

“This is Important”

Romans 3:19-28

Reformation is not a day of boasting about Martin Luther. What we celebrate today is the important work of God continually reforming His church. The church is always in need of reform. The church will never be pure and pristine – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” As I like to say, “I can make you a member of a perfect, pure, pristine church, but to do that, I would have to kill you.” Only when you enter the Church Triumphant will you see a perfect church. However, one of the marks of the true church on earth is the striving for pure doctrine. The church is always in need of reform.

Our challenge in the church today is somewhat different than the challenges Martin Luther faced. We still battle against works-righteousness. There are not any “indulgences” being sold on the streets of Quincy (to my knowledge), but you are kidding yourself if you don’t think that most people are looking for a way to provide for their own salvation outside of the death and resurrection of Christ.

During this political season, there are many who are tired of hearing about polls. However, I will share a few with you. Polls show 90% of people believe in heaven. 85% believe they will end up there. (I don’t know about the 5%. You would think that would be important).

In our life we are confronted with many things that we list as being important. When raising your children, you know that they will not always do what is right. No child is perfect. So then, as a parent, do you say, “Since they are going to sin and fall short of the glory of God, it doesn’t matter what they do. They can do what they want. Whatever makes them happy is fine.”? Of course you don’t do that. Teaching them and disciplining them is important. It takes time and years of instruction for someone to mature and grow so that they have the tools to deal with the trials and difficulties of this sinful world.

One important thing you teach your children is how to eat healthy. What if you let your children eat whatever they wanted – and you made available for their consumption pizza, chicken McNuggets, hot fudge sundaes, Mt. Dew, and Monster Energy drinks. What if those were always available. You also made available apples (other fruits), grilled asparagus (other vegetables), lean meat, bread, potatoes. Which would they choose if all of these options were always available?

The children of God in Christ’s church – we are children. I said before that our challenge in the church today is somewhat different than the challenges Martin Luther faced. The church Luther sought to reform presented Christ as a vindictive judge who sat up in heaven looking to throw sinners like you and me into hell (or at least purgatory so you could work off your punishment).

The church in need of reform today presents Christ as being unimportant. Another poll of those who call themselves Christians shows that 70% of them believe that most all religions lead you to the same God.

A wide swath, of those who call themselves Christian, say that the reason Jesus came was to teach you how to “be the best you that you can be.”

But if the death and resurrection of Jesus is unimportant for your salvation, then what we do here is unimportant. Then how we treat the body and blood of Christ is unimportant. Then how we worship him is unimportant.

If the goal of a church is to be popular (and 70% of the people believe that Christ’s death and resurrection is not the only way to salvation), it is easy to see why they take the “hot fudge sundae/Monster energy drink” approach to worship and teaching.

This is why it is such a challenge for our churches to remain faithful and spiritually healthy. This why it is such a challenge for the children of God to remain faithful and spiritually healthy – when there are all these other “food” options available.

Now don’t get me wrong, it is just like with our bodies – I will have a pizza and an “occasional” Diet Coke now and then. I have even been known to enjoy a hot fudge sundae. But I know that these are not the staple of a healthy diet. I know that I am notorious for drinking Diet Coke, but I also drink about a gallon of water every day, and I have milk with every meal. Drinking water and milk is important for me – for the health of my body.

I believe in having an enjoyable and dynamic worship experience, and I believe we do because of the food we receive. The body and blood of Christ are offered each week. Our worship is dynamic because the liturgy and hymnody are filled with the depth of the Word of God.

I am not simply talking about worship style. Whatever we do, we must always remember that what we do here is important, and at the same time, is something to fill us with joy. But to offer the theological equivalent of a hot fudge sundae each and every week, spiritually, that would be very unhealthy – and it would be totally out of place.

Think of the very popular movies like The Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter series. In those movies, in the scenes that deal with death or important, life-changing events, what kind of music are they playing in the background? Is it music that you would listen to on the radio driving around Quincy? They play music that lets you know this is important.

I don't listen to 16th Century hymnody when driving around town. However, when we turn our attention to the broken body and shed blood of Christ, how we worship should be recognized as being important.

Proclaiming the death of Christ; the broken body and shed blood of Christ which covers your sin is important. Your typical "hot fudge sundae" churches don't even celebrate Good Friday, because, to them, it's not important. The church is always in need of reform. This includes our church.

This Reformation Day, we celebrate the reforming of the church in the past. But our concern must be the church of the present and of the future. Raise your children to know that God's Word is important. Tell your neighbor that Christ's death and resurrection are important. Always know that in God's eyes, your presence in His Kingdom is important. Amen.