

Sermon 1610

Isaiah 55.1-5

August 20, 2017

I am going to warn you ahead of time. Almost every time I get into this pulpit until Thanksgiving, I'm going to be convincing you, wooing you, selling you on the truths of the Reformation. On October 31st it will have been 500 years since a Roman Catholic monk, Martin Luther, posted his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church, inviting the faculty to join him in a scholarly debate as to whether you could buy forgiveness of sins with money or good deeds. It seems you couldn't even bring up certain subjects back then, either. With increasing force the powers that be tried to silence Luther. "Here I stand," he famously said, when confronted with a choice of taking back everything he had written or face the wrath of the Empire. He would not back down. We usually hear about the Reformation one week during the year and then we go back thinking that our church is like any other Christian denomination and we all pretty much teach the same thing.

So I warn you today, we are going to hear about the truths of the Reformation whenever I get into this pulpit, not because this pulpit is Lutheran, but because it is Christian and the truths of the Reformation are the true teachings as drawn from the Bible. We are going to see that time and time again, from prophets and apostles, from the life of Christ to the life of his people. Our text from the prophet Isaiah, writing 700 years before the birth of Jesus, is a perfect example.

Come and Be Filled

1. By grace alone (1).
2. By Scripture alone (2-3a).
3. By Christ alone (3b-5).

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost (1)."

I like the idea of being filled. One time we went to an Italian restaurant with another couple. We got four ravioli in a bowl. That was the main course. We were grabbing the breath mints at the hostess desk in order not to starve! God wants us to be filled. But even in Las Vegas, where buffet food is as cheap as water, you still need money. Nothing is really free.

That's what our sinful human nature thinks when it comes to getting to heaven. "I'm a good person," I hear. "I'm not perfect, but I try." That theme runs through all our thinking when it comes to our relationships with others. You goof up, you butter up mom and dad and they'll forget about that dent on the car. Flowers for the wife to make up for that late night with the bowling team. If the sinful human nature is right, then we can pull that routine on God. Get what we want if we give him what he wants. So, what's the bill for me getting into the heavenly feast?

There is no money required. There is no cost attached. Salvation, living with God forever in heaven and living with God as one of his forgiven sons and daughters on earth, has already been paid for. It is free to you and me because Jesus Christ

paid the price when he died on the cross. That is what we mean by grace. Grace isn't something that God puts into our heart, like a little spark, and then demands that we fan that spark to a flame. Grace isn't letting everything you did before you became religious slide by, but now that you know better, you keep your nose clean and earn your way in God's kingdom, buddy. No. Grace is free. There is nothing we have to do to earn or merit it because there is nothing we can do to earn or merit it. It has already be won for us. The invitation Isaiah puts out to his listeners, and that includes you and me since this is in the Bible, the invitation to this heavenly banquets shows the meal is ready. The drinks are poured. All that is missing is you and me, so come! God has done everything necessary to get us there. The Reformation showed there is nothing you can add to God's grace, not a 40 Day improvement plan, not a human decision for Christ, not paying for a mass for the soul of your departed grandmother. Come and be filled by grace.

Come and be filled by Scripture.

“Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live. (2-3a).”

There are all sorts of instruction going on in the world. You can learn French or Spanish, immigrants can learn English as a second language. The big box hardware stores have classes on installing floors and bathtubs. But all these types of instruction cannot fill a person, not completely. You can't lose yourself in flooring or French pastry. Life is more than bread and the body is more than clothes. Isaiah makes that point when he compares what God is giving us to food that lasts and menus that truly satisfy.

Where can I get certainty? Not from the daily news. A learned publisher, long before the tiffs and snits we are having now, said the newspaper is history's first draft. A lot is going to change when all the facts and ramifications are known.

Where can I get certainty? Every human authority is prone to error. As Luther said, “Councils and popes have erred.” These holy books in the world, the writings of Lao Tsu, the Koran, the Tripitakis, are all written by people who only have the insight of people and have the fallibility of people. I'm buying a lot of cotton candy there. Tasty for a moment, but you are going to be hungry as a little tiger very soon.

Only from the Holy Bible, the Old and New Testament, do I have this certainty that God freely has forgiven me all my sins. Our Bible was written over a period of 1600 years, by many individuals as the Holy Spirit inspired them to write. God selected people to convey his message to the world. Over and over again the prophets said, “This is what the Lord says,” because he did speak those words to them. In the New Testament we've got the words of Jesus himself, the Son of God who is the ultimate prophet and spokesman for the Father. The Bible wins us over

and authenticates itself in our hearts so we find ourselves saying, “This is true. This is right.”

The Bible authenticates itself in our hearts because it proves itself. In the Old Testament God promised that the coming Savior would be such and such and do this and that. People would be able to identify the Savior who was to be born of a virgin in Bethlehem. They would know the Savior when he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, drove out demons, was crucified, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. If any of those promises failed to come true, there’s an error in our Bible, a glitch, a bug. Since God is supposed to be perfect, anything he gives us is flawless, no glitches, no bugs. Not a promise of God made in the Old Testament failed. Jesus carried out and fulfilled each and every one of them. The Bible is true.

That’s why we want you to know the Bible, you, me, our children, our teens. The more we know the Bible, the more we will become convinced this is the true Word of God. The more we know the Bible, the better we will become at discerning the truth and the lie. Why are we being told we have to be rebaptized, if our original baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit was a complete baptism, a whole baptism, a saving baptism where the Holy Spirit washed me through the water and the word? I mean, I don’t have to get a new marriage license and pretend the first wedding was no good just because the wife and I go through a rough spell. The more you know the Bible the better we will be able to resist the temptations that will come our way. The more we know the Bible the more we know a bright future awaits us, so hang on. Just hang on. That is very much Martin Luther bringing forth the truths of the Bible. We are Lutheran because we teach and live by Scripture alone.

Come and be filled by Christ alone.

Heaven is a gift from God to me. I don’t have to earn or deserve it. It is his free gift. By grace alone. I have this certainty heaven is mine by grace alone because I find that message in the Scripture alone. Every other authority in this world will fail me when it comes to getting to heaven. Only what is written in the Bible is 100% trustworthy and true.

But how does God pull all this off? What are the grounds of my certainty? It seems God is down on sin and will punish it, but how can I get off the hook scott-free? It makes God look wishy-washy. Isaiah has a Reformation answer for that, too. Come and be filled by Christ alone.

“I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. Surely you will summon nations you know not and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor (3b-5).”

There is a “him” coming, a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander. This “him” God promised to David. This “him” would be one of David’s descendants and yet, the Son of God himself. This “him” would rule over Gods people forever. David himself wrote about this coming Savior, that they would pierce his hands and feet when they put him to death. Isaiah said this coming Savior would suffer and die for our sins and the sins of all the people. This “him” is Jesus Christ.

Only in Jesus Christ can God be both just and loving. Justice demands punishment. Everybody expects that. A judge who willy-nilly lets murderers go will be removed from the bench. We want crime to be punished. But that means every single human being would end up in hell. God doesn’t want that. But how can he be forgiving and also fair?

Jesus Christ comes and suffers for our sin. Sin is paid for. But we didn’t have to do the paying. Jesus did it for us. Since sins are paid for, we can be forgiven through faith in Christ Jesus. What crook would try to sell you something already purchased for you? Through faith in Jesus we have God’s justice and God’s mercy.

But it only works by Christ alone. He is the only one who suffered for the sins of the world, because he is the only Savior. He is the only one who was true God from all eternity, who came down to earth to live as you and I do. He was the only one to lead a perfectly holy life, so he didn’t have to die for any of his own sins. He could die for our sins. And since he is the Son of God, only his life is worth enough to be the payment for the sins of the entire human race.

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Now, that wasn’t so bad, was it? No old and obscure history lesson that leaves you wondering what in the world that was about. Our Reformation heritage goes down to our bone, down to the heart of our faith because the Bible is the heart of the Reformation. God’s grace is the heart of the Reformation. Jesus Christ, as revealed only in the Holy Scriptures, is the heart of the Reformation. If this were only something we talked about once a year, why, how could we even be Christian? How could we have certainty? How could we be saved? We would constantly be desiring another menu, another course, another banquet.

But here we stand, so satisfied and content that we need not and want not to look for another Savior. Jesus has filled our every need.