

THE WORD OF GOD REMAINS IN ETERNITY

Hear again the Word of God for this Reformation Festival:

And I saw another angel continually flying in mid-heaven, continually having (the) eternal Gospel, to have gospelized upon the ones continually sitting upon the earth – and upon every nation and tribe and tongue and people – continually saying in (a) great voice: “All of you must have feared God, and all of you must have given to Him glory, because it comes – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you must have worshipped the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!”¹

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

“What’s with all the Latin?” queried a local pastor at Sunday’s Circuit Reformation Vespers. Then, he proceeded to answer himself, “Well, Luther was so fluent in Latin that he could write entire treatises in that language.” Latin is just one of the many languages into which the Holy Spirit moved the faithful of old to proclaim and record the eternal Good News of Jesus Christ. That we can have it here, coupled with the Gospel proclamation in English, delivered through an adaptation of Luther’s German Mass, with some Greek thrown in, provides simple proof to us tonight that God’s eternal Word continues to be fulfilled as we await the great and awe-full Last Day.

Consider how that is imaged before this congregation this 500th anniversary day. Beginning from the right of the Chancel Cross, the position of highest honor before the King of Kings, we have the VDMA banner. At its center, the Son of God is depicted superimposed over the Luther Rose (the teaching about which we have covered over the years during our Reformation festivals). Below the crucified Savior’s feet, are the Latin words we may translate, “[The] Word of [the] Lord Endures Forever.” (That VDMA motto appears to have been first publicly used in A.D. 1522 in the Court of Frederick the Wise. It was beheld on the right sleeve of the official garments of the court – a symbol that was worn by both prince and servant alike).²

¹ Revelation 14:6-7.

² Internet. <https://lutheranreformation.org/history/the-motto-of-the-reformation/> Accessed 31 October 2017.

That VDMA phrase, as it is located in the image, declares at least a double-entendre. The first meaning it teaches is that Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Word of God, in His one-word dying declaration, *τετελεσται*, “It is finished!” fulfilled all that the Holy God demands for the final Sacrifice that atones for (covers-over) your sins. (Some of the Church Fathers wrongly interpreted to Whom the sacrifice was offered. We are free to not repeat their errors. One of the tenants of the Reformation was to make their teaching subservient to Scripture).

The second meaning that banner image proclaims is the Good News of Jesus’ death. Out of that God brought forth His, and therefore your, resurrection from the dead. That Gospel remains forever, as St. John’s revelation continues to declare:

And I saw another angel continually flying in mid-heaven, continually having (the) eternal Gospel, to have gospelized upon the ones continually sitting upon the earth – and upon every nation and tribe and tongue and people...³

From the far right, our eyes move to the garments with which our pastors are traditionally vested this day. There is a white robe. It symbolizes baptism’s washing away sin, and the wedding garments given to the holy ones in the Church Triumphant. Upon it, freely depends a red stole. It proclaims the yoke of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the blood of the witnesses of the Good News who have been faithful unto death. This churchly vestment displays that the one here is rightly and orderly called to proclaim the angel’s eternal Gospel in this generation.

Below the pastor, on the pulpit, hangs an image of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world – the eternal Gospel! It was hung here that all the men who proclaim the Word from this place may be reminded of Whom they are to declare to God’s hearers. It calls to you to behold your Savior in the sermons.

At the Center of the Chancel, lifted high for all to see, is an image of the life-giving Cross of Christ. Below it hang the convicting, killing, condemning Holy Words of the Law. Their placement was made to declare to those who witness them that it is Christ’s

³ Revelation 14:6.

atoning blood that covers over their requirements on behalf of sinners. Below that, stands a fluted silver flower stand. It appears as if it is prepared to be filled with the eternal life-giving blood of Jesus.

From there, moving forward in our vision, stands the Table of the Lord. It is adorned with funerary vestments in the color of the Holy One, and in the red of His martyrdom. Its frontal declares three of the Solas, “Alones,” which came forth from the Reformation: Faith Alone; Grace Alone; Scripture Alone! Below that Church Militant battle cry hangs another Luther Rose – this time, with a blackened cross at its center.

On the Table, balanced, stand the Word of God from which He is proclaimed, and the veiled elements for the Visible Word of God, from which His true Body and Blood are distributed. These are flanked by two candles, used for symmetry and balance. Their light may remind us of Christ, the Word, Who is the Light of the World.

To the left of the table stands the processional cross, with the image of Christ upon it. Its use reminds one and all present that Jesus has promised to come into the midst of His people, even where two or three are gathered in His Name. From there, one’s gaze moves back to the credence – which holds items for use during the Lord’s Supper, and for the congregation’s sacrifices of prayer.

In front stands the lectern. It is adorned with the Luther Rose to display that it is from this place that men are given to proclaim God’s Word directly from scripture into our ears. To its left, on the wall, is suspended the Chancel light. When it is illumined, its glow displays to one and all that the Body and Blood of Christ Jesus are truly present in the consecrated Bread and Wine of His Holy Meal for sinners.

Finally, to the far left of the cross, is suspended another banner. It is adorned with Reformation-grounded Solas. At its center is the Luther Seal.

In all of this, have you noted the Church’s emphasis of the eternal Good News, particularly as it is revealed in all the crosses? There are at least 30 in and immediately flanking the area surrounded by the Chancel Table rails. (There are dozens more in the Nave...). Ok, stop counting now.

Reflect on this truth: each time God gathers you here, you are reminded that the Heart and Center of the Word of God is this: Christ is crucified for the forgiveness of all your sins! It is His death that sealed His resurrection. Because He died, He would be raised from the dead. Because He died to atone for sins, you too are free to die daily to sin. Because He rose from the dead, you too are free to live in new life each day!

There is much more we can teach from the simple things that adorn this Chancel and Nave.... Even so, there may be, by God's grace, more years to teach of them! Even if the Lord returns now.... (Not yet, it appears. There must be others left to be conceived and born in sin, and then rescued from it, and death, and hell, and the wrath of God by the eternal Gospel.) Even if the Lord comes soon, we are free to rejoice that there have been many centuries of His grace. Throughout that time, in multitudes of languages, His enduring Word has been purely proclaimed in fulfillment of this divinely inspired text chosen for the Reformation Festival long ago:

And I saw another angel continually flying in mid-heaven, continually having (the) eternal Gospel, to have gospelized upon the ones continually sitting upon the earth – and upon every nation and tribe and tongue and people – continually saying in (a) great voice: “All of you must have feared God, and all of you must have given to Him glory, because it comes – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you must have worshipped the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!”⁴

The temptation for preachers in these half-millennium anniversary years – and there will be many Reformation milestones to celebrate until A.D. 2080 if the Lord does not return on the clouds – there is a testing that the pastors face. That is, that we might fall into telling all about that which Luther, and his rightly guided students, did in recovering the pure Gospel. We could hear about facts like these: since A.D. 1528, in Brunswick, Church orders were amended to include a Feast of the Reformation. Eleven years later, today's Collect was added to a Saxon order of service. Shortly after A.D. 1648 the Elector of Saxony, set October 31 as the date for the Feast of the Reformation. (There

⁴ Revelation 14:6-7.

is another 500th our descendants in the Faith may celebrate, if the Lord is patient in bringing others into His Church until A.D. 2148).

Even with all that we might declare, our Chancel serves to speak through images to drive us ever back to the heart of the day's message. That is, that we are called to continue to proclaim God's eternal Good News to people from every nation, tribe, tongue and people.

You have been reminded that Christ-crucified is at the center of the Reformation. Know also from the readings, what that means in terms of application today. St. John still testifies of the angelic message, the words of one who was, and is...

saying in (a) great voice: "All of you fear God, and all of you give Him glory, because it comes – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you worship the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!"⁵

A spiritual being flying between heaven and earth declares the message of this part of the vision. His call rings out between the realm of the Church Militant that is composed of blood-bought mortal, fallen, sinful humans and the Church Triumphant surrounding the immortal, risen, sinless God. His message continues to fly between the kingdom of the power of the prince of this air, the Satan – and Kingdom of God – from the heavens which is found wherever Christ is purely proclaimed and His Sacraments are rightly administered. He is here tonight. The angelic Gospel message is:

"All of you fear God, and all of you give Him glory, because it comes – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you worship the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!"⁶

There is the clarion call to those who will hear and be saved from the devil's kingdom and the end coming to him. It declares the summary of the purpose for which the Gospel is proclaimed. The Word calls for fearing God. That you do rightly when you behold His Holy Commands and discover that you cannot, in yourself, ever keep even the simplest perfectly.

⁵ Revelation 14:7.

⁶ Ibid.

The angelic message calls for giving God glory. This you do whenever you confess your sins, all the while trusting fully in His Word that He has covered them over by His own blood. You give God glory when, in His Word, the Holy Spirit holds you fast to His promises until the hour of His judgment.

The angel then, in view of the coming judgment, calls to all who will fear and give glory to God to worship Him as the Creator of all. You recall that the biblical worship of God is described as giving as your sacrifices a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.⁷ It is to such faithful people that the Lord is near.⁸ God has promised to dwell beside those such as you who regularly confess your sins and receive His Holy Absolution.⁹ That is what the angel is declaring as he continues to proclaim:

“All of you fear God... give Him glory... worship the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!”¹⁰

This day, and from now on as such 500th anniversaries of Reformation events are celebrated over the coming decades, you are ever called to hear and respond in like manner to God’s enduring Good News. That having been taught, you who wish to be found faithful to the English District of the LCMS’ theme of this celebratory year, “*To serve in our home, church, and community,*” remember that you are the ones who are called to truly serve as you lay ahold of eternal life in the fear, glory and worship of God the Creator. As the Holy Spirit, through the proclaimed Word holds you fast in Christ, you will truly and rightly serve God and neighbor. That is part of the promise of the Word of God [that] Remains in Eternity, the

eternal Gospel, (to have gospelized) upon the ones continually sitting upon the earth – and upon every nation and tribe and tongue and people...¹¹

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

Reformation Feast (LSB One-year series; 500th Anniversary)

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

October 31, 2017

⁷ Psalm 51:17.

⁸ Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 57:15.

⁹ Isaiah 57:15.

¹⁰ Revelation 14:7.

¹¹ Revelation 14:6.

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Soli Deo Gloria