



MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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November 3, 2013

End Time 1 Reformation

Sermon Text: [Romans 3:19-28](#)

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)

Psalm of the Day: [Psalm 46](#)

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

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

The Promises of End Time “The Truth Shall Set You Free”

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow redeemed:

Imagine that you have to prepare for a test that is upcoming and what is at stake isn't a good grade. It isn't making the Dean's List. It isn't any of that kind of stuff. What comes as the result of this test is either life or death. The problem is what is on the test is absolutely impossible for you to do. You can't read it and understand it, and you can't do it. It can't be done by you. Can you imagine what that would be like, knowing the days, the weeks, the months that it was coming. It is upcoming. Can you imagine how frustrated you would be and how you would say to people that this is unfair, and how you would try to kid yourself into something different like, they'll grade on a curve or that they wouldn't actually put you to death for getting one question wrong on this test.

If you can even begin to understand what that would be like, you're starting to get an inkling of the struggles Martin Luther had as he was told by the church, "You have to perform the acts of the Law to be right with God." Then he would read in the Scriptures that God demands not that we be better than someone else, not that God is going to grade on a curve, or not that God is just going to send everyone to heaven, but that God says, "*Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.*" ([Leviticus 19:2.](#))

Then you understand that the command doesn't just say don't kill. It says anyone who speaks a word in anger that hurts someone else or speaks a word that hurts someone else knowingly or unknowingly is guilty of murder and is worthy of going to hell. That's exactly what Scripture says. When we spend time in Scripture and don't just imagine God as you think he should be but actually find out that this is what God says his Law demands of you, perfection, and anything less means damnation, and the church says that you can't be saved by faith alone but you have to be saved also by your own works... imagine the fear, the uncertainty, the agony you would live with if you take God at his word. The only thing you could do is start kidding yourself and come up with other ways to try to make it right.

That's what many did. Just like today. I just heard a guy this week at a pastoral conference say that before he joined one of our churches, he was at something with his wife, a premarital class with his wife (who was a WELS member), and the pastor asked the question from God's Great Exchange. If you were to die today and God said, "Why

should I let you into my heaven?”, what would you answer? He said, “I said what most people in the church body I belonged to would say. I’ve done my best and I think I’ve done more good than I’ve done evil.” But he said to hear that God demands perfection, not just good, not just better, it crushed him.

But then, not living year after year in that being crushed, as many did in Luther’s day, he said he immediately also then heard the good news that what God demands of us he gives to us through the life and death of Jesus. He said it was like a weight was lifted off his shoulders. It’s an amazing thing this guy told us, a whole room full of pastors. A layman standing there and giving us this confession of his faith. You could hear the quivering in his voice because he was a little nervous, but man, did he make a beautiful confession.

In our Gospel we heard Jesus say *“you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”* The truth that sets free is found in the Three Solas of the Reformation. We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and Scripture alone is the authority in all matters dealing with spiritual things. That truth was not what was being taught at the time of Luther. They were taught that grace was something that God infused into you and that the merits of Christ would get you so far, but then you had to rely on the merits of other saints and the merits you yourself did to get your hiney out of purgatory eventually. That’s what they used to get a coin into the coffer ring so another soul from purgatory would spring as they terrorized people about their loved ones and where they might be.

But the truth that sets free is what Paul wrote to the Romans. As Luther taught on Romans, his eyes were opened to see that the righteousness God demands God gives. That was the point of Paul’s letter to the Romans. He wrote to the Romans because he had never been there yet. An apostle had not been there. The church was there and it was growing, but no apostle had been there. So when you read the Book of Romans, you read what Paul taught when he first came into an area.

In Chapter 1 he shows the sinfulness of Gentiles and how they are wicked and deserve to go to hell. In Chapter 2 he shows the wickedness of Jews, how they have sinned and deserve to go to hell. Now in the words that I read to you a minute ago in Chapter 3, he shifts from “everybody should go to hell” to “here is why you don’t have to be afraid of hell.” It’s not from looking at you. It’s not from looking at some infused grace that you have to put to work to find salvation. It comes all from outside of you. It comes from God.

God has said every last person, Jew and Gentile, should go to hell. No one will be declared righteous in God’s sight because of doing the things the Law requires because all the Law can do is show you your sin and condemn you to hell. It cannot save you. That’s why you just sang in Speratus’ hymn that the Law was a false misleading dream that it could save you, because it never could. We are just too sinful through and through.

The righteousness that God demands he provides because, just as *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”* Those words are a mouthful there in Verse 24.

It's all a Courtroom setting. It starts in this whole section. It's all Courtroom. It's about Law. It's about Judgment. The Judge has looked at us and has seen that we are guilty, but instead he has declared us not guilty because of grace. Grace isn't something God puts in us that enables us to keep the Law. Grace is undeserved love from God. He just looks at us and loves us because we can't keep the Law. He loves us because of who he is, not because of what we have done. We can't say, "I've kept the Law pretty good God, so you owe me something." If you don't keep it all, you deserve to go to hell.

The truth that sets you free is that all are justified, declared not guilty, by grace, through redemption. Redemption is a good, fancy church word. It means through the act of buying back, through being bought back. That came by Christ Jesus. He was presented as the sacrifice of atonement, the sacrifice that makes us at one with God. We were separated from God because of our sin. God said sin must be punished and the wages of sin is death. But he poured out that death on Jesus and not on us. So now we are declared not guilty.

But notice it says all have sinned and all are declared not guilty. He did this for the whole world. Yet he tells us it becomes ours personally through faith. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. When God gives us the gift of faith, then what Christ did for the whole world becomes ours personally. We receive the benefit of it. But faith doesn't cause that redemption. Faith doesn't cause us to be declared not guilty. Faith simply is the open hand that God places those blessings into. And faith is something God himself gives us. It's not even our act. It's not our decision to believe. It's not that we did the one thing required (that all you have to do is believe). We can't do belief on our own. Even that is a gift that comes fully from God's grace.

When you understand that completely, when you have given up any hope of the Law, of your own works, even if it's that one last work that many cling to of having to decide to believe, then you can stand and bask in the glory that is the fullness of God's grace, the fullness of his love that saved you because you did nothing. You couldn't keep the Law. You couldn't decide to believe. But God poured his love on you and by his Spirit, you are led to believe it. Everything has been done by him. That makes all the difference in the world.

If you want to make faith in some way, shape or form your work, what are you going to do when the one you love has dementia and can't do anything anymore? Can't do anything. Can't speak. Can't do anything but grind their teeth to little stubs. If you believe that your salvation is somewhat dependent on you, what are you going to do at that point in time?

This is the beauty of what Luther restored in the Reformation. It tells us God has done it all. If God can bring a little child to faith, like he did today as I baptized a baby in a hospital, he can keep us in the faith when we become childlike through dementia, can't he? That's the comfort. It's all about God. It's not about us. We simply receive this incredible blessing from our God.

When you understand the fullness of that blessing, then you want to know God more and more. You don't want to know him more and more because you have to do it so you can be saved. You want to know him more and more. You want to read more and more about what he says and who he is and what he does. It's just so incredible that he, a holy God who demands perfection, punished Jesus in your place so that he can be just. He said sin must be punished, and he punished it. But he can also be merciful and justify us, declare us not guilty, because of his love. If you don't want to know more about a God who loves you like that, I don't know what you want to know more about. I don't really know what would be more important to you than that in your life.

I know we are sinful and I know Satan tempts us to believe other things are more important. We can get to that later, but in reality, what could possibly be better, more important, more thrilling, more incredible, more awesome, more anything than that? When you lay your head on your pillow at night, you don't have to say, "Have I done enough? Have I believed hard enough? Have I loved enough? Have I forgiven enough? Have I listed all of my sins enough?" We simply say, "Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit." And I know that I'm forgiven. And you can know that you are forgiven. It's the most incredible thing in the world.

You have the privilege of telling people who are struggling, who are trying to fix life's problems in all the wrong places, who are still thinking they have to do something, you have the privilege to go and say "It's not about you. It's all about Jesus." You get to talk about Jesus. Why wouldn't you want to do that? It's the most incredible thing in the world. There are so many people living in the shadows because they don't know the fullness of the Gospel like you do. When you lay your head on the pillow tonight, thank God that his Spirit touched your heart. Then ask God to touch other people's hearts through your words. Amen.