothing but the judgment of God. However, in His grace, He does not give us what we deserve. He is unfair because He doesn't give us what we deserve. He gives us His mercy and His grace and His love. He made His Son a propitiation by His blood. Now what is that word, propitiation? It's an action that allows somebody to give goodwill to another. In other words, it's an appeasement. It's a means of standing in the gap, of advocating for the person who did wrong to the person who was wronged, so that the person who was wronged might forgive the other. And that's Jesus Christ. He stands in the gap and He tells the Father, "I paid for those sins."

You have been given a blank slate because of Christ. Not because you're any better, but because Christ is now with you, and now that Christ is in you and with you, you are justified before God. You are declared not guilty. More than that, you are declared holy and righteous and perfect before the Lord, our Savior, and His Father. That is incredible and that is such a gift. And the only way that we hold fast to that, the only way that the Reformation continues, and the Reformation is nothing more than the pure preaching of the Gospel and the reception of His body and blood in the sacraments and the reception of faith in baptism, where He gives us all of His gifts, the only way we maintain that, the only way we can hold fast to that, is if we hold fast to the Word of God.

That eternal Gospel that the angels were declaring to the heavens because He made heaven and earth. More so than that, He made us. More than that, He gave us the words by which to stand firm on. He clothed us in His righteousness, put on the Armor of God, which is His gift to us, and He gave us that sword of the Spirit, that Word, that eternal Word of God that says that we are saved by faith. We are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward. This was to show God's righteousness. He passed over our former sins because He was waiting for His Son to come, because He wants to forgive. He wants to love not just us who are here, the chosen ones, the ones who have heard, the ones who have believed, but He wants them, everyone out there, to know the truth as well. And He has given you the gift of bearing that message to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

He has equipped you. He has saved you. He has clothed you. And he has prepared you. And all of that, He gives freely out of His divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness within me, for which it is my duty to thank and praise Him, serve and obey Him. Now we know how much joy there is in thanking God and praising Him. When we hear our hymns and we sing together a joyful noise to the Lord that is praise and thanksgiving, there's no effort. There's no fear. There's no hardship in singing the praises of God. So to thank and praise Him is not a hardship, but neither is to serve and obey Him, because those too are His gifts to us.

To obey God and His Word is nothing more than to live according to how He already planned it to be, so much so, that He prepared good works for us to do before the creation of the world. In other words, when there was just God, not only did He figure out how to put this world together and how to put us on it, He also figured out

and knew that we would rebel against Him, so therefore put together His plan of salvation and how it would work throughout all of history. And not only that, He gave each and every one of us that He has called by the Gospel, good works to do. He knows what He has you to do and it's not onerous.

You don't have to worry, "Am I being good enough, or doing enough right?" He's already got you. He's already got a plan. Your job is to pray, "God, how am I to obey and how am I to serve today? And let me do it with joy and thanksgiving," because today is the day, and every day, where we are called to be a light unto the world. Not because of us, but because of the God with us and the Word in us. That is what draws people to the Gospel. That is what draws people to the church, that, and only that. So let us stand firm, clothed in the armor of God, bearing the sword, the Word of God, which will strengthen and preserve you in the one true faith, now and forever more, unto life everlasting. Amen.