

Messages For Us From The Reformation And The 500th Anniversary Posting The Ninety-Five Theses.

Text: Psalm 46:10

1) God Reigns over the nations

Suggested Hymns:

2) Man is personally accountable to God

549, 352, 195, 207, 260

3) Man is personally acceptable to God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Psalm 46:10, ***10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The Reformation of the Lutheran Church we commemorate every year around this time. The Reformation gave us again the open Bible; the Gospel of an open heaven; the glad tidings of the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord; the message of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; and it gave us again the Gospel message of life and immortality.

And with all this, the Reformation gave humanity the aptitude which has founded our modern institutions, such as hospitals, and has constructed the frame of modern political freedom. Surely, these are great blessings, both religious and political!

Without the Reformation all these blessings would have been impossible. The Reformation gave them to us. Meaning so much to us, the Reformation demands our gratitude, it demands it again today, and this gratitude our Worship Service intends to express.

Today we celebrate the 500th anniversary of Luther posting the Ninety-five Theses on the Castle Church door at Wittenberg.

Luther sounded the alarm that awakened and stirred the mind of the benighted Church. Luther sounded the clarion that shook the bulwarks of paganised Roman hierarchies. Luther sounded the death knell to medieval thralldom over the consciences of Christian men and women.

Luther sounded the trumpet that led the way to Christian freedom and that restored the faith and the hope of God's royal priesthood on earth. Yes, Luther blazed the trail for Christ's Church on earth and endowed it with Christian liberty and with it the consciousness of its Christian privileges and duties.

Five hundred years on, it is very appropriate to ask, *What lessons have the Reformation and the life of Luther to teach us at this time? What lessons may we learn from the Reformation and the life of Luther to sustain us, to help us, to encourage us in our day?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. God Reigns Over The Nations

We read in Psalm 47:8 that *^s God reigns over the nations; God sits on His holy throne*. If the Reformation teaches us anything, it teaches us that God rules at all times, including times of moral upheaval like we are currently experiencing.

Who was Luther? He was a peasant's son. A monk. A professor at the University of Wittenberg, which was the youngest and one of the weakest institutions of its kind at the time. What could this Luther do? He had no family prestige or power at his command, and no powerful connections. What could Luther accomplish as of himself in the battle that his Ninety-five Theses brought upon him?

Against him stood the Roman Catholic Church, one of the most powerful organisations in the world. And that Church was powerful! It was powerful because it was built upon the ignorant superstition of the masses. It was powerful because it was bolstered by the interrelated selfish interests of its officialdom. It was powerful because of the cunning, the wiles, and the ruthlessness of its leadership.

Others had assailed that Church as individuals, others had fought it in groups, but all to no avail. The entire period of European history between 1300 and 1517, more than 200 years, was agitated by efforts on the part of individuals and of groups to reform the Church, both as to its head and as to its members.

For a period of many years even the Papacy was divided against itself, with two, and for a while three Popes, condemning and cursing one another; but there was no change for the better.

The great Council of Pisa, 1409, undertook a reformation but accomplished nothing. The greater Council at Constance, 1414 to 1418, for four years, and the third Council at Basel, 1431 to 1449, for eighteen years, flagrantly failed in their endeavours.

Even while these councils sat and discussed the necessary reformation, a man like Huss in 1415 was led from the Council and burned to death because he proclaimed the truth. And one year later, the Council still in session, Jerome of Prague was led to a similar fate.

In the light of such experience, what was Luther to accomplish? And yet Luther won. And Why?

Luther gives us the answer in the immortal stanza of his Battle Hymn, when he sang:

With might of ours can naught be done,
Soon were our fall effected;
But for us fights the valiant one
Whom God Himself elected.
Ask ye: Who is this?
Christ Jesus it is,
Of Sabaoth Lord,
And there's none other God;
He holds the field for ever.

It is clear to us, Luther allied himself with God who rules all things. Luther believed and felt assured that Jesus, who had said to His disciples, “**All authority [and power] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth,**”¹ and who had given His disciples the command “**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,**”² and who had given His disciples the promise “**and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world**”³ was the resurrected Christ, was still living, and that His Word does not change.

This Word, God's Word, Luther had made the basis for his Ninety-five Theses. This Word he proclaimed against all those who denied the truth, and this Word, God's Word, conquered. God ruled in the great upheaval, God upheld the eternal truth of His Word and caused it to shine forth victoriously again in the end.

Let us learn this lesson for our own benefit. God most assuredly still rules. He is ruling in the turmoil of today. His truth will issue forth from and will stand victoriously at the end. Yes, it shall abide forever.

Today with the pride of man and the sway of psychology, man derides God whenever God and His Word comes into conflict with their own will and ideas. We can see this in the push for same-sex marriage. People have largely forgotten about God, about Adam and Eve, and about sin. They just live for themselves.

God's Word, the guide of man through the ages, is universally set at naught, and selfish opinions have usurped the place of God and God's Word. Humanism, and rationalism, in which every man is his own god, has now exalted itself as god. Such people are truly "*without God and without hope in the world*" as we learn from Ephesians 2:12.

Into all this chaos the Reformation sends out the cry of its festival Psalm: ¹⁰ *Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!* ¹¹ *The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.*⁴

Let us hear this message today: God lives, He rules. Listen to the Saviour, whom the Reformation so gloriously exalts in all His saving glory, hear Him as He says also to you and to our generation as we read in 1 Peter 5:6-7, ⁶ *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,* ⁷ *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.* Hear Jesus as He assures us that not a sparrow falls from the housetop, nor a hair from our heads, without the will of our Father in heaven.

Friends, if God knows, and He surely does; if God rules, and He does, then beloved it is well. Let us always look up to Him! Let us, then, learn this lesson. With its vision we will march on to victories, both in time and in eternity.

2. Man Is Personally Accountable To God

As we thus contemplate the message "*God reigns over the nations*" and look back to the Reformation and to Luther, there comes to us another message, telling us that we all, everyone of us, are accountable to God for whatever we have done, be it good or bad.

Yes, it is a sombre message! And it comes to us from many sources. It comes to us out of our own conscience. It is on this account that we all instinctively dread so much the judgment of God.

It comes to us from God's revealed Law, which emphasises our inborn consciousness. The eternal "*Thou shalt*" and "*Thou shalt not,*" reverberating continually in our minds, clarifies our consciousness, and strengthens our consciences.

And so both of these voices proclaim to us the sombre message: you must answer to God.

Luther and the Reformation both in teaching and example stress this truth. In thundering tones they declare to us the message in Romans 14:12, ¹² *So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.* You are all accountable to God for what ever you do. Prepare to meet God. Make ready to give an account of your stewardship.

In the very first of the famous Ninety-five Theses, which Luther nailed to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg 500 years ago, Luther said: "*Our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, in saying: 'Repent ye' ... intended that the whole life of believers should be penitence.*"

How could Luther have proclaimed more clearly and more forcibly this fact, the accountability of man to God? Again, when four years later Luther at Worms stood before the highest representatives of both Church and State, he by word and deed proclaimed and emphasised this fact. He would not recant unless they showed him a clear word of God which demanded such recanting.

He proclaimed his own accountability to God. He demanded it as his right and as the right of every individual as well as man's duty. Thus he stood at Worms with his immortal declaration "*Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me.*" And so he stands today declaring to the world the accountability of every individual directly to his Maker.

Luther could have avoided trouble at that time and to his temporal advantage. Great bribes were held out to him if only he would submit to papal authority and cease his onslaught on the powers that be.

And, had he felt like many people today who deny the truth that really makes men free, then Luther would have looked out for himself, would have compromised that truth, and enjoyed the friendship and the honours of the mighty men of his time.

But Luther could not recant, he could not surrender, because he had within him the conviction that he must answer to God for whatever he would do, and he knew that it was only right to obey God rather than men.

May we today again hear this message of our accountability directly to God for all we do.

Our own Church will do well to heed this message. We Lutherans have received much, and no doubt much will be required of us. Not only have we been entrusted with the heritage that comes to us directly from Luther and the Reformation, but we have also received the additional bounty of additional blessings that have come to us through our own Lutheran heritage.

“God’s Word and Luther’s doctrine pure” are a precious boon entrusted to our stewardship. Consider the many blessings, the rich literature we have, churches with their preaching of the pure Word, schools, colleges, and missions. Let us realise the obligation that such rich possessions lay upon us?

There is no question as to the need of our Church and its message. The world, and to it belongs a large portion of nominal Christianity, is sitting like the heathen, in darkness and in the shadow of death. Millions of souls are in need of evangelism, of the Gospel. The field, which is the world, is ripe unto the harvest, and still the labourers, the real labourers, are few. Our duty is clear, and we shall be accountable to God for whatever we have done, or whatever we have not done.

3. Man Is Personally Acceptable To God

The final great message that comes to us again from the Reformation and from Luther is this: Man, every man, is directly acceptable to God. Man may go to his heavenly Father, *just as I am, without one plea, but that Jesus’ blood was shed for me.*

Man is not acceptable to God in his own name or merit. All people, all of us, have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But, man may come in Jesus’

name, for the Scriptures say in 1 Timothy 2:5, ⁵ *For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.*

So this is the sum total message of the Reformation. It is the everlasting Gospel which Luther preached to all nations, and kindreds and tongues and people. It is the message that in harmony with the Scriptures teaches in Acts 4:12, ¹² *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

It is the message which teaches the truth that is central to the whole Bible, namely, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world, the One who was *“wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities,”* that *“the chastisement of our peace was upon Him”* and that *“with His stripes we are healed.”*⁵

Yes, Luther and the Reformation thunders the message down through the ages that *“man is justified by faith”*⁶ in Jesus Christ and that with faith in Jesus Christ the heavens are opened to all people, the access to the throne is clear to all. That in Jesus Christ man is acceptable with our Father in heaven.

Thus Luther and the Reformation preached against the heresies of their day. And this is their message to us and to the world.

Let us confess before the world today the faith of Luther and of the Reformation in the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles, as it is written in Romans 3:28, ²⁸ *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.* And so let us stand, not able to do otherwise.

It will be clear from this confession that there is for us Lutherans no thought of a necessity of “re-thinking” our religion. We accept the Gospel message, the everlasting Gospel, from Luther and the Reformation, as the clear teaching of the Bible, the Word of God.

We hold it out to the world as the one thing needful to help it in its troubles, to lift it up, in the assurance that God reigns and that He not only holds man to account for whatever he does, but that He also in His grace is ready to receive every sinner, to comfort him in the many experiences of life, to lead him from strength to strength, and to enable him finally to appear in Zion before God.

What more do we need? We need no other Gospel. It offers to our souls the hope that we need, the joy that remains, salvation for time and eternity. It brings peace that surpasses understanding, rest that revives, the vision that is not a dream but that resolves itself into the sight that sees God face to face.

May we joyfully receive from Luther and the Reformation this message, this Gospel again today. May we cherish it, may we exalt it. Let us declare it to the world. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 28:18

² Mark 16:15

³ Matthew 28:20

⁴ Psalm 46:8-11

⁵ Isaiah 53:5

⁶ Romans 3:28