

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 30, 2016
Reformation Sunday

Scripture Lessons: Hebrews 13:7-9, John 2:13-17

Hymns: 258; 774; 264; 283 (261)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: 2 Chronicles 29:12-19

Then these Levites arose: Mahath the son of Amasai and Joel the son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; of the sons of Merari, Kish the son of Abdi and Azariah the son of Jehallelel; of the Gershonites, Joah the son of Zimmah and Eden the son of Joah; ¹³of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; ¹⁴of the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.

¹⁵And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. ¹⁶Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse *it*, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord. And the Levites took *it* out and carried *it* to the Brook Kidron.

¹⁷Now they began to sanctify on the first *day* of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord. So they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

¹⁸Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles.

¹⁹Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there they *are*, before the altar of the Lord." (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Reformation Sunday

Reformation means to change for the better, to correct what is wrong. As we observe Reformation Sunday we recognize how great a blessing the true worship of God actually is.

There had been dark days for true believers, dark days indeed. Our text references spiritual darkness in Jerusalem that King Hezekiah would endeavor to end with a thorough reformation. It was his own father that had brought on this round of deep darkness for the Kingdom of Judah. We read of it in --

2 Chronicles 28:1-4, 19, 24 “Ahaz *was* twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do *what was* right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David *had done*. ²For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made molded images for the Baals. ³He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. ⁴And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree. ... ¹⁹For the Lord brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had encouraged moral decline in Judah and had been continually unfaithful to the Lord. ... ²⁴So Ahaz gathered the articles of the house of God, cut in pieces the articles of the house of God, shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and made for himself altars in every corner of Jerusalem. ²⁵And in every single city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers.”

Deep spiritual darkness indeed! When Ahaz died his son Hezekiah took the throne. Hezekiah’s mother was the daughter of the High Priest. Imagine how it must have been to be married to such an evil king when she loved the Lord. She raised her son to love the Lord.

When Hezekiah became king the first order of business was a restoration of faithful worship of the true God.

2 Chronicles 29:3 “In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. Hezekiah’s desired --

THEME: Reformation: Sanctifying the House of the Lord.

To effect the changes Hezekiah saw were necessary he needed the help of –

I. Able Servants of Reform

The first three verses of our text constitutes a list of men, leaders from among the Levites who were to be caretakers of the temple, and priests who were to be preservers and observers of true worship of the one true God. They had not been allowed to fulfill their God given responsibilities for many years, at least not openly, and not in preserving the temple worship. I’ll forgo rereading and stumbling over that list of names again, however one may even wonder what purpose such a list served. It may be that it was important in those days for different reasons than it is for us today. For us, it impresses upon us the reality of what God expects of His children and how He uses His people in service of His kingdom for the advancement of His gospel. These were real people, individuals summoned by King Hezekiah to serve the Lord by restoring the temple and true worship in Jerusalem. Hezekiah was blessed with a godly desire to serve the Lord and restore the true worship of God, but Hezekiah couldn’t have done it alone. It didn’t happen simply by Hezekiah’s command. It happened with the hard and diligent labors of these several men, who were also blessed with true faith and empowered by the Holy Spirit, who then led many others in service to the Lord.

When we think of the Lutheran Reformation we automatically think of Martin Luther. After all Luther’s name is right there before us even in our church’s name. Luther may have been at the center of the Reformation of the 16th century, but he was hardly alone in this restoration of the truth of the gospel, and it didn’t all happen because of Luther’s intellect or power of persuasion. The success

of the Reformation is evidence of the Holy Spirit working through the Word. First Luther read and studied the Word and was empowered by the Spirit. Then other men who learned from Luther followed Luther's lead and stepped forward for the sake of the truth. They put their positions, their homes, even their lives and the lives of their families on the line. And they weren't all theologians, or priests. They may have names you have rarely if ever heard, but they served the Lord and His gospel with their lives, and they were critical to the reformation of the church on earth. These men included Philip Melancthon, a close colleague of Luther, and a group of important German princes: John, Duke of Saxony; George, Margrave of Brandenburg; Ernest, Duke of Lueneberg, Philip, Langrave of Hesse, John Frederick, Duke of Saxony, Francis, Duke of Lueneberg; Wolfgang, Prince of Anhalt, and others.

This group of princes faced the Emperor Charles in Augsburg, and presented a confession of the truth of God's Word to Charles with their names attached. They had deemed it too dangerous for Luther to come to Augsburg, but they went, risking the wrath of Charles, emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. They realized what needed to be done for the gospel's sake, even if it cost them their lives! They were ready to sing with Luther, "**Let these all be gone They yet have nothing won, the Kingdom ours remaineth,**"

So yet today this lesson applies. We dare not take the truth for granted. We dare not think that others will stand up for the truth of God's Word and true worship of God. We need to realize that it takes real people with real names with real lives. **We are those people.** Each of our names, names which are recorded in the Book of Life, should also be recorded in the list of those who strive to preserve the truth of God and salvation in Jesus' name. We are the people whom God has called to serve Him, and stand up and testify to the truth of the gospel, to "**contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints**" (Jude 3).

We also see in Hezekiah's reformation the importance of
II. Cleaning House.

Our text reports:

2 Chronicles 29:15-16 “And they gathered their brethren, sanctified themselves, and went according to the commandment of the king, at the words of the Lord, to cleanse the house of the Lord. ¹⁶Then the priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse *it*, and brought out all the debris that they found in the temple of the Lord to the court of the house of the Lord. And the Levites took *it* out and carried *it* to the Brook Kidron.”

First note how these men sanctified themselves. They cleansed themselves for service to the Lord. While this cleansing was prescribed by the ceremonial law it also gives evidence of how they first set their hearts right. They made sure their own lives and actions were in line with the Word of God and the service of God’s temple. Then they went in and cleaned house in the House for the Lord. The debris that was there was the result of a lot of neglect but more than that, a deliberate vandalism and a defiling of the temple courts by Ahaz and his henchmen.

In the Lutheran Reformation there was also a need for the individuals to set themselves right with the Lord. That began with Luther himself. There was a need for repentance, a change of heart and mind. Early on Luther did not have a true understanding of repentance or any proper concept of the forgiving grace of God. He lived in uncertainty concerning his sin, an uncertainty that festered in his soul so that he feared God and the judgment to come. It was only after he came to understand that it was faith and not works that secured for him the forgiveness of God that Luther knew peace. He came to know from Holy Scripture that it was grace and not works; it was the absolute declaration of the peace coming from the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that set him right with God. That set Luther’s heart right so he was ready to clean house and thrown out the trash that was found in the church of the 16th century.

It was not so much literal garbage that needed throwing out, but rather the foul smelling abuses of the Roman Church. It was the selling of indulgences, the works of penance, the adoration of relics, all of them corruptions of the gospel that tore at a true and proper worship of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

Church cleaning was necessary then, and it remains necessary today. And again that begins with each of us examining our own hearts. We all need to be continually attentive to our own hearts and lives, and sanctify ourselves for the Lord and His service. We need to root out all that is evil, and prepare ourselves to serve the Lord with diligence. Then we need to see trash and refuse for what it is. If it detracts from Christ then it needs to be thrown out.

As in the days of Luther it is not now a physical building that needs to be cleaned, but a spiritual building. The Lord's Church is not made up of brick and mortar but rather of people's souls, and the refuse that needs to be cleaned out are the corrupt practices of organized religion that misleads people so they fail to run away from sin and Satan's lies, and so endanger their souls' salvation. We need to root out hypocrisy and false teachings and the idea that one need not repent and reject sin.

We need a

III. Church Restored for True Worship.

It was important work, work to which the king had given a sense of urgency, and so it was handled by those appointed to the task.

2 Chronicles 29:17-19 "So they sanctified the house of the Lord in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they finished.

¹⁸ Then they went in to King Hezekiah and said, "We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offerings with all its articles, and the table of the showbread with all its articles.

¹⁹ Moreover all the articles which King Ahaz in his reign had cast aside in his transgression we have prepared and sanctified; and there they *are*, before the altar of the Lord.

The sense of urgency was spiritual. It wasn't a matter of making this ancient temple look nice and pretty again. It was a matter of restoring the true worship of God to bring the people of the kingdom the truth of God in the proper temple service. It was about seeking God's forgiveness and favor. All the work they did in those days was to achieve that goal that they would be prepared to properly worship the Lord their God.

That was also the goal of Martin Luther and all those who worked by his side. He desired to bring true worship to the people of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, the congregation that Luther served as pastor, as well as true teaching to the classrooms of the university where Luther taught. And God's truth spread from there; it spread as the Lord blessed the efforts of His true servants so that more and more congregations gathered to worship in spirit and in truth. People were once again being edified in their worship, built up in the true faith and understanding of God. God pleasing worship was restored.

True worship is so important to our spiritual lives. In many churches the goal of entertainment has taken precedence over true worship. Services have become pep rallies designed to make people feel good about themselves. A positive mental attitude about one's pursuits in life is the gospel proclaimed. Preachers like Joel Osteen attract huge crowds, while often confessional churches that are focused on doctrine, on sound teachings and presentations of God's truth are found to be boring.

True worship says,

Psalms 95:6-8 "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. ⁷For He *is* our God, And we *are* the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: ⁸"Do not harden your hearts,"

We humble ourselves before the Lord. We kneel before Him in a spiritual sense if not physically, and we hear what He has to say to us. We hear Him and by the Spirit's power believe Him, and by the Spirit's power conform our lives to the truth that saves us from our sin.

Today we celebrate the anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation. What we celebrate is God's grace! In His patience and enduring love the Lord restored the light of the gospel so that we, four hundred and ninety-nine years later, might know the way that leads to our salvation.

May the spirit of reformation take hold of our hearts so that we always treasure this gift of the gospel and be on watch for all that would attack it. To God all praise and glory.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)