



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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October 31, 2010
Reformation Sunday
Pastor Randy Ott

Epistle Lesson: [Romans 3:19-28](#)

Gospel Lesson: [John 8:31-36](#)

Die Deutsche Messe A Service of Holy Communion

In a Bible Class on worship and in our Worship Committee meetings, I've often reviewed with people the four main principles of Luther when it comes to worship. One of them is *let the history of the church be honored*. I distinctly remember talking about that at a Bible Class and having people respond with "Yep, that's what we have to do. We have to honor the history of the church. I remember when I was a child, this is how we worshiped and we don't do it this way anymore. We should still do that now." When Luther said "Let the history of the church be honored," he wasn't taking about your lifetime or my lifetime, this little bit. He was talking about the *history of the church* dating back to its roots in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. In the teachings that are universal to Christianity, *let the history of the church be honored*.

But I think that reaction illustrates something that is there in each one of us...It's all about me. That's kind of how each one of us approaches life and approaches worship, right? It's all about me.

How many of you standing here this morning, in that opening part where we stood for so long, how many of you thought "Are we ever going to sit down? My legs are getting tired." It's all about me. How many of you as we sang that Creed thought to yourself "Why are we singing this hymn? This is un-singable." It's all about me. That's how we are, isn't it? It's all about me.

That's why we so desperately need a Savior. That's why we so desperately need to cling to the truth, not the truth just in the way that we are accustomed to hearing it, but the truth itself. That's what we are supposed to be clinging to. That's what we are supposed to hold onto, like a man floating at sea holds on to a life preserver. Not as much in the ways we have heard it, but the truth itself.

Over time you can probably see how various things may no longer be beneficial for us to do that were beneficial in Luther's day. John just said they stood for the entire service, and the service was often over two hours. They didn't have pews in the churches. Any of you want to do that next week? Sermons were quite often over an hour. Some of you might like that...you'd get a longer nap in, right?

You notice that things change over the centuries, but here is the one thing that we have to focus on...not ourselves, but the truth, the truth of the Gospel, who God is, who we are, which the Law shows us, and who God is, which the Gospel shows us, and how we

are forgiven and made his children, which is the most incredible thing of all. Cling tightly to that because if we don't, if we get too hung up with "it's all about me and I like this or I don't like that," then aren't we doing exactly what we just read about in the Gospel?

Look at what Jesus said to these guys. What is he trying to emphasize? "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" Isn't he emphasizing "hold to my teaching. Look at me. Focus on me. Keep your eyes on me at all times because the result will be that you're free."

But what did those people hear? The response that is given to Jesus isn't people that are looking at Jesus. It's people that are looking at themselves, right? These guys heard this and when it's all about us, "We're the chosen people, the nation of Israel. We've never been slaves to anyone. How can you tell us that we should be set free? We have all of the blessings of being God's chosen, God's preferred people. Get out there and talk to the Goyim, the Gentiles, about needing to be set free. That isn't us." Think about it, because they were so focused on themselves, they missed Jesus' glorious truth...hold to his teachings.

He goes on to show them this truth. "Here's the truth. You're all slaves to sin. I don't care if you're born a Jew and you're circumcised on the eighth day and you've done every offering that you're supposed to do and every time you're supposed to do it, you're still a slave to sin because in your thoughts and in your words and certainly in your actions you haven't loved perfectly like God said. You haven't avoided everything God said to avoid. You are a slave to sin. And a slave doesn't have a place in the family. But the Son does, so if I, God's Son, make you a son through my life and through my death and take away all your sins, then you are a son indeed. So hang onto that" is what he is saying. It's pretty straightforward. He's telling us the greatest blessing we have is the knowledge of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

The day that we take our eyes off of that and focus more on ourselves, our likes and our dislikes, Satan is going to cackle in hell because he's gotten us to take our eyes off the truth that sets us free.

So, for all the times that each one of us has gotten so wound up and it's all about me, repent, because it's not. It's about Jesus. And for all the times you've attacked someone else because they did something that you don't like or you're not comfortable with even though God hasn't said it's wrong, repent. Throw yourself at the mercy of Christ and his cross.

Then, knowing that you are forgiven, go forward and live to his glory and hang onto his truth and rejoice in that truth, not just the ways that it has been proclaimed to you, but that truth itself. That's what God has called us to do. That's what we have as heirs of

the Reformation, heirs of Luther's teachings of grace alone and faith alone and we're saved by faith alone and Scripture alone as the authority. That's our heritage and that's what we want to hang onto because it points us all at Jesus and his teaching.

That's what Luther learned. He was so mad at God as he was struggling in his faith, even as a priest, because God demanded righteousness and he thought that meant that he had to be perfect. Then he learned, as he was teaching the Book of Romans, that the righteousness that God demands, God gives. A righteousness from God has been revealed that is from God from first to last. God has declared us not guilty through the life and death of Christ. That's what we are to hang onto.

Now as we hang onto it, where is boasting? Did you notice what Paul said there? He said it's excluded. When we are hanging onto God's truth, we can't boast about ourselves as though we are so much better than anyone else because we are heirs of the Reformation. This is a gift of God's grace. You had nothing to do with it and I had nothing to do with it that we have this truth to hang onto. This is God's doing.

So focus on him. Don't get full of yourself and don't get obsessed with yourself. And where you have done that, know that in the Lord's Supper you receive the very body and blood that takes away your sins. And in your Baptism, you were marked as a child of God. This is what Luther often focused on when the devil would come and say "Who are you, this lowly German monk from Podunk Wittenberg to take on a stand against the established church of your day? Who are you to do this?" Those thoughts crossed his mind. He would answer it by saying "I am a baptized child of God. I have been forgiven by Christ and I have been empowered by Christ to be a priest of God, a royal priesthood that I may declare the praises of him who called me out of darkness into his wonderful light." He held to those truths and didn't let go. Do the same.