

HEARING THE WORD OF CHRIST'S FAITH AND GOD'S GRACE IN HIM

Hear again the centering theme of the Word of God for this feast day:

*The one having ears must continue to hear!*¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Today we celebrate the Festival of the Reformation, a movement led by the Holy Spirit working through God's Word that continues today. His Work which began anew 498 years ago, is still going on today. We have been hearing the Word of Christ's Faith and God's Grace in Him through this entire Festival Service. It is proclaimed to lead us to better understand why we, in response to Jesus' Word, Faith and Grace, annually on October 31st celebrate God's work in re-forming His Church.

God's declared Word serves to focus and center this congregation and others like her to remain faithful to the right confession of the Faith, in Word and practice. It directs us to hear of the three *solas* displayed in our banner: faith alone, grace alone and scripture alone. To that end, this congregation is recalling the work of God in the Reformation through hearing God's Word and receiving His gifts through the order for Divine Service which God effected through Dr. Luther's reform of the Mass.

This day and date have this year, also aligned to provide us opportunity to host a celebration for our neighbors. That is because this day and month commemorate a second event that we are free to remember. Out of an original 69 mortal humans, God has kept in the flesh among us three sinner/saints who may recall that happening.

Today marks the 33rd anniversary of the chartering Catalina Lutheran Church as a member congregation of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. God, through His Word, led the 69 to begin that which God has grown over the years. God continues to call His congregation here to the *three solas* of the Reformation. Recently, God has moved us to confess our joy at receiving His gifts with a new statement of His mission in this place. We believe, teach, and confess that God gives, through this congregation, treasures

¹ *Matthew 11:15.*

which He has kept in her heart, namely:

At Catalina Lutheran Church we preach, teach, and confess Christ Crucified for this forgiveness of our sins to reconcile us to the Father (CLC Mission Statement).

God has, through times of little and of plenty, through shifts in the assembly of our congregation's members, throughout mighty and small world events, shone forth His Faith, His Grace, His Scripture from this "light on a hill" in Catalina. Now, as we continue receiving God's gifts in this place, He has raised us up to servant-leadership in Circuit, District, Synod and the Church catholic. He has challenged us to remain faithful in our stewardship of His gifts, and He has kept us so. He is blessing us with more people, ministries and work in the Faith.

After 3.3 decades on this land, God continues to bring forth fruit from this congregation. You should expect that for He, through faithful, Holy Spirit-filled humans, planted His House here. Moved by the Holy Spirit through the means of God's Word, visible and proclaimed, any good flowing from us, God works to the end that sinners will be saved. God has kept you faithful, dear ones in Christ, to our Lord's call:

The one having ears must continue to hear!²

The Festival of the Reformation is an annual celebration to hear God's call to remain attentive to His Word. This day's readings emphasize that it is by God's grace, through Christ's Faith, all proclaimed through the Scriptures, that works His will in, among, through and out of His people. This He has done through human angels – messengers of God. They are the called, ordained and installed servants of Christ for this congregation – Steunkel, Patt, Morehouse, Pacey and Palmer. They were, and are, to proclaim to you the unending Good News such as you heard today from the Revelation:

"All of you fear God, and all of you must have given to Him glory, because it has come – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you must have worshipped the One having made the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!"³

Where CLC's human angels have failed in clear proclamation, confession was to be

² ² Matthew 11:15.

³ Revelation 14:7.

made and God's forgiveness offered. Hear this: there is Good News in the angelic proclamation for all of you who have learned to *fear, love, and trust in God above all things* (*Small Catechism*, p.11, 2008). There is good news in God's judgment which has come. There is Good News in God's coming judgment.

The first Good News hour of judgment was declared as God's entire wrath at sin and human sinners was borne by Christ Jesus onto the Tree of the Curse. He was burdened by the fiery anger of God into death. That was buried with him in the grave.

Such declarations work and sustain the Faith created in this congregation. In them we hear of God's bearing the full burden of our sins, of your sins. That moves us to continue to publicly confess as the Reformation of this congregation continues:

We are a group of sinners who, through no merit of our own, have been called by God to receive His gifts through the proper preaching of Law and Gospel and the right administration of the Sacraments (Mission Statement, bulletin, page 7).

That is what our new members this weekend are affirming as they are publicly added to the Lord's roles in this congregation. That is our united confession borne out of us through the proclamation of the Word. It is centered on proclamation/hearing, and administration/reception of God's Word. The Word says:

Now, without Law, (the) righteousness of God (is seen) having been manifested, continually being witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets, even (the) righteousness of God through (the) Faith of Jesus Christ for all the ones continually believing.⁴

Today, through the Word, we have heard that, in the Person of Jesus, the Word of God remained faithful to the Creator Father in the Spirit. The Faith of God, testified to by the Old Covenant Scriptures, is manifested in Jesus. The Faith of God is lived by Jesus unto death and into resurrection. From that Faith comes the declaration of God's grace

⁴ Romans 3:21-22a.

for sinners like you and me. The Word of God, pronounced into your ears, soon to be received into many of your mouths, is God's Faith-gift which continues to save you from condemnation in the coming judgment over all people of all times.

Such realities serve to move us who believe to continue to give right religious service – through our continued reception of God's gifts. God's grace for you, lived into death into life for you by Jesus is then displayed out of our, your, love for God and our neighbors. As we live in God's grace, through His Faith, by hearing, we begin to believe anew and act upon His revealed Word. Remember, God continues to prepare us, you, for His final judgment. Some day, you will hear the angelic call to receive the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world. That is Good News! Jesus says,

*The one having ears must continue to hear!*⁵

Throughout the Scripture record of the history of salvation, God issued that call. It was first proclaimed through the prophet Ezekiel. Later, three times God the Incarnate Word called His people to hear His Word. The final time the Scriptures proclaim the call to hear, it comes from the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus.

The message that precedes that divine exhortation in today's text is that which leads us into a confession of the Faith. We declare that Jesus is the Anointed One of God, our sin-bearer, Savior and Guarantor of eternal life. Jesus says,

*If you will welcome it, [John, Baptizer] remains Elijah who is about to come!*⁶

Over the past decades, it has been made clear to teachers of the Faith that people in the Church still remain confused about the Scriptures' teaching about John and Jesus, Law and Gospel. John, the baptizing One, was the final prophet of the Old Covenant. John, as the scripturally promised prophet who was to come before the Messiah, lived and died under the Old Covenant. That was a unilateral contract, written by God, sealed in blood. It provided for the forgiveness of sin through faith in that which the blood of

⁵ Matthew 11:15.

⁶ Matthew 11:14.

sacrificial animals foreshadowed. That means that the Old Covenant faithful, in their sacrifices, looked forward to God's New Covenant.

John declared that which convicts, condemns and kills. He did so in the Faith in order to call people to a baptism into repentance. His work was preparatory.

Jesus declares that which, through Him, acquits, atones and enlivens. He does so in His Faith. In Jesus, people are baptized into His death and raised to new life in Him. (Many of us have been privileged to witness God's washing of regeneration and renewal a few days ago. We are set to do so again in a few more days). Jesus Himself continues to compare and contrast John's call into repentance with Jesus' call that rescues sinners from sin, death, and hell, as He says:

*For John came not eating (and) not drinking, and they continue to say,
"Demon, he has!"*

*The Son of Man comes eating and drinking, and they continue to say,
"Behold, (a) man, (a) glutton and (a) wine bibber; of tax collectors (a) friend and of
sinners!"*

Yet Wisdom is declared righteous by her works.⁷

Jesus thereby points out the difference God sees in those who would be saved by keeping God's Law on their own and those who would be saved by not rejecting God's Good News. Scripture declares that John lived and died under the vows of the Law. He kept that Word of God in the Faith. As he did so, he looked for God to fulfill His Law, to bring that which was greater than the Law.

That God did in the Person of Jesus. Jesus came to people in their sins. He took their sins upon His sinless Person. He was truly a Friend – that is, One who loved others as a true Brother. He declared the greater Way – God's Way of forgiveness for sinners. Jesus teaches that people are declared right with God through His Work.

That gives you divine power to truly repent: to turn from your sins and walk in newness of life. Jesus brings that which covers over the Law. His blood, shed once for all mankind, washes away sin, your sins, and presents sinners declared clean before the

⁷ Matthew 11:18-19.

Father. It is God's work, Jesus Who is the Wisdom of God, to declare you right with God. To those so turned by God from total sinners into sinner/saints, Jesus still declares:

*The one having ears must continue to hear!*⁸

Our Lord's call is to hear His Word: That means the whole convicting Law and the beautiful acquitting Gospel. He desires that you who were once only living as tax-collectors and sinners of old, to truly be turned by His Good News. You are free to believe it and to die in it. His will is that He might raise you on the Day of Judgment to rule in His eternal kingdom. Hear this: the Word of God continues to declare of those who hear and believe the Word of Christ's Faith and God's Grace in Him:

*For we continue to reckon (a) man as continually being righteous by faith, apart from works of Law.*⁹

Without the Wisdom of God, that accounting is one of God's truths that is impossible for sinful humans to believe in, confess out and live under. Christians who still have an Old Adam with all his works-righteous thinking, still wrestle with the Truth that those of the Faith are accounted right before God through Jesus' Faith. It is His Faith that penetrated this fallen world. His Faith, its fruits and its gifts, presses down our fallen natures with the reforming power of the Word of God. Jesus declares to us:

*From the days of John the baptizing one until now, the kingdom of the heavens continues to enter forcibly and forces continue to snatch it.*¹⁰

Remember, the Kingdom of the heavens is where Christ is. The Kingdom of the heavens entered fallen creation by the force of the proclaimed and, in time, incarnate Word of God. With power the Word entered into the ear of the Virgin Mary. Through the Spirit the Word conceived Himself Incarnate in her womb. That Word grew in favor before God and men. Then that Word broke through the rule of the devil, bound him and declared God's victory.

The Word now leads multitudes into the gates of heaven. The Word of Jesus'

⁸ Matthew 11:15.

⁹ Romans 3:28.

¹⁰ Matthew 11:12.

victory on the Cross still violently pierces and breaks stony hearts. Hearts broken by the Law are healed through the application of the Word that pours out rich forgiveness. Hearts, minds and souls are turned from sin by the proclamation of the violence that brings salvation.

Earlier this year, the violence of the Word began to be displayed upon these walls. Last year, that violence began to be symbolized in a new processional cross. A few years ago, the Word's violence began to be displayed in the crosses that adorn this congregation's hallways and classrooms. As the 21st century dawned, the violence of the Word was hung upon this pulpit. As the 1990s began, it was displayed on this chancel wall. As the 1980s began, the image of the Word was placed in a "temporary building."

Such a progression of image hangings reminds us that, for 33 years, God has been re-forming His Church in this place. He knows what He will do in the future on this high land in order to display the violence of the kingdom of the heaven's entrance into this fallen world. He calls you all to be faithful to His Word for the next 33, or 333 or 3,333 years. Through His Faith, in His Grace through His Scriptures, God will keep us in His Faith.

*The one having ears must continue to hear!*¹¹

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Reformation (*LSB* One-year series)

Psalm 46; Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19

October 31, 2015

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

October 31, 1517

October 31, 1982 (CLC Chartering)

¹¹ *Matthew* 11:15.