

8/31/2010

REFORMATION / ANNIVERSARY SERVICE - Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Jacksonville, FL

THE FIRST LESSON

Revelation 14:6-7

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth-- to every nation, tribe, language and people.

7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

THE EPISTLE LESSON

Romans 3:19-28

(We are justified by grace through faith.)

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. ²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. ²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished -- ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. ²⁸ For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

John 8:31-36

(The Word brings truth; the truth brings freedom)

³¹ To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. ³² Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

³³ They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

³⁴ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. ³⁵ Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (NIV)

INTRO - Last year, the end of July and beginning of August 2009, I was in Minneapolis for the wedding of my son and daughter-in-law. While away from home I got a call. "Don Petrie is going to the doctor. He collapsed at home. They are afraid he has a brain tumor." Don was an active member, a reliable Trustee, and a friend. He and his wife did not want to believe the feared diagnosis. But, that *was* what the doctor said. It was bad news they had not known, they didn't want to believe, but it was true and denial couldn't make it go away. The cancer diagnosis changed their life, or made them face the sad truth that had already been there.

- I. In our text, in John 8, verses 31 and 32, Jesus offers the people hope for their problem. But, all of John 8 is Jesus' diagnosis of a horrible condition to the people of his time. **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**
 - A. The people caught on right away, Jesus was saying they weren't free,
 1. A number of years ago I read a National Geographic article on slavery. One of the pictures was the remnants of stone slave quarters just east of here right out on Ft. George Island. I had seen those structures and not known what they were. It brought to my mind the horrible cold reality of slavery in America.
 2. No wonder they responded, **"We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"**
 3. Yet, imagine this denial as they were occupied by the Romans.
 - B. But, the situation is much worse even than they thought Jesus was telling them. In verse 34 Jesus says, **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin."**
 1. They weren't just slaves, they were slaves to sin. Whenever someone sins, that sin enslaves them.
 2. But, worse than that slavery, they denied it. They thought that because they were church people, because they were children of Abraham, they were not slaves to sin. So, they couldn't deal with the problem, because they denied they had it.
 3. What's even worse we are told in verse 31 that these are the Jews who believed what Jesus said about being the Son of God. How about the rest of them.
 - C. These people had ignored their condition for so long that they could not admit their problem.
 1. And, the consequences of our sin is death and hell.
 2. Denying their rebellion against God, denying their lack of love for others, only keeps the Jews from hearing the hope Jesus was offering and from dealing with the issue.
 3. They were in trouble, bigger trouble than they realized, and could not admit it.
- II. Today is Reformation Day a day we remember our heritage as Lutheran Christians. Today is also the 50th anniversary of Our Redeemer. This is an appropriate time not only to look back at the past, but to plan as God's people for future ministry.
 - A. I am convinced that one of the reasons that this gospel lesson from John is the traditional lesson for Reformation, and thus a good one for today, is that the Church has always needed reformation, always needed cleaning, changing.
 1. First of all, the church is the people of God, and we are all sinners.
 2. We all struggle with anger, rebellion at God knowing what is best for our life and telling us what is best in his law. We all fight desires of the flesh. We all have selfishly hurt others.
 3. Like the Jews we all want to deny our sin and fight self-righteousness.
 4. We need to hear Jesus' words, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."** All God's people, including each of us, need admit our sin and repent, to turn from our sin, to be reformed.
 - B. Because people are sinful the church has always struggled.
 1. The Jewish church of Jesus' day surely needed reforming. In the beginning of chapter 8 Jesus

says they want to kill him. At the end they try to stone him. The sins of the Jews are obvious in our lesson for today.

2. The Bible is full of God's people struggling. There is no congregation in any of the epistles in Scripture that was without its issue, its sin.
 3. The Catholic church of Luther's day needed reforming. He had to point them to what God's Word said, and tell them that their teaching and their living did not conform to God's standard.
 4. All churches today need reforming.
- A. Churches today face the results of the sins of their members and their leaders. You can find it in the news.
- B. Churches today, like the Jews like to deny their problems.
- C. Every denomination, even our church body the LCMS, need to fight self-righteousness and deal with sins of leaders and members which hurt the work of God.
- D. Every congregation, including the congregation where I am pastor, needs reforming. We don't like to admit it, but we all are slaves to sin.
- C. Jesus said, **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.** We all need to repent, and all churches have sin and failure to deal with.
- III. But, what do you do when you have a problem so bad you don't want to admit it? Have you ever heard of an intervention? About 10 years ago I went to Alaska counselor Michelle Overstreet talk about running an intervention for someone I knew. The intent was to confront someone I cared about with the damage their substance problem was causing for them and loved ones, and then to surprise them with our love and offer to help.
- A. You might call John 8 an intervention. Jesus has pointed the Jewish people to their sin throughout this whole chapter, and their slavery to this sin.
1. But, Jesus doesn't point to their sin to put them down.
 2. If they were to see their helpless slavery to sin, they would be open to the real help Jesus had to offer.
 3. **Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**
 4. Jesus points people with no hope to the real hope found only in Jesus, only in himself.
- B. You might call Jesus' whole life an intervention, not only for the Jews, but for the whole world.
1. Jesus began in our text saying, **"If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.** The truth pointed to the people's sin and hopelessness and looked like bad news, really bad news.
 2. As we realize more and more how bad our sin is, the good news of God's Son gets better and better.
 3. Jesus tells them, *"Look to me. I am the very Son of God himself, but I am in your presence, come down from heaven. I love you enough to come help. Look to the Son. I Love you enough to take on your sin, to take your punishment."*
 4. You are slave to your sin, it is stronger than you, But I will rise and I am stronger than sin and death.
 5. The truth about our sin is bad news. The truth about God's Son is better news, the best news, the only really good news.
- C. For people that need repentance and churches that need reforming, Jesus calls us to turn to the Son, to come to Him.
1. His word points us to our sin, and to his victory.
 2. Because of His resurrection and forgiveness we can admit our sin and self righteousness.
 3. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, by the grace of God through faith we have forgiveness and victory over sin and death. **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.**

4. If we listen to His word, His word points to His love, His word brings us to faith and to forgiveness, and changes our hearts and . . . reforms us.

CONCLUSION - The news for Don was not good. In fact, he learned in August of his cancer, and died about 3 months later. Cancer does not always end that way, but it did for Don. The truth of the disease was horrible. But, there is something stronger than that bad news. As Don got more ill, he expressed even more outwardly his thanks for the love of God, which was stronger than the truth of the bad news.

We're all slaves to our sin and need changing. **"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.** But, there is hope for churches that need reforming and people who need repentance and forgiveness and life. **if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** free indeed. This is not only a diagnosis of our past, but a prescription for the future of being reformed and changed by the love of God.